



Memory and Prophecy

A story to remember, a story to be built

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
OCT 2021

Memory and Prophecy are two complementary dimensions of the entire historical experience of Consecrated Life in the Church. It is likely that only if we combine them well can we extract from both the deep wealth that they contain. We look at our history to strengthen the keys from which to build the future, not to stay in the nostalgia of what has already happened. And we build the future from what we have learned and received from our elders, as “*dwarves on the shoulders of giants*” who can see beyond themselves because they have the support of those who lived before them.

I would like to reflect in this fraternal letter on the life of the first Province of the Order, the Pious Schools of Italy, inspired by two family “events” that we are living in these months. The first, the farewell of two extraordinary elders, Fathers Olivo Pallanch and Giovanni Grimaldi, both recently deceased at the age of 95. Two Piarists worth remem-

bering: cheerful, dedicated to mission, passionate about the Pious Schools, apostles, educators. How much I learned from them by listening to their stories and their projects! Because yes, at their age they had projects.

The second, the celebration of the 400th anniversary of our school of Carcare, founded by Saint Joseph Calasanz in 1621. Carcare is today the third oldest house of the Order, of which that remain open, after the Mother House (San Pantaleo) and Frascati. It is the first Piarist foundation outside the Roman context. We would not arrive in Naples until 1627, in Florence until 1630 and outside the Italian borders until 1631 (Nikolsburg).

When one arrives in Carcare one immediately sees the sign announcing to everyone that Carcare is a “*città calasanziana*”. With seeing that poster we can already get an idea of what the presence of the Piarists has meant for the city. The story of the founding of Carcare is worthy of being known by all, because

we can learn a lot from it. Not in vain are we talking about a school especially loved by Calasanz, who wrote a weekly letter to accompany the process, even going so far as to design the plans of the building. These are very specific letters in which you can see that he cared about everything. Especially nice is to be able to read how he was interested in the novices who were in the community, whom he invited to Rome for the Holy Year of 1625, to “learn to be saints”.

When we contemplate our history, we realize the extraordinary effort made by our elders to gradually build the Pious Schools. We realize the dynamisms that made it possible for Italy to have more than a thousand religious in seven provinces at the end of the eighteenth century. We become aware of the difficult external events that seriously damaged the Order in various historical times, and also of the mistakes made by ourselves, almost all of which can be synthesized into three: conformism in the face of difficulties, lack of fraternal communion and a lack of vision of the future.

We are beginning the fifth century of history of the Pious Schools in Italy. Today we have an Italian Province, with 60 religious, of which 10 are not Italians. The Province runs six schools, seven parishes, fifteen churches or chapels and four non-formal education programmes. Hanging over it is a formidable question, as disturbing as it is hopeful and convening: *What is the future of the Order in Italy?*

I have written “salutatio” about Congo, Vietnam or Indonesia, recent foundations of the Order, seeking to offer the keys from which we have started in each country and the options from which we intend to walk. I think it is also good to write about an ancient Province, looking for the same thing: how can we continue to build Pious Schools in Italy? I share with you all my small thoughts, which spring from a deep conviction: if the Order is not possible today in secularised Western Europe, it will not be possible tomorrow in other contexts that seem to be flourishing today. The Piarist Consecrated Life does not depend only on the more or less favorable contexts, but on the capacity we have to interpret them and

respond to them from a charism that is still necessary and urgent.

I propose five options that I believe we must consider clearly in order to try to make this fifth century of the Order in Italy - finally - flourishing and missionary. And, as a portico, I propose to review this extraordinary paragraph of Pope Francis that tells us how we should pose a challenge like the one before us: to make the Order possible in Italy. *“Time is superior to space. This principle makes it possible to work in the long term, without obsessing over immediate results. It helps to endure with patience difficult and adverse situations, or the changes of plans imposed by the dynamism of reality. It is an invitation to assume the tension between fullness and limit, giving priority to time. To give priority to time is to take care of **initiating processes** rather than owning spaces. Time rules the spaces, illuminates them and transforms them into links in a chain in constant growth, with no paths of return. It is about privileging **actions that generate new dynamisms and involve other people and groups that will develop them, until they bear fruit in important historical events. No anxiety, but **clear and tenacious convictions.**”***¹

Live and work with mentality of “Province construction”. It is a new mentality, which we need to recover. It is that of Calasanz, who in addition to giving his life for the mission, built the Order, thus leaving us a permanent message: building the Order is nuclear in our mission, it is something deeply missionary. This mentality involves many things, but I would like to highlight just four:

- a) “Expect from God the necessary means.”² We must start from this conviction. The Pious Schools are the fruit of our labor, but first they are the fruit of God’s favor. Increasing the spirit of prayer for the Province and the spirituality of openness to a renewed future of Piarist life and mission will be central to the path we must travel.

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1.- Pope Francis. Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” number 223.

2.- Constitutions of the Order of the Pious Schools number 6

- b) Promote a concrete, plannable, demanding and coherent Province project with the Life Keys of the Order. It is true that you have to solve problems, but you have to bet on “life choices” and do it seriously. Among them, a renewed, daring, and consistent Vocational Ministry; a convinced impulse of the participation of the laity and a community life understood as a space of authentic following of the Lord.
- c) Generosity in understanding that we must change. We need Piarists open to new challenges, willing to give up what they have always done in exchange for working on bets that can provoke new horizons; generous Piarists who open space to the new ones who arrive wanting to give their best for the Province; Piarists willing to understand that “if we remain the same we will only achieve the same thing”.
- d) Taking accurate decisions. It is essential to get the concrete decisions right that can allow new life. Decisions that transform a presence or a work, that guarantee the proximity to children and young people, that even allow to open a new Piarist presence in the country, that allow the incorporation of young people from other demarcations, etc.

Embody the co-responsibility with and of the Order. Co-responsibility is a dynamism of the two directions:

- a) Of the Order with Italy, seeking and generously offering people and ideas to strengthen life and mission in the Province: young people who do their Initial Formation in Italy and who ensure a significant presence in the Province in its early priestly years; religious sent from other Provinces who want to give years of their lives to this mission, without thinking about what they left behind; institutional bets of various Provinces to collaborate with Italy, etc.
- b) Of Italy with the Order, opening to a new way of thinking based on a Province capable of re-inventing itself, welcoming of the intercultural, accompanying those who come, generous

with the needs of the Order, open to the missionary spirit, etc.

- c) Italy will move forward if the Order takes the challenge seriously and if the Province is able to generate life projects from which those who arrive can feel involved.

Create new “life centers”. The Province will walk if it is able to create new “centers of life”. And this is done from two options: renewing some presences to turn them into places that radiate life (for example, a renovated Pompilian sanctuary or an authentically Piarist parish) or assuming new presences and missions, well discerned and planned. We cannot and must not wear ourselves out just in “holding things up”, sometimes in an expensive and even decadent way; that path leads nowhere. We must think seriously about this challenge and try to take steps in this direction.

To promote in a systemic way the options of the Order. The Order has nine “life keys” from which it tries to carry forward its path. The nine are important, the nine can and must be developed in a coordinated manner. Any step, however small, in the right direction is a “life bet”. For example, a plan for the formation of the laity in Piarist identity or a community that decides to reorganize its life to make it more meaningful. Similarly, any step in the opposite direction delays or moves away renewal. For example, not working with the laity on their Piarist identity or not promoting the Calasanz Movement.

Grow in missionary zeal. The history of Italy is missionary. From Italy, Calasanz sent the first missionaries to Nikolsburg. Every year, the Order celebrates the “Day of the Piarist Missions” on April 2, remembering the first missionary sending made by Calasanz in the year 1631 in the persons of eight religious who began our mission in the land of Moravia, today in the Czech Republic.

Perhaps more than one will find it surprising that I invite a Province like the Italian one to strengthen its missionary spirit, considering its numbers and its average age. But I have no hesitation in doing so, inspired by the strong call of Pope Fran-

cis in Evangelii Gaudium: “*We are all called to this new missionary departure*”.³ I do so for three fundamental reasons:

- a) Because being a missionary, passionate about mission, is essentially a spiritual attitude, a way of understanding and living the vocation, regardless of the concrete possibilities of being sent elsewhere. And if this is taken care of, the Province will grow in a spirit of mission, in Italy or outside Italy. It is not part of our ideal to remain calm under the delusion that we have no strength for more.
- b) Because if Italy transmits a spirit of mission, young Italians will come who want to give their lives, as Piarists, in the name of the Order, in as many places as we need to do. Can Italy create a house of missionary formation in the Nazareno?
- c) Because the missionary spirit also helps in the reception of those who join the Province from different places of the Order, not only to “sustain” what is there, but to create, together with those who receive them, new responses of life and mission.

The Province of Italy (then the Province of Liguria) founded in 1994 the House of Daloa in the Ivory Coast. Today, the Order rejoices in the Piarist life of 32 Ivorian religious. God blesses -always- apostolic courage.

One of the best gifts I have received these years in which I have served the Order as Father General is that I have learned to love each Province in its reality and in its challenges. And I have received from each many gifts. I would like to highlight some of the many I have received from Italy: the love of school (which still remains despite the difficulties and some carelessness); the example of the life of so many elderly people who are still active despite their age; the ability to arouse love for Calasanz, perhaps not sufficiently exploited, as well as a beautiful experience of the Calasancian Family.

Let us pray for the Italian Province, in thanksgiving for so many gifts offered to the Order, and especially to children and young people, throughout its long and fruitful Piarist history.

Receive a fraternal hug

*Fr. Pedro Aguado Sch. P.
Father General*

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3.- Pope Francis: Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” number 20.