



Our Holy Father

*Letter to our
brethren*
JUNE 2025

Dear Brothers,

This is the last Salutatio that I am writing as Father General of the Order, and I have thought of dedicating it, as it could not be otherwise, to Our Holy Father, St. Joseph Calasanz. For sixteen years I have had the undeserved honor – and challenge – of accompanying the Pious Schools, and I have always known that my task and my service to the Order have a clear model: Our Holy Founder. That is why I would like to dedicate this last fraternal letter to him and propose five aspects of Calasanz’s life that can help us to embody his vocation more authentically. I have chosen these: Priest, Educator, Religious, Founder and Saint. These are five facets of Calasanz that it is good for us to reflect on a little.

PRIEST. I would like to try – in all modesty - to approach our Founder’s thoughts on the priesthood through the letter he wrote to one of his Piarist sons. Letter 4.572, addressed to a young Piarist priest and written on July 30, 1648, is particularly close to my heart. In other words, Calasanz wrote this letter when he was already very old and about to die. It is a short letter, but extraordinary.

It reads as follows: “I thank Y. R. for the pious affection you show in your letter to me and to our Institute. May the Lord reward you with spiritual goods and give you the grace to recognize the priestly dignity and bestow upon you the humility and reverence that such a high office and sacrament deserve. And I greatly praise the promptness with which you serve the blessed God in our In-

stitute, where you are called by God himself, who blesses all and gives the fullness of his grace.”¹ I would like to pay special attention to three accents proposed by Calasanz that can help us understand his vision of the priesthood.

First, **the time at which it was written**. Calasanz knows that he is about to end his earthly pilgrimage and he knows that the Order has been reduced by papal mandate. But he is convinced of his dream, of his project and of God’s love for children and young people, especially the poorest. At this point in his life, Calasanz will not write a letter about unimportant topics. On the contrary, I see in this letter a small testimony from Calasanz about the Piarist priesthood.

Secondly, I find the proposal he makes to this young man so that he can live the priesthood **authentically**. He wants the Lord to give him the grace **to know** the priestly dignity (in Calasanz’s language this means: to experience). And he shows him the way: reverence and humility. These are two powerful indications: Reverence, that is, the “fear of God”, the experience that God is “always greater”, the profound experience of knowing oneself in his hands, small before the mystery of God; and humility (in Calasanz’s language, bending over, humiliation), to recognize one’s own limitations together with the mercy received from God, who grants him the undeserved gift of priesthood.

Thirdly, he wishes him “**the readiness to serve God in our Institute**”. The dedication to our Institute is the education of children and young people, especially the poor. Calasanz inextricably links the “service to God” with the “dedication to the education of the little ones” This is a wonderful testimony! Calasanz does not understand the Piarist ministry by separating the exercise of the priestly ministry from the education of the poor. On the contrary, the Piarist priest is a man who tries to live in the presence of God, whom he serves with reverence in the sacramental mysteries and to whom he condescends in contact with the little ones and the poor.

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1.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Opera Omnia, vol. VIII, p. 481

EDUCATOR. Calasanz made education a fourth vow that he proposed to all Piarists. It is important to find out why he did this. I believe that this decision has much to do with his spiritual reading of the Lord’s statement about children: “Whoever receives one of these, the least of these, in my name, receives me.”² This is the key to Calasanz’ pedagogical vocation, which the Founder proposes to all Piarist educators.

We can approach Calasanz’ vision of our irreplaceable ministry from different points of view. I would like to choose two for this fraternal letter because I believe that they are two essential keys that are presented to us today as a proposal and a challenge.

The first is “**humiliation**” It is a precious conviction of Calasanz that he expressed in one of his most famous letters. It reads as follows: “The shortest and easiest way to be raised to one’s own knowledge, and from it to the attributes of mercy, prudence, infinite patience and goodness of God, is to humble oneself to give light to children, and especially to those who are as if they were abandoned by all.”³ There are many Calasanzian underlines in this letter, of which I have only quoted one paragraph, but I would like to emphasize just one: to know how to be close to children and young people, at their level, in order to walk with them and thus be able to be the educator they need. This is the way of the Piarist.

The second reference I would like to emphasize is clear in Calasanz: the **poor**. Throughout our four hundred years of history, we have dedicated our mission to children and young people from very different backgrounds, but we have never ceased to have the poor as a reference. However, it is certain that the challenges of the poor continue to knock on our door and on our conscience as children of Calasanz and will continue to do so. We are facing a challenge that dares us even more.

The Piarist School must never forget that it was born above all for the poor and that it must work so that we all grow in one conviction: it is neces-

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2.- Mk 9, 37
3.- Saint Joseph Calasanz. Opera Omnia, vol III, p.235

sary to educate in order to create a different society and to promote a different way of understanding humanity, where fraternity reigns. The Piarist School was founded by a man who knew how to see children as God sees them. We educate in order to contribute to the construction of a more just and fraternal world, closer to the values of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ. This is why we strive to ensure that our educational project (integral, inclusive, gospel-based and open to all), embodied by identified and convinced institutions and individuals, grows and develops among the poor, including in the increasingly numerous marginalized areas of our diverse and intercultural societies. We are facing a path that we must continue to follow.

RELIGIOUS. There is a phrase by Calasanz that I have seen on the walls of several of our schools that I think expresses very well his experience as a religious and the keys that made him decide to work so hard – I would say fight – so that his Pious Schools could be shaped as religious Order. Calasanz says: “You have given nothing to Christ if you have not given him your whole heart.”⁴

Calasanz proposes to us a consecrated life that brings humble fullness, in which Christ is the center and in which we put all our efforts, desires, love and freedom to follow him. The religious knows that he is called to give everything, and he also knows that he is not able to do so, and therefore he understands his life as a humble and sincere attempt. I have always been impressed by the way the Second Vatican Council describes Consecrated Life: “There have always been men and women who have tried to follow Christ more freely and to imitate him more closely.”⁵ Consecrated Life is “an attempt to achieve something more”

I would like to give you three small suggestions that are particularly important today in this “attempt”: Passion, communion and novelty.

Our consecrated life needs **passion**. Passion for Christ, passion for the mission, passion for professional authenticity. Only out of passion can

4.- Saint Joseph Calasanz, Opera Omnia, vol X, p.394

5.- Vatican II, Decree “Perfectae Caritatis”, n.1

perseverance be understood as a possible horizon, and only out of passion can we live everyday life by walking the “path”. Only through passion can we live with increasing balance the different dimensions of our vocation, and only through passion can we live our whole life in the desire to accompany the vocation of those who arrive at the Pious Schools. Only through passion can the fear of prophethood be overcome and conformity resisted. Calasanz was passionate about education, about the poor, about prayer, about community. “With all his heart.”

Our **community life**. We do not gather in community because we are bound together by flesh and blood, nor for reasons of effectiveness in mission, even though it is obvious that community helps. We live in community because we are brothers called to share the same professional and charismatic experience. People of different ages, cultures, sensibilities and ways of thinking come together to walk the path of the vocation received. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary today to understand in a new way something that we have heard since the beginning of our vocational journey: Community life is both a gift and a task. We receive it as a gift and we build it day by day. Calasanz has already experienced that it is not an easy gift to embody.

I would like to express my third suggestion with the word “**newness**”. The central task of Consecrated Life is to remind the Church that what is really important is Christ. That is the mission: to bear witness to Christ. For this reason, consecrated life always has something counter-cultural, something risky, something new, even something uncomfortable. Calasanz knew very well how difficult it was for the Church to understand his project and his way of life. But he went ahead because he did not set his horizon on the search for a simple adaptation, but on fidelity to a charism that is by definition always greater than the institution. That is why, when the institution was in crisis, Calasanz’s response was the charism: “Keep working for the children, trust in God, stay united and don’t lose your joy.”⁶

FOUNDER. Calasanz is the founder of the Pious

6.- Saint Joseph Calasanz, Opera Omnia, vol. VIII, p. 273

Schools, but not only in the past tense, “the one who founded them”, but in the present tense, “the one who continues to found them”. From this perspective, I like to read the first point of our Constitutions, in which we define our religious family: “The Piarist religious family with a humbly grateful attitude, recognizes itself as the work of God and of the happy daring and tenacious patience of Saint Joseph Calasanz. For he under the breath of the Spirit, gave himself body and soul to the Christian education of children, especially the poor, in a spirit of learning and piety.”⁷

I believe that this is the key that shows that “the habit should only be given to people who have the soul of a founder”.⁸ And from this key we can understand well what the spirituality of building the Pious Schools means. The Piarists, all of us, must be the builders of Pious Schools, that is, founders. That is why it is important to decipher the keys to this first number of our Constitutions with a careful eye. In this way, we can feel called to continue building.

a) **Humble gratitude** to God our Father, who recognizes us as small and poor, but wants to use our lives for his kingdom.

b) **We are God’s work.** The life of the Order is not primarily based on our work, but on the favor of God. It is therefore necessary to pray unceasingly for the Pious Schools.

c) Calasanzian **boldness and patience.** The skillful combination of these two attitudes is the foundation of who we are and what we are called to do. The first without the second is fireworks; the second without the first is unnecessary answers.

d) **Open to the Spirit.** Let us never forget this statement by Calasanz: “The voice of God is the voice of the Spirit that comes and goes, touches the heart and passes away; one does not know where it comes from or when it blows; therefore, it is very important to be always vigilant so that it does not come unexpectedly and pass away with-

7.- Constitutions of the Order of the Pious Schools, n. 1

8.- Saint Joseph Calasanz, Opera Omnia, vol. VIII, p.39

⁹Saint Joseph Calasanz, Opera Omnia, vol. I, p.169. Letter November 23, 1622

out fruit.”⁹

e) **Surrender in body and soul.** There is only one way to be a Piarist: through and through, in fullness. Every day, every student, every job, every service, every Eucharist, every prayer. We are not called to a life of routine, but to a life of creation.

f) **Holistic education,** the compendium of all other ministries, an irreplaceable ministry.

g) **Especially the poor,** those who have fewer opportunities, those who are Calasanz’s favorites because they are God’s favorites.

h) **In a spirit of intelligence and piety.** That means trusting in God and doing things right. Let us remember the Founder: “If our work is carried out with due diligence, it is undoubted that the persistent requests for foundation will continue in numerous states, cities and towns, as it has proved to be until now .

SAINT. This is the fifth and final key from which I would like to approach Calasanz: his holiness. When we look at Calasanz in his life and in his work, we see the presence of God in him, we see a man who tried to live according to the will of God. And that is holiness, something to which we are all called: “It is the will of God that we be holy.”¹⁰

I remember Pope Francis telling us that “we are all called to be saints, living with love and giving our own witness in the occupations of each day, wherever everyone is”.¹¹ Perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can receive from Calasanz is to contemplate how he knew to live from the centrality of Jesus in his life, integrating in a precious way the care of the life of prayer, the effort to build a community, the generous dedication – without rest – to children, the love for the Order, the care of daily life, his own personal process, his love for the Church... Calasanz is undoubtedly a fine example of how it is possible to live life from a **passionate vocational balance.**

9.- Saint Joseph Calasanz, Constitutions of Pauline Congregation, 175

10.- II Tes 4, 3

11.- Francis, “Gaudete et exultate”, n. 14, March 19, 2018

The people of God have a keen sense of recognizing in some people the testimony that God alone is enough. The canonized saints are precious aids that the Church gives us to discover clues that bring us closer to God in our daily lives. But holiness is a horizon for all and a gift for all. So when we pray in memory of Calasanz, we say this: “Lord our God, who endowed St. Joseph Calasanz with love and patience so that he could work tirelessly for the human formation of children, grant us, we pray, that we may imitate him whom we venerate as a teacher of wisdom in his service to the truth.” Calasanz is our inspiration, and therefore we ask God to give us the gift of imitating him so that we can be a new Calasanz in all humility.

With this letter I conclude my service to the Order as Father General. I thank you all and we will continue on the path with you all.

Receive my best fraternal regards.

Fr Pedro Aguado
Father General

Thank you, Fr Pedro,

for all these years of shared reflections and insights, which have brought comfort and guidance along the journey to so many communities, religious and lay people who share Calasanz's dream.

