



## *“Even if it’s just a glass of water”*

LETTER TO OUR  
BRETHREN  
NOV 2021

**O**n the numerous occasions in which throughout these years I have been able to meet so many people who love Calasanz and collaborate with the Pious Schools, I have tended to speak to them using a passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 11: 42) that is particularly significant and that reads as follows: *“Whoever gives to drink, even if it is only a glass of water, to one of these little ones, for his quality as a disciple, will not go without reward, I assure you”*.

I like to think of this passage as if it were addressed to all those people - so many - who collaborate with the Calasanzian project in so many places in the world. And they do it differently, generously, simply, humbly. How much we must thank our benefactors, who help us in so many ways!

It is impossible to mention them all, not their names, of course, but the way and manner in which they collaborate

and help the Pious Schools, with love and availability. People who care for our churches; doctors and nurses who care for us; people who care for our elders; professionals who help in the training of our young people; people who help us with their material resources; people who give their time for the Pious Schools; people who pray for us; people who promote our vocations; educators and collaborators of our works; people who give their time without measuring it; technicians who coordinate aspects of our life and mission that we could not attend to; professionals who work with us; bishops, priests and nuns who strive to collaborate; etc. An impressive list of people who collaborate with the Calasanzian dream by helping, in many ways, their Piarist children.

I write this *“salutatio”* as a tribute to all of them, as a thanksgiving for their dedication, their love, their dedication, and their generosity. It will never be enough what we do to express this gratitude, but

I think it is good that we grow in the awareness that, without them, nothing we are and do would be possible. And it has always been that way, from the beginning.

I have dived a little into the beginnings of our history, and I have seen that from the first moment there are many people who helped Calasanz, in very different ways. Perhaps the best known is Ventura Serafellini, the calligrapher who taught at San Pantaleo until his death, and for whom Calasanz had a special affection. It is impressive to read in the contract that Calasanz establishes with Mr. Serafellini, in which he stipulates his salary, which he says at the end: *“that our brothers have him as one of their own, and be a participant in all the works and merits of the Congregation, because he has worked in this place from the beginning in which he began this blessed work of the Pious Schools, with great perseverance and love”*.<sup>2</sup> That did not prevent Calasanz, who always closely accompanied all his work, was also demanding of him to ensure that he fulfilled his work.<sup>2</sup>

But Serafellini is not the only one. Names like these can make up the prologue to the endless list of benefactors of the Order in these four centuries of road: the Castellani brothers of Carcare; the Di Falco family and Vito Santiago Ferraiolo, of Naples; the Palorsi brothers of Narni or Andrea Baiano, a Portuguese Latinist who lived in Rome. You can all add many more names to this list of people who, with their love for the Order, have made and continue to make the life and mission of the Pious Schools possible. Maybe it is good to recall them in some meeting, share their memory and anecdotes. If we do it in San Pantaleo, surely the name of D. Vincenzo will appear quickly, who for more than thirty years came once a month to the community to cut the hair of the Piarists of the General Curia.

I would like to share five simple reflections that have to do with this immense gift we receive, the gift of generosity of people who want to help the Order because they understand the transcendent

ence of the Piarist mission<sup>3</sup>. These are reflections that also want to be invitations or proposals.

**THANK YOU.** I would like to express, on behalf of the Order, our thanks to all these people. We have certainly done so many times, and we continue to do so. But I want them to be recorded in writing in this fraternal letter. I thank all the people who help us and who care that our life and our mission find the best ways to develop and grow. We express this gratitude in many ways, and especially through prayer. Therefore, we are going to introduce in our *“Calendarium Ordinis”* a **Day of Prayer for our benefactors**, but not only in the grateful memory of those who are no longer there, which we do in the days of prayer for the deceased, but for all those who - still alive - contribute to the life of the Pious Schools. We established that day on April 21 of each year, because it was on that day, in 1622, when one of the greatest benefactors of our Order, Cardinal Michelangelo Tonti, died.

**LETTERS OF BROTHERHOOD.** One of the most valuable ways we have to recognize the love received from our benefactors is the granting of so-called “Letters of Brotherhood.” Already Saint Joseph Calasanz granted some, because he understood well the value that had all the good that he received from so many people. In our archive we keep the text of the first document of “affiliation” that Calasanz granted, in the person of the brothers Atilio and Pedro Palorsi. The valuable Calasanzian text reads as follows: *“It is an ancient custom among religious that all those who are fond of an Order should be entitled to them by showing them all kinds of kindness, making them partakers of all the graces and goods they have in those Orders. Therefore, knowing that Messrs. Atilio Palorsi and Pedro Santos Palorsi de Narni, our kind benefactors, have singular affection for our Order, it has seemed us our duty to admit them to the affiliation and aggregation of all masses, prayers, fasts, suffrage, vigils, disciplines and other penances and good works that are done in it, and particularly in the exercise of the good education and instruction of youth. May the Lord deign*

1.- Calasanz *Opera Omnia*, vol. X, page 11, Document of 15 July 1618.

2.- Calasanz to Fr. Castilla: “Write to me if you have given satisfaction to Mr. Ventura, and if he is constant in going and attending school, as I hope and believe.” (*Opera Omnia* vol. 1, page 101).

3.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Constitutions of the Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God, n. 6

*to confirm in heaven what we grant them on earth, exhorting them to become worthy, living, as they are customary, devoutly. And in faith of our desire the present has been written, signed by our hand and sealed with the seal of our Congregation”<sup>4</sup>*

Throughout this six-year period, the General Congregation, always at the proposal of the Provincial Congregations, has granted 65 Letters of Brotherhood, an average of ten each year. There are certainly not many. I would like to make two proposals, so that you can reflect on them. They may seem contradictory, but they are not. The first, that you consider reactivating this precious sign of gratitude, with the granting of Letters of Brotherhood to our benefactors. The second, that you be demanding in its concession, recognizing in this way those people who have distinguished themselves, in truth, by their love of the Pious Schools. A Letter of Brotherhood offers to one who is already our brother the best we have: our prayer before the Father of all of us, for his life and his fullness.

**PARTICIPATION.** Our Order has a Directory of Participation, and it is increasingly clear that the dynamism to which it refers is an authentic “Key of Life” of the Order. Our institutional document tries to explain, above all, “*what we can do*” to accompany and increase the link of people to the Pious Schools from any of the four modalities. And that is good. But perhaps we should highlight more something that is at the basis of the dynamism of Participation: that many people collaborate spontaneously, simply because they love, because they are grateful, because they want to help. And that is central to what the Order wants to promote, protect, and bless.

The Directory of Participation was approved after a long road traveled within the Pious Schools, a long road of communion. In fact, the Directory begins by summarizing that path, before describing all types of collaboration and explaining the modalities of participation. I just want to remember how the directory ends: with a chapter dedicated to the co-responsibility of the Order to de-

velop, always attentive to the novelties that arise, this exciting dynamism. Six years after the Directory’s approval, perhaps it is time to take more concrete steps, throughout the Order, to make it a reality.

**ACCOMPANYING.** It is perhaps one of the most valuable words we have to express the dynamic from which we can and must stand before so many people who accompany us. Being close, listening, comforting, blessing, welcoming, inviting, proposing, forming, demanding, correcting, learning... all these verbs are the result of *knowing how to accompany*.

Let us accompany our brothers and sisters to collaborate in their Christian and Piarist life, and to sustain them also in their sufferings. Let us never forget that love for the Order and for Calasanz also causes problems and difficulties for those who profess it, just as the Piarist life also causes problems for those who choose it. This is what the Lord guaranteed, when he promised persecutions in addition to one hundred for one, and in the future, eternal life.<sup>5</sup> And so it has been from the beginning. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this, in Calasanz’s lifetime, is that of the aforementioned Andrea Baiano, of whom one of the intellectuals of the time said this, someone certainly very little supporter of the education of poor children, because he considered it a dishonor for people of high social and intellectual status. The phrase with which the thinker Gian Vittorio Rossi dismissed our benefactor Andrea Baiano is not wasted: “*he ended his days teaching Grammar in the Pious Schools, a sewer in which the feces of the whole city converged*”.<sup>6</sup> Cheers, brothers! Follow in Calasanz’s footsteps, even if that means, sometimes, receiving “congratulations” like this.

**CONVERSION.** My fifth and final thought has to do with one of the most significant gifts we can receive in our relationship with the people who collaborate with us. On many occasions, from them we receive examples that deeply edify us, and they proclaim the gospel to us, which we

4.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. *Opera Omnia*, vol. X, page 198, document of December 12, 1620

5.- Mk 10, 30

6.- Severino GINER. “San José de Calasanz, Maestro y Fundador”. BAC 1992, page 442, note 97.

have professed to be witnesses of the Lord. In others, your questions uninstall us. In some, their criticisms or disappointments put us in front of our own contradictions and help us overcome our temptations.

I believe that the call to conversion also comes to us through our relationships. Let us be open to this gift and let us try to live it from the keys from which it can produce its fruits: faith and humility.

I end this short letter by recalling the starting point: *“no glass of water will go without reward”*. To all our co-workers, to all the good people who love Calasanz and who express that love by helping the Piarists in so many different ways, to live joyful and hopeful because the Lord has promised to reward you. And do not forget that their rewards are only understood and lived from faith.

Receive a fraternal hug

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