



How do you take care of your vocation?

Letter to our
brethren
JAN 2024

The question with which this fraternal letter begins is based on something very important: What is not cared for spoils. This applies not only to material things or interpersonal relationships, but also to the spiritual aspects and, of course, to our own vocation, the undeserved treasure that each of us carries in a *clay pot*¹. I like to remember Father Jaume Pallarolas who, as provincial, gave a clay pot to each young man who took his solemn vows to remind him that the commitment he was making was greater than himself and that he had to take care of it day after day with courage and fidelity.

I continue to conduct the canonical visitation of the young adult religious of the Order and I would like to share with you a simple reflection related to one of the fundamental questions I ask each of them in personal interviews: *How are you taking care of your vocation?* The authenticity with which we live out our vocation depends to a great extent on the answer that each of us gives to this question.

In the Christian tradition there is a word that expresses very well how important it is to take care of one's vocation: *Vigilance*. Pope Francis mentioned it in one of his weekly catecheses². The content of this catechesis is highly recommended for all of us, and it is good to reflect on it carefully.

1.- II Cor 4:7

2.- Francis. Catechesis at the General Audience of 14 December 2022

Francis reflects on a short parable of Jesus (Mt 12:43-45) and refers to a negligent householder who, in his absence, allows various evil spirits to take possession of his house. It is a parable about vigilance, about attention to one's own heart, about concern for the undoubtedly generous response we all want to give to the Lord's call. I particularly like the Pope's reflections on the need to beware of the "*polite little devils who come into your house in disguise without you realising it*".

I would like to dedicate this letter to these "polite little devils" that we must recognise and deal with. Without a doubt, spiritual worldliness is the most important of them.

Worldliness, which consists in living according to the "spirit of the world", takes various forms, many of which go unnoticed by us. And little by little it does its work, which essentially consists of making us "one more" and taking away everything that our vocation has as an alternative, as a sign and as a horizon. Let's take a look at this "polite and obliging little devil" and name some of its manifestations.

Spiritual conformity. It is the attitude of the servant who buried the talent he had received and did not allow it to grow or bear fruit. The temptation to spiritual conformity is very strong and persistent and manifests itself in many ways: lack of attention to prayer, neglect of interior work, lack of attention to the challenges and sufferings of the brothers, detachment from the life of the community and the Church, lack of reading and reflection, etc. There are many manifestations of this spiritual conformism, which makes Christians and also religious into irrelevant persons and communities, even if they appear to be recognised and appreciated.

Individualism, which has its roots partly in egoism and partly in human narcissism. Individualism, which weakens the community, is sometimes disguised as dedication, labour and personal commitment. In many cases, however, this is hidden behind the pursuit of personal fame, wealth and prestige. And this radically weakens a vocation like ours, which is based on the experience of community and building fra-

ternal spaces where we can all walk together and share our individual gifts for the good of all. Humility is one of the best antidotes to this polite little devil who wants to trap us all.

The **constant lamentations.** The constant attitude of complaining, criticising, lamenting in the face of what we see, what we do not like, generally accompanied by a lack of commitment to offer an alternative or a proposal, or a lack of realism that prevents us from seeing that there are often no other, better ways of realising the common project. I once heard a bishop say that it would be good to give shape to a "new religious vow, namely not to complain, but to focus on building." We all welcome positive, hopeful attitudes that are a source of inspiration and hope. They are what transform criticism into contributions.

The **apostolic pride**, proper to those who think that "pastoral successes" belong to them, leads to a terrible blindness: we forget that we are only "useless servants" and that the only owner of the mission is the Lord who entrusts it to the Church and the Church to the Order, and not the specific person who is simply at the service of this mission. It is good to be happy that things are going well, that the schools are functioning, that the Calasanz Movement is growing or that we have vocations. But when this leads to pride or unconscious satisfaction of one's own fragility, it becomes a sure path that leads to project inconsistency. We have many examples of this temptation.

Recklessness in relationships and in our public appearances which tempts us to trivialise who we are and make it "normal". Sometimes I wonder about the posts of religious people on social networks, the way we spend our free time or the careless relationships we maintain without realising that we are putting the lifestyle we have adopted at risk. The environments we spend time in, the image we project in public and the type of relationships we maintain often show where our heart lies or how far we go in our absent-mindedness. And while we sometimes receive applause or the number of "likes" grows, we remain composed.

Uneducated superficiality. We admire people who read and are educated, but we do not imitate them. And when this happens, we gradually become people with little reflection and a poor ability to understand the world around us, its movements and its reasons. It's true that at certain stages of our lives we do not have much time to read, but that does not mean we can not. I believe that this is one of the temptations that can be well combated in community life by providing and sharing educational opportunities.

Self-deception. This is one of the most sophisticated forms of worldliness. We deceive ourselves by giving ourselves reasons to justify or postpone the decisions we know we need to make. It is a dynamic that is not easy to expose, because we all tend to justify our actions or trivialise difficulties or contradictions. That's why it's good to keep an eye on it.

The **culture of the ephemeral**, of appearances, of good looks. The culture of "anything goes", which can lead us to lose sight of the fact that faith in Jesus and the Christian vocation are not based on this dynamic, but on the consistent faithfulness of those who build their lives on rock.

Spiritual vigilance is about guarding your own heart, being self-aware. This is not an easy task. And it is not, because it requires us to recognise that we cannot do it alone and that we need the help of others and the love of God, which often manifests itself in experiences that are not easy, but which carry the seeds of personal transformation.

There are not many parables that are explained by Jesus himself. I have always thought that when Jesus tells a parable, he does so because he wants to make sure that we understand the power of his message. One of these "explained parables" – and in detail – is that of the sower. The seed falls by the wayside, between stones, between brambles or on good soil. The reason why the seed that falls among the brambles does not bear fruit is very significant: *the cares of the world*. That is, worldliness. It is very clear...

The second kind of seed that bears no fruit because it has no roots. I think it's the other way round with worldliness: it has deep, very deep roots. That's why it's difficult to uproot it. How do you uproot worldliness? How can we make progress in this exciting spiritual battle? I think it is appropriate to speak of "spiritual warfare"...

Calasanz dedicates a chapter of his Constitutions to what he calls "separation from the world". I think the most important part of this chapter is its beginning, numbers 33 and 34, which is the "gateway" to his reflections on the "struggle against worldliness". What Calasanz affirms in these paragraphs is that a "*faithful religious wishing to get the most seasoned fruit in our Institute must [...] remain united with Christ our Lord and live only for Him and please Him only*".³ The founder then lists some attitudes and practises that are typical of the mentality of his time. But he makes his commitment clear: "*Look out and don't keep looking to what is behind after setting your hand on the plough! Despise the worries and burdens of this life.*"⁴

I believe that Calasanz's intuition points to the root, to the key of the struggle to overcome worldliness: the centrality of Jesus Christ in the life of each of us. There is no doubt that the process of identification with Christ, if it is honest and sincere, if it is lived consciously, if it is authentically willed, will gradually lead to that "*being in the world without being of the world*"⁵ which is the real proposal of Jesus for every Christian and which we Piarists should accept with a certain necessity. This is the key to overcoming worldliness, and it is not easy to learn. We do not take care of our vocation by isolating ourselves from reality, nor do we protect it by cancelling its alternative contribution. We can only allow it to grow if we are clear about the centre and make and share our decisions from that centre.

.....
3.- Saint Joseph CALASANZ. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation for the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, nos. 33 and 34.

4.- Saint Joseph CALASANZ. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation for the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, number 35.

5.- Jn 15:19

This process is undoubtedly not simple. Calasanz has already discovered it in his own life and that is why he said that “it is good *“to have left the world, but it is better to live in such a way that the world despises you”*”.⁶

I learn a lot from the answers that the young Pi-arists give to my question: How do you take care of your vocation? What I see is an honest search for fidelity through daily life lived with a growing awareness of smallness and conversion. Everyday mediations emerge that are not new, but effective: personal prayer, humble service to the tasks of the community, a life of poverty, formation dialogue, meditation, demanding work, responsibility for one’s own tasks, work to know Calasanz better, the struggle against discouragement due to failure or indifference, dedication to the children, the effort not to look for oneself, etc.

I believe that all these simple mediations of vocational fidelity bring us closer to the demanding ideal that Calasanz proposes and that expresses most clearly what it means to take care of one’s vocation: “*You have given nothing to Christ if you have not given him your whole heart.*”⁷ And there is no other way than to do this every day.

Receive a fraternal embrace.

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

.....
6.- Saint Joseph CALASANZ. Opera Omnia, Volume 10, Page 394

7.- Saint Joseph CALASANZ. Opera Omnia, Volume 10, Page 394