



Accompany

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
MAY 2022

A few days before leaving for Mexico to participate in the General Chapter, I traveled from Rome to Genoa to accompany a young Italian, Elia Guerra, on his priestly ordination. The journey from Rome to Genoa by train takes five hours, which allows you to devote time to many things; also to reflect. At a certain time, I searched online for the specific route of the train, placing its number in the search engine. And there appeared, in a complete and detailed form, the “road map” of the trip: each and every one of the stops, the waiting time in each place, the departure time of each point, and the time of arrival of the train to its final destination, Genoa station.

I was preparing a reflection on the accompaniment of young adult religious, which I planned to present at the General Chapter. And the example of the “road map” of the train helped me to become aware that our life, the life of each one of us, and especially the life of the young Piarists who are ordained and face their first years of adult life is not, at all, like the journey of a train. God does not give us a “road map” that details what we are going to live and how we are going to live it. On the contrary, our life is very open, and in it we live very diverse processes that, little by little, are shaping the Piarist that we are.

Our challenge is precisely this: to live a process in which we can grow in fidelity to our vocation, in life experience, in authentic discernment, in generous dedication and in full Piarist identity. The “road map” is wide open, and many options and possibilities emerge in it. But the challenge is one: to walk faithfully, day by day, to be able to incarnate with the gift of vocation received, taking it, little by little, to its fullness.

In this journey there is a particularly decisive stage, which is that of the young adult religious. It is no secret that this is the life cycle that worries me the most. And the reason for my concern is that I am convinced that in those early years much of the “success of the trip” is at stake. That is why I believe that it is very important for our Order - and for the whole of Consecrated Life - to accompany in an appropriate way the process of these religious, and to do it as what they are: in an adult and mature way. Only in this way will it work and only in this way can we carry out this accompaniment.

I would like to offer some concrete clues to this formidable challenge: to accompany the young adult religious on their Piarist path.

I begin with the central objective of this stage: that the young Piarist religious who is in his first years of adult life **identify himself with his identity**. This is the goal: to live what we are, to embody it with increasing authenticity. And that only works if we live each day as if it were the first and last day of our journey. I like to remember what Fr. Arrupe, who was a General of the Society of Jesus, said to his young adult brothers: *“Fall in love. Nothing can matter more than finding God. That is, to fall in love with Him in a definitive and absolute way. What you fall in love with catches your imagination and ends up leaving its mark on everything. It will be what decides what gets you out of bed in the morning, what you make of your sunsets, what you spend your weekends on, what you read, what you know, what breaks your heart and what overwhelms you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love! Abide in love! Everything will be different.”*

This is the first key that we must know how to accompany: the care and maturation of the passion from which a young person makes his solemn vows and consecrates his life to the one Lord. You have to know how to give name to the center, to the reasons why you live, to the engine of your day to day, to the gasoline that makes you live, to the day to day that turns your routine into surprise and your daily work into opportunity. This is the subject that must always be talked about, and the key to which we must be able to approach

- if the brother allows us to do so - to accompany his process.

Secondly, I would like to mention **three areas that are particularly significant** and that we must know how to face and accompany. I am referring to three very specific aspects, which I express with the brevity that a *salutatio* requires, but which would deserve a much broader development. I believe that the keys to the process are threefold: the *direction* we walk, the *paths* we choose, and the *shared awareness* from which we walk them.

- a) When I contemplate the Piarists around the world who are in their early adult years, I realize that the question I must ask them is this: **what you nourish the spirit with, what makes you grow in faith and in the answers that a living faith inspires**. The neglect of what is not urgent but fundamental, in the long run, is always paid. On the answer to this question depends on the explanation of his daily life: the strength with which he works, the dedication to the mission or to his things, the transparency of life, the care of the vocation, the ability to assume responsibilities, the availability for the Province, his centered or uncentered life, etc.
- b) The second question I must ask them is a consequence of the first: **how, with whom and at what level do you share that profound experience that is the reason for your Piarist being**. At what level you let yourself be questioned, with whom and in what way you build the path, how you let yourself be helped, on the basis of what community context you live, decide, get enlivened or serene, dream and build. And I am not just talking about the specific local community, but about the group of those who “feel and dream of the same thing.”
- c) And the third is this: **how you understand and how you live the dedication of life**, the wear and tear for children and young people, for the school, for the Province, for the Order, for the Kingdom of God and his Justice. How is your availability, your mood, your endur-

ance, your patient listening and welcoming, your clarity and intelligence in defining what is worthwhile and what is not, etc.

I think that the Pious Schools will have a *future* if we live a **deep and careful Piarist experience of vocation**. The great incongruity in Religious Life is to believe in God, to want to give one's life for others, to renounce other highly positive and healthy aspects of life, and, nevertheless, not to make God and the aspects of vocation the *center of our life*. And I see this in too many places and in different ways. We must struggle against this. This is the process. We are men of God, of community and of mission. These are the questions we have to ask ourselves, and this is the depth from which we must ask them.

Thirdly, I would like to propose some attitudes that help decisively in these processes – in the personal process and in that of the accompaniment – and that it is good to enhance. I will mention, again, only three.

a) The search for balance between the various dimensions of our life. It is not a question of balancing - superficially - “community” with “work”, or with “prayer”, or vice versa. This balance is not a matter of “organization” or “agenda”, although everything helps. It is not simply a matter of “proportion of schedules”. It is a matter of passion, of vocational intensity, of real desire to live what I have assumed as a vocation, to let myself be contrasted, to learn. Our vocation is a *way of life*. Life is what makes possible greater synthesis: between *prayer* and *action*, between *relationship* and *work*, between *theory* and *praxis*, etc. Ours, I insist on it, is a *way of life*. This is what we have to take care of. For us to carry out our *mission* and to live in *community*, and to be men of God, the same thing is required of us: an authentically incarnate life, so that we can come out of ourselves. Without this process there will be no life, and therefore no community and/or mission. It may seem strange for me to say that balance is a matter of passion, but I am convinced of it. Passion coming from a center that is cared for and lived with honesty. Only this *passionate bal-*

ance allows an attentive listening to the personal reality, in which God works.

b) The transparency of life. This is one of the keys to our process, which helps us decisively to live in fidelity. Transparency with yourself, with God, and with your brothers and with the people who accompany you. To the first, Calasanz gave it a beautiful name, and considered it central in the Piarists: self-knowledge. The second is the certain path to an authentic relationship with God: no one deceives God, and no one puts himself in the presence of God to hide his soul. Rather what we do to hide ourselves is to forget the prayer or make it a routine. The third is the key to accompaniment: to find a community life and a personal accompaniment which allows us to walk with that freedom that gives us the sincerity and authenticity of life. When our process is transparent, authenticity is possible and double life – or shortcuts – have no place.

c) Know how to “give name” to what we live. This is the proper thing about maturity. Give name to what helps us and what clogs us. Both are part of our lives. And in the life cycle that concerns us, they acquire very specific and concrete forms that it is good to know how to recognize. Some examples, mixing wheat and tares and without any intention of being exhaustive: taking on responsibilities and knowing how to carry them out; confusing fruitfulness with success; lifestyles that separate - or oppose - community life, mission and prayer; confusing leadership with individualism; believing that belonging to the Province or the confidence of the superior depends on the positions or responsibilities entrusted to you; working on affectivity as what it really is: a powerful force that defines and qualifies our life; having an accurate discernment to detect our temptation to worldliness; fighting against clericalism by starting by recognizing that I am not free of it; gradually accepting that “passion and results” or “expectations and fruits” are never fully related; working on the dynamisms proper to each of the vows that make our consecration explicit, etc.

Finally, I would like to recall that our General Chapter approved the insertion into the Rules of a very significant point: **the need for all the Provinces to design and organize the process of an integral accompaniment of religious who are in their first years of their adult life.** I am sure that over the next few years we will learn a lot from these important processes, which seek that we can all grow in authenticity of vocation. I would like to point out some dynamisms that will help this objective to be fulfilled well and to bear fruit. There will be three of them:

a) **Count on the opinion and feeling of those involved.** Let us not design a process without taking into account what the beneficiaries of the process live, dream or suffer. Let us do as Calasanz did, when he asked Glicerio the right question: *what dwells in the heart of the young Glicerio?* This is the starting point.

b) To be clear about the project of life that we have given ourselves and that the Church has consolidated, and that is expressed in our **Constitutions.** Keeping our ideal project in mind in order to think about the steps that can help us walk towards it is a safe bet.

c) To take care of the dynamisms of **authenticity in the daily life** of the communities and demarcations, so that the processes of accompaniment are not islands in the middle of the real life of the religious, but proposals that strengthen what they are already living and sharing on a daily basis.

We are facing an exciting challenge. Let us live it with the joy and availability of those who know that they are trying to take care of their own vocation, the best gift they have received from God, our Father.

Receive a fraternal embrace.

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