

Rome  
November 1, 2013  
Solemnity of All Saints

### **Personal and community responsibility**

Dear brother ,

may God the Holy Spirit unite us always more with the Son to the Father.

*I would like to offer you, in every act and state and in every atom of my time and every creature, a heart of love, as the hearts of paradise, as the immaculate heart of Mary and the adorable heart of Jesus (Devotional – 2012 Italian edition p. 900).*

I had to change to Advent the topic I wanted to write you about in the circular for the Solemnity of All Saints, because now I feel the need to insist on fraternal life, taking inspiration from the first ordinance of the XIV General Chapter, who asks to *"educate the mentality of personal and community responsibility to share the fruits of the apostolate and of any income , deposited into the joint account . For this reason the family council , every religious present its monthly note and the fruit of his work ..."*

In my view, I do not think that a General Chapter is celebrated only to fulfill a constitutional obligation to elect the Superior General and his Council or an opportunity to see each other every six years. A General Chapter is the highest body of a Religious Institute, so what it establishes must be recognized and put into practice. If the XIV General Chapter has among its tasks, *to protect the spiritual heritage of the congregation, keep up the general good , to promote the apostolic life, enhance the charisma, ensure the unity and the constant renewal and adaptation of structures and members* (Cost. 128). I believe that the Father General and the General Council must not only oversee the decisions taken but also remind to every religious the need to fulfill them.

It is certain that we are not infallible, dogmatic, but I do not think that the 43 chapter members gathered in Pianura from June 18 to July 4, 2012, presented to the Congregation some nonsense or impossible fantasies to be put in practice. The programmatic guidelines are the result of a consensus, a synergetic thinking, of the desire to improve our daily life of the congregation, to educate the hearts to conversion, because in the end this is the greatest need. When the heart is not kept guarded and polite, then it is likely to become wild.

I do not think I exaggerate when I say that practically all the general chapters of our congregation gave rules and clear guidelines regarding the sharing of goods. Since there has been a need to call to mind repeatedly the same topics, we can understand the fact that the congregation is vital, it is dynamic, not static nor made by immortal persons. Generations preceded us, other generations will follow, because this is the natural law. So, our present is built keeping a glance to the past and another reaching out to the future. Another reason why we reiterate the same

things, is due to the fact that this topic is not of minor or optional importance, but it is essential and very important, in our being religious, such as the common life and the sharing of goods, both spiritual and material.

It is my desire, at the beginning of this circular letter, to reiterate, once again, that the only reason why I have accepted the duty of Superior General, it is because I see in it a way to express all my love for the Mother Congregation, by putting myself totally at the service of the brothers without sparing any energy. Our congregation has showed me the face of God, who is good and merciful; she took me by the hand and led me through the journey that led to my consecration and priesthood; she has believed in me from the first moment that I presented myself only conscious of being called by God. The rest was done by the Lord, through the Society of Divine Vocations, so all eternity will not be enough to express my gratitude for all the good received, but mainly because of I felt loved and wanted since the day I was welcomed.

Who among you has not been chosen and loved by God from all eternity? Who among you has not been accepted, loved, encouraged, supported and desired by the mother congregation? To whom among you, fr. Justin did not open the heart, even before he opened the doors of one of our Vocationist communities? Who among us has been able to become what we are today without the love of a brother who came before us? What is it that we have, that has not been given to us by our mother congregation? Who among us had to interrupt the formation, for lack of financial means? Are we aware of being loved by the Congregation? Do we correspond to this love?

Do not expect great things only from me during this time that has been given to serve as General Superior of the Society of Divine Vocations, because we all know very well what testimony we are called to give, which lifestyle we must live, which program we must fulfill. We already have a vast heritage inherited from the heart of fr. Justin and thanks to my predecessors, and regarding the norms of conduct there is nothing to add that has not already been said.

I am increasingly convinced that it is my duty to remind each brother that we cannot waste our life by being attached to material things or running after material and earthly goods, but we have to spend our life for the people entrusted to us, and in our case, for the elects of the divine vocations, as fr. Justin did. This is the only and ultimate expression of love that the Lord expects from us. This is our legacy. Let us be persuaded and attracted by this certainty in this Vocationist jubilee year. Fill our hearts with love for vocations. I heard once that there is no such a thing like an *"empty heart"*, because the heart is always full. The question is full of what? If it is not full of fraternal charity and love, then it will be filled with something else. Then let us educate the heart to Love, for the true Love!

During my formation I was fortunate enough to know and live with vocationist religious who have formed generations of young religious with their way of life, with attachment to the Congregation and to the Founder, with the detachment from material goods and a deep spirit of belonging and sharing. Priests who have not only given up everything for the sake of the kingdom but also have become beggars for vocations without sparing themselves, their health and their talents. Priests who have exercised their ministry in the suburbs of large cities in Bahia and in the slums of the great city of Rio de Janeiro, without ever seeking something better. They loved their vocation, their dedication, their congregation.

A simple reminder of priests like fr. Antonio Polito, fr. Luigi Fontana, fr. Luigi Bellopede, fr. Vincenzo Russo, who have marked the beginning of my vocationist formation, it is enough to reinforce my belief in the consecrated life and in the Congregation.

The memory of these confreres who have never been friends of the superfluous, attached to things and to a comfortable life, spurs me to carry out the mission that the Mother Congregation has entrusted to me, aware that since its foundation there have been plenty of sacrifice, of sweat, of renunciation, of holiness, fidelity and charity, and in some cases even permanent signs of blood marked on the flesh of these brethren. Since the grace of God and the power of the Spirit do not belong only to the past but have opened up unlimited horizons, even in the present, thanks be to God, we are always encouraged and uplifted by the examples of so many confreres whose model and lifestyle manifest a page of the gospel.

I am sure that the sanctity of our founder, and the edifying example of so many brothers, some of the past and some in the present, ensure the vitality of our religious family and urge us to follow in their footsteps, in order not to lose sight of the goal that has been proposed.

It is not a surprise for me the fact that I do not see this kind of holiness in the majority of our Vocationist religious, beginning with me. Many religious have had their true conversion of heart late in life, and have been still equally recognized as saints of the catholic church, so this should fill us with hope and renew in us the good intentions and holy desires. What sometimes surprises me is not the lack of perfection but the indifference on the part of many religious or an explicit rejection of the fundamental constituents of the consecrated life. Religious who struggle to live as consecrated persons. Religious who are able to work miracles but which are not miraculous when it comes to being more spiritual and less worldly, to be more servants and less masters, to share the wallet instead of inflate it or to obey rather than criticize, and are easy to condemn and dictate laws.

In the monthly magazine of the Vocationist Italian Province, *"Il cammino"*, it was published in the issue of August-September, a document where vocationist religious, with their signatures, are asked to commit themselves to deposit their clergy monthly salary in the joint account of the community. If I remember correctly, it was I who suggested to the Italian Province in one of our joint sessions, that they put in practice this request made by the XIV General Chapter. The surprise was the immediate reaction of some religious who began a campaign against our decision, as if to confirm the saying that *"if we want to know the true identity of a religious, you need to put the hands in his wallet"*. I have the impression that things between us are good only when they remain a theory ... but we can not live only on theory.

I also regret to have reached the point of having to ask to sign a document to our religious brothers, who have taken a vow of poverty, and to ask to share the fruits of their apostolate. We have arrived at this decision because with the way we act we are abusing, insulting and betraying the congregation and our consecration. It is useless to find another term to sweeten the pill, to define the religious who is not faithful. *"Whoever is not faithful is traitor"*. The act of betrayal can be committed only by the one who has promised to be faithful, and the word "loyalty" is written in the formula of the vows, in the context that expresses the perpetual consecration to God through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. In order not to lose or forget the

power of those words pronounced solemnly on the day of our first profession, we need to renew them at the end of the each annual retreat.

What we are asking for is the minimum, since we are well aware that in Italy and around the world, we do not handle only the clergy salary but also other economic resources. What will happen if we would ask to stop buying cars in the personal name of a religious? They are bought for the most part without any permission of Major Superiors and are almost never put at the service of the community. Suppose we ask the religious at the time of the transfer to leave "their" cars in the community rather than take them with them? What if we would ask the cash flow of each offering received? Their pensions? And the fruit of their ministry?

Unfortunately, the money have become, not for few vocationists, the only concern around which revolve all other interests and influences. The economic concern is the first criterion to be evaluated and measured when it comes to transfers, duties or appointments, and is the first demand that is made by many to be sure they will not have to depend on others. The money, for many religious, have become the most important thing in religious life, then here is the reason why communities are becoming more heartless homes, like prisons with precise schedules and regulations to be observed but with little or no spirit of communion, communication, recreation, family council, moments of fraternity, etc. A little like the seven churches of the Apocalypse, some of which the Lord, knowing their works, declares dead. You can even continue to beautify your homes but if there is no esteem among you the atmosphere will be like the one of cemeteries, because where there is no love, people will die of suffocation.

In this war for the money, that fills of worldliness a congregation born for divine union, every day I realize that we are losing, if not the total trust, at least the solidarity of those who first looked at us with a certain compassion especially in time of trial. Some benefactors, once so close to us and on whom we could rely especially in difficult times, now keep themselves at distance from us. We do not convincing anyone by saying that the Congregation is in debt and that we need help, when they continue to see religious who use the money as they please, fattening their personal accounts, helping their families while impoverishing the Congregation, and continuing to look after their own business without realizing that the family spirit is collapsing or has already been destroyed.

The congregation has grown numerically but its patrimony has become poorer. Shouldn't be the opposite? We risk to have religious without identity and our communities of formation deprived of essential services due to lack of financial support. We are forced to have to sell what is left of our properties, because we refuse to share personal resources. Everyone knows that this is the case because for a long time we did play this alarm, but many do not seem to know and continue to live in personal comfort. We profess with our lips our total trust in divine providence but we continue to put aside what we judge to be the guarantee for our future, we continue to watch, powerless and passive, some confreres who are sacrificing their lives for ordinary maintenance of the community while others do not care about this and continue to live in personal comfort. From time to time we are also available to give the occasional personal offerings, when the major superiors begs or laments, perhaps to appease our conscience, but afterwards we return to the usual personal business.

Our beloved congregation has grown in numbers, and we are also proud to announce it to people: but have we ever come to terms with those religious who do nothing but take advantage of the Congregation? We have never dealt with those

religious who have built impenetrable ghettos? Do you realize that sometime personal projects take precedence over our common projects of the Congregation? How many Vocationists live as such? Who can we count on, when it comes to carry out some services who are purely vocationist? What do you think should be the service of those religious who received their first name as Servants of the Saints? I am reminded of the reflection of St. Gregory the Great when he says that *"the world is full of priests, and yet rarely we found those who work in the Lord's harvest; we have assumed the priestly office, but we do not do the works that the office would entail"*.

The service that we are called upon to pay in our congregation is that of holiness, of sharing, of love, of building, of believing. A religious who does not live and serves as Vocationist, serves only as to be part of statistics ... and unfortunately in many cases we find ourselves in this situation. In the statistics of the Congregation we have quite a few religious members who never share the fruit of their work, who make use of our homes or our facilities without cultivating fraternity, sharing and responsibility. I have heard the complaint that some religious treat their communities like hotels; even if we want to accept this unpleasant comparison, let me assure you that hotels are not free of charge. Not only this attitude denounces the lack of vocationistality in many of our religious, but especially the lack of interest in participating in family life, in prayer life, or even in the life of the community; never talking about vocations, our founder fr. Justin; never promoting a pilgrimage to the crypt of the Founder, while traveling with many faithful in Europe and around the world for more sophisticated places of spirituality, and unwilling to fulfill those tasks that require sacrifice and do not carry any profit, etc...

Therefore I extend to the entire congregation and I make mandatory for all Vocationist priests and religious the obligation to sign the document attached to this letter by the end of 2013 and send a copy to the General Curia, because we are sure that those engaged in pastoral service always receive a form of remuneration.

To prevent that abuses can multiply and repeat in the future, I establish:

1 . No one is excluded from signing the document, because no one is excused by the vow of poverty and of the sharing of goods. The bank account of the religious community is to be signed by the superior together with the local treasurer, and if the superior is also the treasurer, then with vicesuperior (Dir. 229).

2 . The religious superiors need to be the first to set an example, to treat the brothers in their care with dignity, charity and justice. Do not let them lack the necessary. It is an attitude inconsistent and highly anti evangelical to impose on others a humiliating and miserable behavior, as if we were their masters. The formators must teach the young religious, starting with the novitiate, to manage their money and goods with responsibility, maturity and sharing. It is commendable to have noticed in some communities the practice that the youth in formation give a monthly note of their expenses, and they also give back to the community the money received that were not spent.

3 . No charitable or humanitarian initiative, while laudable and commendable as it is, may be taken without the express written permission from the Superior General. It is incomprehensible how such an abundance of compassion and solidarity is given by some confreres for those programs that already enjoy large consensus in society, and while they lack sensitivity and awareness for our missions and our Vocationaries.

4 . As vocationist we also have social works done by some of our brothers appointed to this task or who have been given permission. Adoptions of students and children abroad are coordinated by fr. Anthony Ezebuoro, our general councillor for the

missions, who at this time has been helped by our confrere fr. Florent Hounkponou. Even our vocationist missionaries, who come from abroad to sponsor collections for their mission and other activities in support of our communities, have our support and encouragement, and I ask all vocationist pastors to support them. No other vocationist religious is allowed to go around with alleged projects in support of any other organization. And I ask the superiors and parish priests to watch over this norm, and if necessary, to warn the faithful of our parishes;

5 . No vocationist religious may solicit benefactors from purely personal projects without give an account to the Congregation. You can take all possible initiatives in support of our missions but always in agreement with the major superiors and the General Treasurer.

I have heard that there are brothers who go around inciting other brothers not to sign this document. I ask these brothers to put an end to this attitude, which is not worthy of religious life. I would take more pleasure if these religious would incentivate others to be more grateful for the good they have received from the mother congregation, and be more consistent with their choice of life, more detached from material goods and more sensitive to the needs of the congregation.

I also learned that some brothers are threatening to return to their homeland and some to leave the office that has been entrusted to them if it is confirmed the obligation to sign the document. I am sorry that these religious, in doing so, give a bad image of themselves and of their countries of origin, as if they were exempt in their nations from the common life, the vow of poverty and the sharing of goods. Despite this threat, I am also willing to allow them to go back to their homeland from where they were invited to come from, and willing to close some of our residences, in order not to betray the nature of our vocation as consecrated persons. I want to invite these confreres to return to their hearts, their consciences and ask with sincerity and serenity if they have embraced the religious life and the priesthood as a vocation or for convenience, to enrich their lives with the poverty of Christ or to get rich with the patrimony that belongs to the congregation and not to the individual, using the name of Christ to promote themselves or to promote vocations and missions.

To you, my dear brother ... who do not live only for the Most Holy Trinity, the Church, the Congregation for vocations! Praise be to the Blessed Trinity for the gift of your life! Thank you because with your life, with your testimony and service you give honor to the Congregation! Thank you because with your life you add a beautiful and outstanding living page to the history of the Society of Divine Vocations! Thanks for understanding that in our consecrated life the one who wins is the one who gives it all! Thank you for continuing to aim to the one thing that is necessary in life, that is to achieve divine union! Thank you for not be put off by the bad examples and the evil that revolves around you! Thank you because you continue to believe that the good will always triumph, while acting in the silence and obscurity! Thank you because you continue to spend yourself for the Congregation! The Lord knows how much I am proud of you and how much inspiration I find in the gift of your existence.

Dear brother who do not yet believe that there is more joy to give than to receive, open your hearts to the gift of sharing and you will see how the Lord will work wonders in your life! Have a little compassion for the congregation that is a mother, who gave you life and the consecration to the priesthood, and asks only the sense of fidelity, fellowship, and charity. What is the point of accumulating, if at the end of our life we will present to God only the things that we have given away? What is the reason of your lack of trust? What is it and where is it your treasure? Why before

wasting any penny in things that you know are useless, do not think about our confreres in the vocationaries in the mission lands who do not ask us other than the ability to ensure our students the normal and essential to a decent life?

Let us become humble, dear brother, so that we may not be prevented from crossing the narrow gate of eternal life, crossed by many saints, our intercessors.

Let us become saints, now, because everything else is zero.

May the Lord bless us, always !

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