

Circular letter for Advent 2013

Rome, December 1, 2013
1st Sunday of Advent

Subject: Need of esteem

Man needs more to be esteemed than to be loved, or rather, first esteemed, then loved, because true esteem may be based only on true love (Fr. Justin, Opera Omnia, VII, 19).

Dear brothers,

May God the Holy Spirit unite us always more with the Son to the Father!

We are about to begin a new liturgical year during the Jubilee year for the centenary of the priestly ordination of our Blessed Founder and of the first experience of the Vocationary.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you a vital issue for those who responded to the divine call and began to follow Christ poor, chaste and obedient, living in communities, by vocation and grace. It is the theme of the esteem, so dear to fr. Justin, so much reiterated by Pope Francis and much needed to strengthen, energize and sanctify our communities.

I do not want to pose as teacher since as I am writing this circular, but simply want to share the anxieties of a father, as I regard myself during this time when the Lord has entrusted to me the task of leading the congregation. A father who sees his own family oppressed by a disease who is difficult to eradicate.

What does “esteem” means?

Esteem is a verb that indicates the value we give to something. We esteem the value of a land, an apartment, but we esteem the value of a person.

In the material world, it has a price, a cost well defined; in the supernatural world it has no money, no cost, as it is the result of the essence of our nature.

In reference to persons, esteem is defined as the ability to have a good opinion of someone and so the topic is of our utmost interest, since all around us is not just anyone, but many brothers created, elected, called from eternity to a special vocation.

Man is God's dwelling place, the image of God and therefore is worthy of honor and esteem. Man without esteem is nothing. Without self-esteem man cannot live. Without esteem for the others, man is alone. Without feeling valued, loved by God, man is not complete.

We are infinitely valued by God

The man is the object of the love of God; he is his obsession from the moment he became lost because of sin: Adam, where are you? (Gen 3:9). We are the constant thought of God.

How beautiful my dear brethren to think that we were loved, desired, wanted and called by God. We are not born by chance, but before we were in existence, God already dreamed of a plan of love for us. For fr. Justin the fact that we have been called by God is, in itself, already a great proof of esteem: *“I recognize in my vocation an adorable proof, predilection, a proof of an*

ineffable esteem that the Lord has for me, among the possible ones, among the living ones, among the Christians” (Opera Omnia, II , 232).

In me and in you God has poured all his love and esteem. We are the subject of predilection, on the part of God and that is why we should love each other more, to grow in the esteem of ourselves, consider ourselves a treasure of inestimable value. We are the temple of God, let us never forget it. We must learn “*to recognize and relate our own being, body and soul as temples of the Holy Trinity, and as such to respect it*” (Opera Omnia, I, 76) .

The esteem in Fr. Justin

Fr. Justin defines man as *the goal to which eminently ends and to which is ordered all creation* (Opera Omnia, III, 37) and then he says that *he is the small living world, compendium and happy crown of all the other creatures* (ibid).

In fr. Justin’s writings, the word esteem has a large use and recurrence (from the esteem for the neighbor to the esteem of the created things, to the esteem for sacred things, etc...).

His works are imbued with this term.

I have often wondered why the Blessed Justin makes extensive use of this term in his writings.

I found the answer in what is just the starting point of the Justinian asceticism, the famous text of the Book of Genesis, which has become the foundation of our spirituality: *Let us make man in our image and likeness”* (Gen 1:26), let us create this wonderful, special, unique creature, as a loving relationship because we are a loving relationship.

For fr. Justin, man is the end of a relationship of love with the Most Holy Trinity. The reason for his existence is based on this relationship: *No one else can be in this relationship, since I am unique, alone in my genre* (I am the vine and you are the branches , 1969, p. 120).

The starting point of the Justinian asceticism is grounded in Holy Scripture; in fact, to the people who are going to make their return to Jerusalem, God remembers: “*You are precious in my eyes, because you are worthy of esteem and I love you*” (Is 43.4).

The esteem for the neighbor

The man is basically good because it comes from the hands of God; he is and always remains at the image and likeness of the Triune God. Since he is the image and likeness of God is always entitled to our respect and our affection, as fr. Justin reminds us: *Our Lord gave us his image and likeness alive and real, in which he wants to find our esteem, honor for our dear neighbor* (Opera Omnia, II , 207) .

We are called to love and serve God in our neighbor. This is required by our baptism, our religious consecration and our priesthood. “*Who is my neighbor?*” asked a lawyer to Jesus (Lk 10,29).

Your neighbor is not far from you, my dear brother. He is right there next to you, is the brother of the community with whom you eat, drink, and pray every day and maybe you do not know anything about him. Your neighbor is just the one closest to you.

He is not your family sympathizer who invites you to dinner, it is not the group of parishioners with whom you share your pastoral work. Your neighbor is, first of all, the confrere of your community, maybe the one with which you do not want to talk, the one that irritates you, mocks you; the one that will not listen to you. Your neighbor is your brother with whom you should share your joys and your sorrows, your successes and your apostolic failures.

Love of neighbor is a frequent thought in the Justinian spirituality. Never should fail in us the love and esteem of others, whatever he may be. No error, no fault of my neighbor can and should prevent me to have esteem and love for him in the Lord God, both internally and externally (Opera Omnia, II , 207) .

The esteem among us, Vocationist religious

It has become proverbial among some vocationist religious, the fact that since they think very highly of themselves, while they have the ability to drive a Ferrari, the congregation has given them only an old and small car. Yes! Moving the example at the level of esteem, I think I do not exaggerate by saying that nonetheless the rich spiritual heritage left by blessed Fr. Justin we still advance as some turtles, while we should have wings to fly indefinitely. One of the reasons, in my honest opinion, it is precisely the lack of esteem for one another, for the congregation and for everything related to a lifestyle freely willed and embraced.

A religious who does not have self-esteem, how will ever help a soul to rise to God?

A religious who has no esteem for his brothers will never help a young person in religious discernment.

A religious who does not believe that God has respect for him and he does not believe to be loved by Him, how can inflame of love the heart of a soul?

A religious who has no esteem of his congregation how will persevere in it?

The relationship with oneself, with God and with others are the foundation of our lives.

Our life is continuously made of those relationships and among them there must be harmony otherwise, we will end up in the chaos.

The esteem for the Congregation

I cannot stress enough the importance of the esteem and love for our Congregation that is our mother, that has welcomed us as we were, without asking anything in return. She has nourished us with immeasurable love, as Mary has accompanied Jesus, and finally has given birth to us in the Holy Mother Church as consecrated people in religious life and priesthood.

It also deserves our respect and our love.

Fr. Justin gave his life for this work of sanctification; he gave all of himself to the congregation by not allowing anyone or anything to stop the implementation of the project he had received from God. He suffered without complaint, since then believing in me and in you as his future children. Neither the tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword (cf. Rom 8:35) have separated him from the love for Christ and for the work entrusted to him. In all these things he has been more than conquerors through Him in whom he placed his trust (cf. Rom 8:37).

In Volume 9 of the Opera Omnia "*Journey toward spousal union*" fr. Justin wrote:

"If every age has need of saints, and if the need of the world are the saints, so our congregation needs that every member be a great saint; because he has to give saints in every field of apostolate, must make holy all the world, from the present onwards until the end and beyond" (p. 288) .

So, dear brother, how much confidence, you and I have in this work?

To what extent are we willing to fight for it? Up to what point we consider the congregation as our mother? To what extent do we love her? You and me, what are we doing so that it can grow more and more in grace and holiness?

How much do we esteem this congregation inspired by the Holy Spirit and entrusted to a man whom the Church has already recognized his heroic virtues? Fr. Justin wrote for us that the esteem will power perpetually the supernatural love for our Congregation (Opera Omnia, IX, 287), because in it God has reserved for us the greatest good that we can and want to receive: *“It is very good that you will grow in the esteem and love of the Congregation, which is our mother, the summit and everything, because in it the Lord has decided to celebrate the meeting and his divine mission with our soul (Opera Omnia, XIV, 328).*

Imagine how many fruits of holiness and how much joy will go to the heart of the founder if our beloved Congregation was recognized especially for the continuous and reciprocal esteem among his members!

Fr. Justin has left us a very rich spirituality, our charism in the Church will never end, many young people are knocking at our doors, the people of God look for our guidance, our purpose is the way of life of every baptized person, so why it is such a hard walk?

Yes, dear brothers, I think we need so much of this esteem.

God has called us to such a high vocation: the indwelling presence of the Holy Trinity!

Not only is the divine Trinity, not only the heavenly court, but each of us, joining the Creator, becomes the subject of this famous *“Let us make man”*; with our cooperation we can and must become a better and more *“image and likeness”* of God the creator. What a great job we have to do, my dear children, we develop more and more into the image and likeness of God to become even *“portrait of the Lord”*.

A portrait often clouded because of our sins, a portrait sad with his dark colors instead of being alive since it was made with the colors of the rainbow.

In *“Faciamus Hominem”* (part 1), at the beginning of the great ascension to the divine union, fr. Justin poses a legitimate question, asking the Lord to make him understand what he is and how he should correspond to become an increasingly perfect image and likeness of Him.

This is a fair question that our dear founder posed to the Lord: *“O Lord, show me who I am and who I have to become according your thought and desire. Show me what my ideal in your mind and in your heart in the need of your love. With your grace I want to make you happy and please you”* (p. 47).

Fr. Justin will understand how to accomplish this, by letting the Trinity love and indwell in him, always leaving open the doors of his heart to a life free from all corruption.

His ideal will allow him to have always fixed before him the goal to achieve: becoming soul spouse, getting to the mystical marriage with the groom, so much loved and searched for in his life.

To me and to you, today, is this ideal missing?

Am I really wishing for myself and for the souls entrusted to me this goal?

From this answer depends the truth of our vocation, our calling in this religious congregation.

What is clipping the wings of our congregation and does not allow her to fly high?

Some attitudes that show the lack of esteem in our Religious Family

Inability to forgive.

Often it is sad to hear brethren who still bear grudges after long time. Consecrated ministers of the Word, dispensers of mercy who still have a bleeding and poisonous heart against a superior, a fellow student or a priest.

It is terrible, and all of this is frightening, it blocks the circulation of lymph in our congregation, it is a true tumor that we need to root out. You cannot live the religious life with this lack of love, forgiveness and respect among us. We are consecrated to God, we should be holy people, chosen people (cf. Ex 22,30), an example for the people of God.

Anything, any divine grace comes through forgiveness, forgiveness that you have to ask, if you've done wrong, you have to give forgiveness to those who have behaved badly towards you. Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling; Jesus says to forgive all, even those who do not deserve it, those who think they do not need it and those who do not ask.

Who is the one who cannot forgive, the one who feeds on hatred and so much anger towards God and his creatures, if not Satan, the great enemy of God. A well-known spiritual father said to his brothers that the lack of forgiveness allows evil spirits to act in us in an undisturbed way, unleashing hell in the human heart, and I would add, that it is even more terrible if this heart had been consecrated solely to the love of God and neighbor as happens with some of us priests and religious. Among the sins that gives more souls to hell, there is certainly the lack of forgiveness.

Often we are faced with brothers with a "*hard shell*", that do let people love them easily. What to do in these cases?

It is not productive to fall into judgment. Each one is the product of what he has experienced, of the wounds received and betrayal suffered. We should know the reasons for this hardening, but only God knows the human heart (cf. Jer 17,9-10). Fr. Justin in this regard gives us two suggestions that I think of great efficiency.

The first concerns the brother wounded by sin, but that must turn to God who continues to esteem him: *only a broken heart certainly goes to his God.*

A broken heart wants, but cannot live anymore; feeling to die, he goes, as brought in the wake of his weeping, at the feet of him who alone is the Lord of life, and alone is the Lord of compassion and respect and only considers each pain of his creature" (Opera Omnia, VI, 273).

The second regards all of us: to pray for that brother! The hardness of that brother becomes for me the matter of sacrifice and prayer: "*Everyone must know that our Lord did allow us to be aware of the error and guilt of our brother, so that if he may offer it to God, and through prayer, the sacrifice of Jesus and his might be cancelled"* (Opera Omnia, I, 221).

Wake up brothers! The end that is set before us is greater than pettiness and disagreements between us. Let us purify our memory and our hearts.

Fr. Justin continually insisted on the necessity of forgiveness. "May never happen that we may not have somebody to forgive, otherwise how could we then say ... forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors? We should all be based on the pure mercy of God! We know that it is all based on God's mercy! It is also true that the Lord has established the correspondence between his forgiveness and ours, and this precisely because we could find, in our own forgiveness, a sign of safety and surety of God's forgiveness. If we did not have to forgive others, we could fall into very cruel doubt that perhaps the Lord had not forgiven us as well!

Therefore, it is necessary to exercise and offer forgiveness to anyone who made us suffer, superiors, confreres and others, those who live with us and not, regarding the point of honor, of the pocket ... everything! For each offense: ... forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. For anyone who might have cheated us, betrayed us, criticized us, said things that are true or false, or even simply fruit of our imaginations that made us suffer equally. Only the exercise of forgiveness attracts a great complacency upon us by God.

Fr. Justin then continues on the necessity of esteem applied to every creature:

"Like all the abyssal depths of the sea, and all the most high summits of the mountains do not remove the roundness of the Earth, because its size is such that it surpasses them by far, so all the blame and the errors of our neighbor cannot come to take away the esteem and the friendliness, in the supernatural world, because he is greater than its own evil " (Opera Omnia, I, 220).

Gossip

I notice that in our community we fail to share, to pay attention to each other. There is a certain immaturity and sluggishness in fraternal correction. However, there is plenty of gossip, chatter, judgment, divisions, parties, jealousy, envy, prejudice, labels that will last a lifetime. St. Paul would call all of these works of the flesh.

How many times the Liturgy of the Word gives us food for thought on these issues before mentioned ... and we from our pulpits stand as masters of spirituality.

We remove the speck from the eyes constantly of our brothers, probably from the eyes of these little ones mentioned by Jesus and then live with a beam embedded in our eyes. (cf. Mt 7: 3-5).

It seems that gossiping is a rash of internal dissatisfaction perhaps to compensate. Taking the time to gossip about others can mean a shift away from ourselves, from our passions, our weaknesses, as if the esteem of one's own person was even insignificant. In fact, the difficulty to talk about themselves and their world is often a poor indicator of confidence in their abilities and hides the internal frustrations. It may seem like a lack of self-esteem, as you do not try to create a bond of friendship with topics of conversation aimed at building positive.

A study of sociology has stressed the sociological aspect of gossiping, as if speaking ill for some aspects can also be a fun, or could favor the complicity between two or more people and create a form of gambling, so to speak in order to know greater depth. Seen from this point of view, paradoxically speak ill can promote social integration, contributing to the formation of bonds of friendship. But the same study ended by saying that: ... *underneath it all, in those who use the medium of gossip, there's something wrong.*

It is necessary to seek, instead of cultivating our own interests, and devote our time to our business, to find a point of reference within ourselves and not outside of us. Prior to "speak ill", we must stop and think about why you are wishing, as an accomplice, a third person that is chosen as a receiver of our weaknesses.

Pope Francis, who a few months ago raised his voice to warn us of the danger of a new world war, has not lost the opportunity to denounce another war made without the use of conventional weapons, that is a war done with our tongues that equally kills, destroys, divides. The Pope has also identified the human space where lurk the small daily wars: the worm of envy. He was referring to the alleged devotees in the synagogue of Nazareth, who listen to the authoritative prophecy of the Son of the carpenter, and pass from the praise of Jesus to the plot to kill him.

And the worst is that this scene is set in a synagogue, that extends today to the environments formed by men and women, who by vocation and mission are to be peacemakers.

"This happens every day - said the Pope - in our hearts, in our communities," whenever you welcome a newly arrived talking well about him at first and then less and less until you arrive to gossip, so much so, almost to skin him". A religious who, in a community, speaks against his brother ends up "wanting to kill him".

We are accustomed to chat, to gossip", and often transform our communities and even our family in a "hell", where it is expressed this form of crime that leads to "kill the brother and sister with her tongue.

I wonder how we can go to pray, celebrate Mass, give a homily, advise, guide others, when we carry on our conscience so many corpses killed?

Where the Lord is, there is no envy, there is no crime, and there is no jealousy. There is a fellowship. Let us ask the Lord never to kill our neighbor with our tongues and to be with him, as we all will be in heaven. "

The Pope, reiterating the same topic in a public meeting, has also shown how not to use the tongue to insult and kill. I would suggest bending our knees before the Blessed Sacrament as well, which is not only a school of holiness but also an exercise of silence and elevation.

The frenzy of speculation

In our communities there is a swollen wave of speculation, especially in some religious who live practically geared toward of gossip, rumors and superficiality. They enjoy to gather and transmit baseless news just to show off and draw attention to themselves. In this festival of rumors they speculate on everyone and everything. Many times they go around suppositories decisions that are not even in the mind of the Superior General, especially regarding transfers, appointments, and duties. When we are invited to review certain attitudes not worthy of a religious instead of taking the warning as a call to conversion and holiness, we seek to discover in the other sins always bigger than ours, so we justify ourselves that we are good. They speculates how the other superiors acted in the past and how they act on the present, on how to deal with the brothers, why you cannot get what you want, etc... We are becoming more "Speculationists" than "Vocationists".

They even speculate on who writes the Superior General's circular letters, as if the lack of intellectuality and science are not enough to express my ignorance and my limits. The worst is that they act so simply to discredit the things that are said and continue to act as it is convenient to them. Particularly I have no difficulty to write or copy treaties of spirituality or high theology on the consecrated life, but I do not think that the Congregation has need of such teachings. If at the end of my term as Superior General I will be able to tell you and me how is our religious family and propose to me and to you the ways to strengthen what good and holy you can do, I will be the happiest and most accomplished Vocationist in the world.

So much noise, poor communication.

Another plague that has infected our communities is the removal of what was supposed to be a natural privacy between what the priests talk about among themselves and what to talk in the presence of aspirants, postulants, novices and temporary professed. It would be naive of me to think that today we do not know everything in record time, but another thing is to trivialize the topics, despise the good manners, diminish the importance of hierarchy, level the positions, advertise our faults, lack of selecting the topics, do not differentiate among the different audience

we talk to. We look so naïve not to perceive an evil inclination on the part of so many confreres with regard to talk about the negative aspects of the congregation. Do you realize that a good portion of the young people who come among us already know the curriculum vitae of almost all priests? Do you realize that most live in the trenches of the self defense rather than the availability of listening? How come so many of them already walk through the doors of our communities already knowing who to avoid and who to count on?

We have a huge lack of communication and a deluge of noise. Among our religious communication is almost zero, especially when it comes to correction, incentive, and clarification. Usually situations that could be solved with a patient dialogue and a spirit of confidence and even failure are camouflaged and then routed to the major superiors to be dealt with as if they were trash containers. In the meantime spare no prejudice, censorship, contempt and condemnation to those who are our brothers, and that in matters of sins perhaps the weight on the scale will be heavier for me than for him. Such attitudes are not new, of course, but that does not do justice to no one, have been one of the biggest pains caused to the heart of the Founder: "I learned with great regret of mortal sins committed by you against charity. My dear, tell a friend or whomever "He did mortal sins" and tell especially to those who do not know, and make known a secret thing, it is a grave sin and you did it! May Jesus forgive you and when he will have given his forgiven then I will do too, mortally offended as well, because you have hurt in my heart the good esteem of my religious, from the youngest student to the oldest priest (Opera Omnia, XV, 338).

Yes! We talk very little talk with the brothers, but we talk a lot about them. Then we find the refectories of certain communities where it seems that the meals and indigestion go well together to the point that one cannot wait to retire in the room after the meal. The places and moments that, by nature of religious life, had to be the most beautiful and full of meaning have become the terror of the community. It may be also that some do not even realize or even wish this, being now accustomed to superficiality and nonsense. Let us propose conversations that are intelligent, uplifting, mutual and digestive. We have a precious treasure to be explored and deepened . Just wish .

The solution ? Love and cherish forever!

Dear brother I would like to remind you of one thing. One day we will be judged not only by virtue of the multitude of good works in this life that we have been able to achieve, but we will be judged on what kind of love we were able to give to our brothers and sisters.

The Lord has threatened a kind of judgment without mercy, if we do not live as merciful: "*Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom, because judgment without mercy against those who will not have had mercy. Mercy has always been the better of the judgment*" (Jas 2:12-13).

Our love for the other is manifested in serving him and see him in action, act and live the Most Holy Trinity.

We must never despair of the most perfect conversion of every sinner, the most perfect of all warm fervors, the most perfect sanctification of all just ones: love believes all things, hopes all things (Opera Omnia, I, 221-222).

What should we do? you may ask me.

First, kneel before the Lord and recognize that we are poor and small in front of him and then ask him the gift of true sweetness.

The real sweetness and the true esteem encourage and promote the development of the soul towards ever-higher goals, towards an ever more intimate and perfect union with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

“The real sweetness is the one that surrounds the interior of every soul in high supernatural esteem, constant and full pardon of all guilt and forgiveness, compassion, sympathy and repair of all moral and material misery, but most believe that is capable of always greater things for the Lord” (Opera Omnia, I, 332).

If our brothers of the Congregation do not encourage each other, do not console each other, do not help each other to rise up again, etc... Then we need to go back to formation, we need to return to the houses of formation to learn from the Lord what it means *“I desire mercy and not sacrifice”* (cf. Mt 9:13).

That would have happened to that sinful woman who entered the house of the pharisee if Jesus had judged, ignored, withdraw his esteem because of her past, marked by mistakes and falls?

Jesus was not stopped by the prejudice of the people at the banquet, but he loved her as she was, and because of this love that woman's life has been transformed.

It is love that heals, nothing but love can heal our wounded poor hearts. But if we are afraid of each other because someone, one day, had warned us about this brother's problems, we will become like judges ready to label the other, that for me and for everyone who will always be “the other” and never “my brother”.

Love heals, my brothers, and I do not speak the simple love of the world, but that love which only God can pour out in our hearts, a love capable of giving the life, like Jesus did, for which one day we left everything.

Are we unable to love in a supernatural way? Why not ask God for this love. Do we think we are so great and able to make it on our own?

When God will ask us to account for our brother we cannot respond like Cain: *“I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?”* (Gen 4:9).

Yes! You and I are the keepers of our brothers. None of us should ever say, *“I am alone”* because everyone has the task of bringing his brother in his heart: *one in the heart of the other, the one on the arms of the other...* (Devotional, p. 840) .

In the image of our father founder presented for his beatification, Father Justin is depicted with a finger pointing at the Vocationary, in the original idea, but according to me, that finger is pointing to the sky ... and it is a beautiful image. This gesture is so important for us. It reminds us that he has always wanted perfection of his children and that image is to show us the peak to climb the summit of the mount of the Ascension.

Fr. Justin wanted that each of his children would struggling to remove from him any form of spiritual weakness. He had a great passion for people and a burning desire to see a flood of saints and among these we have to be there, me and you, dear brother, which is impossible unless we learn to love and respect each other.

Let us learn from him that was able to make his own the style of Christ's love. In the footsteps of the Master, with his love, he could conquer every soul he met immersing it in the infinite love of the Triune God.

Fr. Justin had full knowledge that God loves man also in guilt, so did not judge the sinner, but enveloped him in esteem and love so that he could redeem himself.

In the gospel of John, chapter 13, Jesus leaves his testament: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this, all men shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

May the Lord forgive me if I dare to make a replacement of the word “Love” with the word “esteem”, but I think that these two terms are closely related to each other and express the same reality because there can be no love without respect, nor esteem without love.

I give you a new commandment, that you esteem one another, as I have esteemed you, so you also esteem one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have esteem for one another.

If do not admire my brother is because do not love him enough and if you do not love him enough I can never esteem it! Here is the cancer of our religious family: If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand (Mk 3:24). Here is the real suffering of our congregation: the lack of esteem, love, a sense of God's Family.

Conclusion

Dear brothers do not take me for a pessimist because I am not at all. It is the desire to see more saints that prompts me to remind you and me the duty of sincere conversion. Do not even think to joke that I only see the negative in our large, beautiful, and elected Congregation. There is no reprimand extended to you that is not addressed prior to myself, as there is no allegation of sin denounced that I do not see myself involved.

God knows how much joy I feel with the brothers who live with natural daily fidelity of their priesthood and their consecration in the parishes, missions and Vocationaries, because in the end this is the holiness that the Lord gives us and expect that we live in full.

The Lord knows how I am moved to tears when I think of our Vocationist sisters who have literally consumed their lives for vocations, in the shadows and in faithfulness, in the sanctity of life and in that highest level of charity, that the Spirit has been able to keep alive even when it has failed our spiritual assistance, which is the minimum that we need to assure them. I am proud of you and so proud of the men who live as Vocationist, researching, cultivating and educating our young people. You cannot imagine my gratitude and my respect for the brothers and sisters that are making deserts bloom again with their tireless and relentless evangelizing ministry, bringing hundreds of people to discover or rediscover the freshness of the Gospel and the beauty of being church.

I feel immense gratitude to the brothers that are redeeming lives freeing them from the hell of the drug, many adolescents and young adults who seemed to despise forever the “immense gift of life”. I enjoy every day in thinking about those brothers of yesterday and today which gave birth to the Congregation on the four continents, ensuring that our blessed founder and his work would produce vocations, hundreds of thousands of devotees and the esteem, toward the Congregation, of many dioceses with their bishops. I am more than sure that the congregation enjoys a true esteem in many parts of the world where we are present and certainly this is because there are still brothers who live with joy, consistency and faithfulness to their vocation.

I pray for them daily, but also for those who still finds it hard to esteem or for those who live as if they were not held in esteem by no one, that soon may discover that for us this is not an option but a necessity to survive. Here is what Fr. Justin assures to you and me: It is not true that you do not have a friend. Many, many souls love and respect you more than any other person in the world. And this in the present and in the future (Opera Omnia, X , 143).

I will leave you with the words of our blessed founder who wants to be an wish for me and for you for a future of new zeal and boundless love for ourselves, our brothers and the entire congregation:

“Our Congregation, represents a major human cooperation in the divine work of universal sanctification in time and universal glorification of the elect in eternity, who will serve you well in heaven. Our faithfulness and perseverance in it must correspond to eternity and immutability of the sanctifying will of God in it; this will we worship, we carry out, and with this will work and we will triumph in God” (Opera Omnia, IX, p. 288, n. 622).

The Lord bless us always!

Fr. Antonio Rafael do Nascimento, sdv
Superior General