

JANUARY 31.

# THANKSGIVING DAY FOR OUR VOCATION



# Background

In the provisions of its fourth paragraph, the Founding Brief “Ad ea per quae” granted the faculty of writing the timely and necessary legislation for the governance and management of the new Congregation of the Pious Schools.

Between the foundational date (March 6, 1617) and the final approval of the text of the Constitutions (January 31, 1622) there are nearly five years in which the life of the emerging Pious Schools develops with the firm impulse of serving the children and under the guidelines of Calasanz, who was responding to the emerging needs based on his experience of more than twenty years as *Prefect* of the schools and on the existing documents. The frequent and close correspondence with the new foundations provided the required oversight for an adequate functioning of both the teaching work and the life of the new religious.

In these years the first novitiate opens in Rome under the guidance of Blessed Pedro Casani, a faithful companion of the founder; Pious Schools are founded in Narni, Mentana, Magliano, Moricone, Carcare, Fanano and Nursia, and a second school is opened in Rome, while new piarists join the work already launched. Calasanz accompanies the progress of the schools and of the communities with his experienced word of Father and teacher, inviting everyone to dedicate completely to the Lord and to the children.

However, the prescriptions of the founding Brief forced Cardinal Protector Giustiniani to urge Calasanz to write down the text of the Constitutions. The saint recalls it in his Report of 1623: “Cardinal Giustiniani himself commanded Fr. Joseph in 1620 to leave Rome in order to write the Constitutions, deeming it necessary for a sound progress of the Congregation, and so he did retiring to the Pious Schools’ house in Narni, where he wrote the Constitutions, which were approved later on January 31, 1622, with an Ap-

ostolic Brief of His Holiness Gregorio XV”<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, in the fall of 1620, Calasanz starts writing the Constitutions, which he ends early in the following year. The death of Pope Paul V in January 1621 hastens his return to Rome to request the Holy See the approval of the constitutional text. After timely consultations with the first companions and other friendly religious, the manuscript is submitted to the Congregation of Religious for consideration and approval.

Regarding the approval process of the Constitutions, S. Giner asserts: “The founder went to congratulate the new Pope (Gregory XV) for his election, accompanied perhaps by Giustiniani. In that audience he submitted a Memorial requesting the approval of the Constitutions and, in a veiled way, the upgrading of the Pauline Congregation to a Religious Order of solemn vows”<sup>2</sup>. Here starts a double process that will develop in parallel during the following months of 1621: the acknowledgement of the work of Calasanz as a Religious Order of solemn vows, and the approval of the text of the Constitutions.

The upgrading to a Religious Order had an impediment reflected in canon 13 of the Fourth Lateran Council on the *Religious houses*, which restricted the foundation of new religious institutes. Cardinal M.A. Tonti, president of the Committee on issues related to the Pious Schools, remained convinced of the need and novelty of the Calasanzian work when he received the famous *Memorial* in which Calasanz defended and dignified the educational ministry, deserving the acknowledgement as Religious Order of solemn vows on November 18, 1621.

The new status of the piarist family still needed the approval of the text of the Constitutions, which was signed by Gregory XV on January 31, 1622, after an accurate process of revision and contributions.

With the approval, the foundational process of the Pious Schools came to an end. What had started in the fall of 1597 in the parish of santa Dorotea in Trastevere as an unprecedented educational adventure on behalf of the

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1 J. CALASANZ, *Informe sobre las Escuelas Pías*. Roma. 1623. EGC II, p.172.

2 S. GINER, *San José de Calasanz. Maestro y fundador*. Madrid. 1992, pp.577-578.

poor, obtained in early 1622, with the approval of the Constitutions of the Order of the Pious Schools, the highest ecclesial recognition of the work of Calasanz and the first piarists, born “in the Church of God and guided by the Holy Spirit” with the purpose of a *tireless* surrender to the education of the poorest and the least.

### **The Calasanctian Constitutions: grateful for a shared vocation.**

The conciseness and power of the text written by Calasanz in Narni is amazing, with its three sections written according to a classic pattern of the Regular Clerics, in which he expresses the identity keys to his new religious family: dedication to the educational work, a service provided in poverty, common prayer and fraternal life, privileged reference to Mary, and love for Jesus, the Lord, center of the piarist’s life.

The intuitions rooted throughout the protracted process of foundation have been included in the Constitutions as the best way of responding to the vocation received. The twenty five years since the beginning in Trastevere of the programme *education for all* are faithfully reflected in the Calasanctian text: the pedagogical and organizational documents that shaped the life of the schools and co-operators, as well as the uses and customs of the beginnings, along with the prescriptions of the text regarding the new reality of a Religious Order exclusively dedicated to the educational apostolate, provide an accurate synthesis of the original piarist identity.

After the papal approval, Calasanz repeatedly encourages all the religious to accommodate their life and ministry to the Constitutions. The regular reading of the text, prescribed as a rule in the first piarist communities, invited to listen and walk according to the vocation received. The saint was firmly convinced of the value of the Constitutions in relation to communion, as they helped to nourish harmony and unanimity in the way of thinking and acting in the Pious Schools: “I wish all would be united in one heart and one soul in the service of God”, is a recurrent advise in his letters regarding the observance of the Constitutions.

The Constitutions express the certainties that supported the life of Calasanz and gave dynamism to the Order’s mission from the beginning; they also manifest a convergence between the desire of God, who grants the saint the

Calasanctian charism, and the humble responsiveness of the founder and of the first companions who managed to express in this text, and to materialize in their lives, a shared project on behalf of the least, which called them to live

- *Centered in Christ*, the Lord, with a conscious and renewed desire of living only for him and pleasing him in everything (CCal. 34)
- *Poor* with and as Mary of Nazareth, to be able to surrender to the least and most abandoned with a free heart (CCal. 4)
- *Ready to work in the school without respite*, encouraged by the example and the word of Jesus: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (CCal. 4)
- *Attentive and docile to the voice of the Spirit*, who whispers in the heart new ways of responding to the needs of each moment (CCal. 48)
- *Rooted and daring* to live in the Church of God and under the guide of the Holy Spirit, seeking the glory of God and the good of one’s neighbours (CCal. 1; 345)

The Calasanctian Constitutions have been weaving the secular background of the Pious Schools: generations of piarists have grown and walked accompanied by their spirit, which they knew how to keep in their memory and hearts with filial love, translating in many different and daring ways the word of Calasanz. The Calasanctian Constitutions cause the same piarist heartbeat that is able to give life to so many services and tasks among the least and the poor.

The approval of the Constitutions confirmed Calasanz in his desire of serving the Church from an educational mission, and sealed in his heart a vocational road that led him to an increasingly full and conscious surrender to the Lord and to the children in school; it consolidated the project of a shared life in the Pious Schools with the first companions and granted the citizen card to a new religious family, which meant a renewed impulse to the teaching task and provided a more stable guarantee for being faithful to the vocation received.

Based on this, the Calasanctian Constitutions are a landmark for the life of yesterday and today's Pious Schools that were able to interpret correctly the intuitions that had consolidated the piarist project of life and mission, as D. Cueva says: "It is good to verify that the three cleanest jewels of the Calasanctian Constitutions, that have emerged directly from the mind and heart of the holy founder, have been included in the new Constitutions of the Order: the Preamble, the fourth vow and the motto. The double source of the Calasanctian motto, *God and one's neighbours*, remains as the best programme for the piarist: gratitude to God for his vocation, and generous surrender of his life to children and youth"<sup>3</sup>.

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3 D. CUEVA, *Calasanz y sus constituciones*. Salamanca, 1979, pp.37-38.

# A THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION FOR THE PIARIST VOCATION

*United to Christ, the Lord, to please him in everything (CCal. 34)*

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## **THE SETTING**

**In a central place or where it might be clearly visible to all the participants, the following elements should be placed in a proper way:**

- A copy of the Constitutions and a large burning candle.
- A container with small candles (one for each participant).
- The badge of the Pious Schools. If no medium-sized badge is available, the distinctive cross might be used.
- A Relic or image of Saint Joseph Calasanz.

**In the pulpit or lectern: the Bible or Lectionary for the reading of the gospel (Matthew 25: 31-46. *The Judgement of the Nations*)**

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## WELCOMING ADDRESS

Calasanz writes in 1623 to Fr. Cananea, rector of Frascati: “I encourage you to be very careful and to use all diligence in order to ensure that schools work well and the Constitutions are observed; I ask you to be particularly attentive to this, and I’ll try to help you as far as I can, and to ask the Lord to give you the grace and the strength” (EpCal 165).

In many of his letters Calasanz requests a dedicated performance of a double task: special attention to the students - “that the schools work well” -, and observance of the Constitutions, seeking that piarist life helps each individual to respond with fidelity to the vocation received.

On January 31 we commemorate the approval of the Calasanctian Constitutions in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. In this Calasanctian Jubilee Year we wish to thank God for the gift of the piarist vocation that unites all the piarists: those who have preceded us in the path laid down by our founder, and those who share with us the life and mission of the Order in any of the presences and works that perpetuate Calasanz’ dream.

The Constitutions express the certainties that supported the life of Calasanz and gave dynamism to the Order’s mission from the beginning; they also manifest a convergence between the desire of God, who grants the Calasanctian charism to the saint, and the humble responsiveness of the founder and of the first companions who managed to express in this text, and to materialize in their lives, a corporate project on behalf of the least, which called them to live,

- *Centered in Christ*, the Lord, with a conscious and renewed desire of living only for him and pleasing him in everything (CCal. 34)
- *Poor* with and as Mary of Nazareth, to be able to surrender to the least and most abandoned with a free heart (CCal. 4)
- *Ready to work in the school without respite*, encouraged by the example and the word of Jesus: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (CCal. 4)

- *Attentive and docile to the voice of the Spirit*, who whispers in the heart new ways of responding to the needs of each moment (CCal. 48)
- *Rooted and daring* to live in the Church of God and under the guide of the Holy Spirit, seeking the glory of God and the good of our neighbours (CCal. 1; 345).

The Constitutions reflect the gift of the Calasanctian charism that God granted to our Order; their approval meant the end of the foundational process of the Pious Schools, and a confirmation in the heart of Calasanz of his desire of living “in the Church of God and under the guide of the Holy Spirit” and of surrendering *without respite* to the human and Christian formation of the children.

The commemoration of the approval of the Calasanctian Constitutions constitutes an opportunity to renew our option to follow Jesus on the path laid out by saint Joseph Calasanz, and to thank God for the gift of the piarist vocation, lived in the Church and among the least.

## SONG

*At this point a canticle to Calasanz may be sung or listened, containing a reference to his surrender to the educational mission or to piarist identity.*

*Suggestions (in Spanish; songs in other languages to be searched):* “Ponte de pie”, from the cassette *Hubo un hombre*. / “Pobres de la Madre de Dios”, from the musical *Como grano de trigo*.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

**Introduction:** The word of Jesus touched the heart and life of Calasanz, who allowed to be questioned by it. In his Constitutions we often find biblical quotations, that together with the saint’s experience, are interwoven into the Calasanctian text.

Calasanz is well acquainted with the biblical Word and uses it in his Constitutions where we find images, metaphors and texts of a deep evangelical taste. No other text expresses the experience of Calasanz and his profound

love for the Lord as the parable of the end of times.

In the heart of Calasanz, this text found the *good soil* where it produced the abundant fruit of the Pious Schools. Let us listen to it with gratitude.

*From the pulpit, a reader proclaims the text of Matthew 25: 31-46*

*+ A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew*

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

*This is the Word of the Lord*

After the proclamation, a time of silent meditation.

## LET US LISTEN TO THE WORD OF CALASANZ

**Introduction:** The text that we have listened resounded in Calasanz' existence transforming it completely. The first biographers and those who lived with him concur on asserting how "after being touched by God, he decided to surrender with his whole heart to the poor children", duped by a renewed love for the Lord, whom he found among the least.

The echo of the word and experience of Jesus, served in the poor, is reflected in the *Preamble* of his Constitutions, a privileged text for contemplating the real backbone of the piarist identity.

Standing, a reader reads the *Preamble* of the Constitutions:

"In the Church of God, Religious Institutes, guided by the Holy Spirit pursue the perfection of love as their genuine goal through their specific ministry. Likewise our Congregation is determined to accomplish it through the specific apostolate entrusted to it by his Holiness Paul V, of happy memory, Vicar of Christ on earth.

The Ecumenical Councils, the Fathers of the Church, as well as the best thinking philosophers, unanimously agree that the reform of Christian society depends on the diligent practice of this mission. Because if children, from their earliest years are instructed diligently in piety and letters, it must undoubtedly be expected that their whole life will be a happy one.

We must humbly hope that Almighty God, who called us to work in this most fruitful harvest will give us the necessary means to become competent co-operators with the Truth. Nevertheless, under the guidance that governs the universe and cautioned by the example of the Saints, we have judged necessary to protect our Institute with the present Constitutions.

And since we profess to be authentic Poor of the Mother of God, we shall never look down in any way on poor children but with great patience and love we shall try to enrich them with every good quality, especially in view of the words of the Lord: "What you did to one of the least of my little

ones this you did to me”.

It will be, therefore, the mission of our Institute to educate young boys in the fundamentals of reading, writing, arithmetic, the Latin language, and especially piety and Christian Doctrine. All this must be accomplished with the most efficient and simple methods.

The mission to which we dedicate ourselves is so important that it demands ministers well-endowed with great patience, love and other virtues. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to those who will be admitted and those who will be rejected to share in our apostolate.

For if the screening and admission of novices to be admitted is not carried out with great discernment and they are not instructed most diligently, our Institute, no matter how holy, will easily fall.” (Constitutions, 1621)

## **MEDITATION**

Addressing one of the first piarists Calasanz writes: “*I’m sending a letter to Fr. Gianlucca, in which I tell him with paternal love that I wish to share with him with charity the spirit that the Lord has given to me; and I encourage him, with all the love I can, to come to Rome and stay with me for a while in order to learn the way to Paradise*”. (EpCal 3913)

At 85 years old, Calasanz expresses the awareness of *having received* “a spirit” from God himself. This statement offers the possibility of deepening the experience of faith of this man who has decided to transform his life and follow Jesus under the motion of the Spirit. At times, Calasanz leaves open some *doors that lead to his intimacy* through which it is possible to trace the features of the new and original vocation launched in the Church by him and the first piarists.

In his letters Calasanz highlights the pedagogical and spiritual aspects of his vocation, and in several documents he also exhorts the first companions to live as piarists; in the reports he describes his experience, and in his writings he details the foundational process and delivers the keys to the original identity. A preferential place is occupied by the *Preamble* of the Constitu-

tions of the Pious Schools, a baseline text of the piarist legislation.

Composed between 1620 and 1621, the *Preamble* summarizes in seven paragraphs the core of piarist life's style. By way of a "credential letter" the *Preamble* presents and identifies the Pious Schools, reflecting the "spirit" that the Lord transmitted to Joseph Calasanz.

*A Spirit:*

- *Of love and service to the Church*, as the ultimate goal of the Pious Schools is to live from the *fullness of Charity*.
- That becomes visible in the *educational service*, expressed in the binomial *piety and letters* with a new, simple and efficient method.
- With the *Truth of the Gospel as the horizon*, from which and with which the Pious Schools walk and co-operate.
- Lived with the *attitudes of Mary, the Mother of God*, assuming her experience of poverty, humility and self-donation, on behalf of the most needy.
- *Prophetical*, hence demanding and hazardous: the formation and screening of the candidates will ensure the survival and fidelity of the work started.

This "spirit" that the Lord gave to Calasanz reflects the best of his charism, and is the path to follow Christ that generations of piarists accepted to live and travel under the guide of the Spirit. Living according to this spirit, Calasanz proposed it as a path of happiness and fullness for all and as a challenge to continue re-creating it in so many different ways.

In the Preamble of the Constitutions we identify the root and the sense of our common piarist vocation, and based on it we thank God for his call to follow and serve Jesus among the least and the poor, shaping our dedication to the evangelizing mission of the Church with the educational features left by Calasanz in the Constitutions' message.

The challenge proposed by Calasanz is to persevere *united to Christ, the Lord, with the desire of living only for him and pleasing him in everything* (CCal 34). Let us ask once more the gift of keeping close to God, who has called us and who remains faithful.

## LITURGICAL GESTURE OF THE LIGHT

**Introduction:** The charism of Calasanz has illuminated the life of the Order from the beginning. The Constitutions have helped to keep the piarist vocations's flame alive. We wish to invite each other to recognize the call of God to follow him as piarists and to express publicly our thanksgiving.

Each one of us is now invited to share a personal reason for thanking God for our piarist life and vocation. After sharing it in loud voice with the community, each one will light a small candle and place it near the Constitutions.

*A large burning candle and a small candle should be left near a copy of the Constitutions. Next to them a container with small candles.*

*At this point, each participant is invited to share with the community a reason for thanking God for piarist vocation and life. After doing this, he/she lights a small candle in the large candle and places near the copy of the Constitutions.*

*At the end of this liturgical gesture, we stand up and recite together the Magnificat.*

## PRAYERS

We give thanks to God our Father because he has called us in his Son to be co-operators of the Truth, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, by saying:

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the Church. You have called us to live in it, serving the least under the guide of the Holy Spirit.

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for saint Joseph Calasanz. That we may continue with fidelity and boldness the work he started for your glory and the good of our neighbours.

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for our Order of the Pious Schools, a very fertile harvest in which you invite us to work with patience and love.

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for your fidelity towards each one of us. Grant us a generous and gratuitous spirit to be able to acknowledge and thank so many good things we have received.

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the vocations to the piarist life. To those whom you call to follow you, grant love, humility and simplicity to look down and provide light to the children.

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for our elderly and sick piarist brothers. Receive with love and gratitude the generous gift of their lives.

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for our deceased piarist brothers. Receive them with Mary, the Mother of God, in the Kingdom reserved to the least and the poor.

- Thanks be to you, O Lord.

## **FINAL PRAYER**

God, our Father,

You have granted saint Joseph Calasanz

A daring and ever-enduring patience

To work in the Church for your glory and the good of the neighbours,

Bless the Pious Schools in this Calasanctian Jubilee Year

With a fruitful “new Pentecost”

In the generous, gratuitous and silent service of the least.

All glory and honor is yours forever and ever.

AMEN.

**Marian Song.** A tu amparo y protección.

ANNUS  
IUBILÆI  
SCHOLARUM  
PIARUM

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