

CVBICVLVM
DIVTVRNO PER XXXVI ANNOS INCOLATV
S. IOSEPHI CALASANCTII
IEIVNIIS VIGILIIS CHAMEVNIIIS
FREQVENTE COELITVM APPARITIONE
ET SIGNIS DEMVM AC BEATA MORTE HONESTATVM
ALTARI CONDITO DEDICATVM
VENERABVNDVS INGREDERE

Prayer

*Letter to our
brethren*
APRIL 2025

I dedicate this fraternal letter to a simple reflection on prayer, with the desire to invite you to live this essential dimension of our Piarist life with greater intensity: To be people of prayer. I would like to focus especially on the example and teachings of Calasanz on this precious and exciting dimension of our vocation: the spiritual life.

I would like to base my reflections on the collect that we always say when we celebrate the Solemnity of Calasanz. It reads as follows: *“Lord, You blessed St. Joseph Calasanz with such charity and patience that he dedicated himself tirelessly to the formation of Christian youth. As we honor this teacher of wisdom may we follow his example in working for truth.”*

If you noticed, in the prayer we say “tirelessly” To devote tirelessly to the education of children. How can we do that “tirelessly”? I think there is no doubt about it: only from his deep experience with God. This is the only way to carry out such a challenging vocation “tirelessly”, day after day. Only through prayer can we understand Calasanz’ life. Only through prayer can we understand the foundation of the Pious Schools. Only through prayer can we continue to build the Pious Schools.

Likewise, only through prayer can we understand what our Piarist Constitutions say about St. Joseph of Calasanz: “Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he dedicated himself totally to the Christian education of children” (C1). Here is what we say about him. And we say this in the same paragraph in which

we speak of the Pious Schools as “the work of God and the result of the daring and ever-enduring patience of St. Joseph Calasanz”

Suffice it to look at the painting by Goya depicting the “last communion of St. Joseph Calasanz with the children” and ask ourselves what we see in this painting. How is it possible to live as he did? How is it possible to remain among children at his age? There is only one answer to this...

The Piarists understood this very well. Perhaps that is why they placed a plaque with a precious inscription above the door of Calasanz’s room, which those of us who have the privilege of praying in Calasanz’s chapel can meditate on every day. This is the text of this inspiring plaque: *Cubiculum diuturno per XXXVI annos incolatu Iosephi Calasancii ieiuniis vigiliis chameuniis frequente coelitum apparitione et signis demum ac beata morte honestatum altari condito dedicatum venerabundus ingredi. This is the translation: Enter the room of St. Joseph Calasanz, were fasted for thirty-six years, kept vigil, had a frequent apparition from heaven and finally experienced his holy death, and venerate the altar dedicated to him.*

It is impressive to think of the life of Calasanz in San Pantaleo. For thirty-six years he fought in this small room to build the Pious Schools! It is nice to see what the Piarists who wrote the commemorative plaque emphasize: Fasting, vigilance, frequent celestial apparitions and a holy death. Written in the language of his time, it says of Calasanz *that during these thirty-six years, in which he was in the deep and constant presence of God and had much time to pray, he was profoundly faithful until he gave his soul to God as a saint.* This can only be said of a man who led a deep life of prayer. We thank God!

1-We will try to capture **some of the keys from which our Founder drew his spiritual experience** and which we can live as teachings and pointers for the way. I will divide them into three sections: Calasanz also learned to pray; Calasanz’s contributions to living prayer; and finally, listening to the Holy Spirit.

a) Calasanz also **learned** to pray.

When we see Calasanz, we are impressed by his faith and his authenticity of life. And sometimes we forget that he too was a child, that he too had his youthful struggles, that he too had to learn to pray. Surely his family experience told him about God and taught him to pray. For this reason, it is also good if we ask ourselves about our faith history and our way of learning and living prayer. It helps us to give a name to what we have experienced and learned and also to what we need.

In the process of his life, he was able to absorb various spiritual contributions from the Church of his time. He was influenced by the Franciscan, Teresian and Carmelite experience and the various currents of spiritual renewal of that time. He was a man of search, with a spiritual depth that he knew how to maintain throughout his life. And that is another key from which we can learn.

It is very interesting to see how Calasanz combines his experience of prayer and his closeness to the poor. His spiritual experience connects his life (prayer and mission). That is why he was able to do what he did and that is why we are here, four centuries later, drinking from the spring that he began. Courage to learn! It’s never too late, it’s always a good time.

b) Some **advices and contributions** of Calasanz to living prayer.

The best contribution and the best advice is, of course, his own life, his daily witness, his example of holiness. It is enough for us to approach his life to understand how God passed through him and how much he cared about his experience of faith. But we can also approach his writings. I will give you just a few simple points that I think are particularly important among the many things that can be emphasized. I will content myself with telling you something of what he wrote in the Constitutions of the Order and some details from his letters, because I know that we are well aware of all this. But it is good to remember it.

Calasanz makes an impressive statement in his Constitutions: *“Without the cultivation of prayer,*

every religious family is in the brink of relaxation and destruction.”¹ This is their starting point. For Calasanz, the Pious Schools are only possible if the Pious Schools pray, if they grow and take care of their vocation to be a “praying body”, because – as he affirms in his letters – *a life without prayer is like a body without a soul*².

The words that Calasanz uses to explain the importance of prayer to the Piarists are impressive. I quote some of them, all contained in the same paragraph (CC44). It is good to read: “Cultivation, impeccable care, never to break, deep silence and stillness of body and mind, effort, Christ.” He wants to explain how his Piarists should value and live prayer.

What Calasanz makes clear is that prayer should be frequent during the day and especially careful in fundamental moments such as the beginning and end of the day or the celebration of the Eucharist. But he very much insists on praying in everyday life and finding a personal way to do it. It is very nice to hear him say that *we can and must bring Martha and Mary together in our person*³.

c) Listening to the **Holy Spirit**.

But if there is one thing that particularly characterizes Calasanz’s vision of prayer, it is his call to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

In one of his oldest letters, sent to the House of Narni in 1622, Calasanz writes: *“The voice of God is the voice of the Spirit that comes and goes, touches the heart and passes away; therefore, it is very important to be always vigilant so that it does not come unexpectedly and pass away without fruit.”*⁴

Calasanz explains how this must be done: First, we must *silence other voices* that lead us astray in order to hear the voice of God; we must be *attentive, vigilant and sensitive* to our inner process,

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1.- St. Joseph Calasanz. Constitutions of the Pauline Congregation. n.44

2.- St. Joseph Calasanz. Opera Omnia, vol III, EP1085

3.- St. Joseph Calasanz. Opera Omnia, vol V, EP2475

4.- St. Joseph Calasanz. Opera Omnia, vol I, EP131

because *only in this way can the voice of God touch our heart. And so it will bear fruit*. And we already know what fruits Calasanz expects from his educators: Humility, the ability to humble themselves in service to the children, mercy and kindness of heart, and the invitation to live gratefully in the presence of the Lord.

2 - A Piarist and an educator who prays can become the Piarist and the educator that Calasanz dreamed of for the children to whom he gave his life.

One of the best contributions we as Piarist educators can offer to children and youth is the witness of spiritual consistency. I offer three simple ways that can help with this:

a) To pray **for** our students.

Do you want to be a better Piarist educator? Pray for your students. Only then will you be able to be the teacher your students need. Pray for them, name by name, face by face. Is there anything better you can do for them than to put their lives in God’s hands every day? Do you know what the fruit of this prayer is? It is beautiful. This prayer makes you the educator they need, because your heart will be close to each one of them.

An example so that we understand it better. We pray for vocations. And why? God, our Lord, already knows that we need vocations, that children need Piarist vocations. But by praying for them, my soul is gradually transformed and helps me to give the best of myself in the vocation ministry. Prayer brings me closer to the challenge I am praying for. Well, the same thing happens with praying for our students. Do it often if you want to become a new Calasanz.

b) **Teach your students to pray.**

This is another exciting challenge: teaching children and young people to pray. Calasanz dedicated his whole life to this task. But we can only do this if we are people of prayer, if we become students who need to know the things of God.

Let us not forget this. When the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray, Jesus did so by praying with them the prayer with which he

prayed to his Father. This teaching of Jesus is the secret of all secrets concerning the learning of prayer and the spiritual life.

c) Praying **with** our students.

A school where teachers and students pray together becomes a school capable of changing the lives of all. This is the secret of Continuous Prayer. There is nothing more powerful for cultivating the teacher's vocation than praying with the children, following their gazes and prayers attentively. And there is nothing more beautiful for the faith of a child than to hear the prayer of his teacher. Do you know why? Because no one can fool God. If you want to get to know a child or a young person, listen to what he says when he prays. That is his soul.

3 - I will conclude. On many occasions, when we talk about prayer, or when we read about it, or when we analyze our lives, an experience can arise in us that is not easy: "We do not know how to pray". We could say it like St. Paul: "*We do not know how to pray as we ought.*"⁵ This is the experi-

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5.- Rom 8, 26

ence of the weakness and smallness of our experience of faith. In matters of prayer, we know we are poor, and that is good for our experience of prayer. But the key is not just to know it, but to experience it. When we perceive ourselves as poor and small, we are closer to the Lord's Prayer that day. At that moment, the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness and then we can say "Abba". The "Our Father" is a response to the love we have received. And we only experience it out of our need and smallness. Courage on the way!

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