

C.P.P.S. RESOURCES-38

# THE CIRCULAR LETTERS OF ST. GASPAR DEL BUFALO



ITALIAN EDITION EDITED  
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*If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.*

—2 Cor 5:17-18

*What, then, is a missionary? He is one sent by the Lord to give his people knowledge of salvation (Lk 1:77).*

—St. Gaspar del Bufalo, Circular Letter of 1836



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# Foreword

The circular letters are a privileged way to understand the heart and mind of St. Gaspar. They focus on his convictions about personal holiness, community life, and the apostolate. These eleven letters were directed to the priests, brothers, and students of the Congregation on the occasion of the prescribed annual retreat, which took place during the ten days before the feast of St. Francis Xavier on December 3. They represent Gaspar's response to the question: *Who is a Missionary?* Perhaps we might also phrase the question: *What does it take to be a Missionary?*

Gaspar still speaks to us today if we take the time to engage in a conversation with the text. Penned nearly 200 years ago, his circular letters use images and vocabulary that may occasionally seem strange to us, but Gaspar can still inspire us, just as he did the members and students of the Congregation in his day. I hope that readers of this volume, especially the Missionaries and Companions of the Precious Blood, will gain a deeper insight into the mind of our Founder, inspiring them to become the “missionary disciples” all of us are called to be.

This is the second edition of the circular letters of St. Gaspar in English. The first edition was translated by the late Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S., who also translated the entire corpus of Gaspar's letters into English. At this time in the life of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in the United States, it seemed opportune to publish a new and revised edition. It is important to listen to our Founder speaking to us in these letters, inviting us to personal and community renewal and zeal for the apostolate.

A bit of history may be helpful. To mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St. Gaspar, the late Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., produced a critical edition of the letters based on the best texts available in the General Archives. The English translation of that edition was first published in a small book in 1986 and is also available in digital format.

One of the reasons for a new edition of the circular letters is to include Gaspar's instructions for the annual spiritual exercises, which were not included in the 1986 English edition. This second edition also seeks to provide better translations of the quotations from Scripture, as well improving the accuracy of translation and the readability of the text. This edition also includes the titles and subtitles added by Conti to indicate the content of various sections. Conti's *Introduction* contains more information on the process for editing the critical Italian edition.

Editing this text renewed a sense of gratitude to the late Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S. I believe that he would welcome these enhancements to his text. He did not have access to the resources that are available to us today, such as online dictionaries, digital Bible texts, and even translating applications that can be surprisingly helpful in checking one's work. I can only imagine how delighted he would be to have access to these tools were he alive today, engaged in his ministry of making important texts available to us in English.

In the preparation of this book, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the help of Bro. Ben Basile, C.P.P.S., who proofread the text, and Jean Giesige, C.P.P.S. Companion, who also offered helpful suggestions. The staff of The Messenger Press have also been most helpful and professional, especially

Sherri Thobe, Prepress Manager/Graphic Specialist.

Finally, in June 2021, Fr. Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., founder of the *C.P.P.S. Resources* series, entered into the fullness of eternal life. I want to acknowledge his support of this ongoing publishing project, now numbering 38 volumes, and for all that he has done in helping us to grow in our understanding of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ. “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

### **Notes on this edition**

In the Italian edition of 1985, the quotations from the Bible are from the Latin Vulgate, with footnotes offering an Italian translation. Not all the Scriptural quotations are entirely accurate, presumably because St. Gaspar was quoting the Bible from memory. The translations in the Italian edition appear to be from a standard Italian Catholic edition of the Bible, authorized by the Episcopal Conference of Italy (CEI). In the first English edition, the Scripture references were simply translated from the Italian in the footnotes.

In this edition, an attempt has been made to find the best translation of the Vulgate, often relying on the Douay-Rheims translation. Other versions were also consulted in an effort to provide accurate translations. Those who consult the biblical references in modern translations are likely to find differences in the texts, although generally these are not significant. Here it should be noted that the original Hebrew and Greek texts on which the Vulgate was based were not necessarily the best, and modern translations are based on better manuscripts than were available in past centuries.

In the circular letters, Gaspar generally refers to the Congregation as “the Institute” or “the Work of God.” The 1986 English edition uses “Society” instead of these original titles. Gaspar does not refer to the Congregation as “Society,” a term in common use in the United States until recently and generally used in a civil legal context. Instead of “Society,” the term “Congregation” is commonly used, reflecting the official title in Latin: *Congregatio Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C.*

The Italian version of 1985 preserved the punctuation and capitalization of the original texts, which may differ from contemporary English practice. This edition does not attempt to do the same, because the editor believes that to do so would reduce the readability of the text for modern readers.

Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

September 30, 2021  
Memorial of St. Jerome,  
Patron Saint of Translators

# Introduction

This small volume<sup>1</sup> gathers St. Gaspar's method for the annual spiritual exercises for the Missionaries of the Congregation and the circular letters he wrote on the occasion of those retreats. Our founder sent these letters each year from 1826 to 1837 (with the exception of 1828). St. Gaspar joined his confreres for a particular time in their spiritual growth and offered them suggestions for their personal self-examination and renewal of their missionary vocation.

In these letters, St. Gaspar describes the vocation of a Missionary of the Precious Blood. He returns several times to the question "Who is the missionary?" The letters give shape to the vocation of the Missionary: the need for an interior life so that the Missionary himself is truly an incarnation of what he preaches to others, the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, community life, the apostolic life animated by a lively zeal, etc. In short, what results is a profile of the Missionary of the Precious Blood. He does not limit his comments to the priests, but also addresses seminarians, whom St. Gaspar calls "*convittori*" [literally, *boarders*] and for the Brothers who, at that time, were called "*fratelli inservienti*" [Brothers-in-service].

Given the purpose for the letters, namely, to be a mirror for the Missionary of the Precious Blood, they are likewise the *magna carta* of the particular spirit of the institute, not only for St Gaspar's time but also for after his death. The testimony of Fr. John Merlini in the process for the beatification and canonization of St. Gaspar is significant: "In speaking of the

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction appeared in Italian in the *Chi è il Missionario? Lettere per gli Esercizi Spirituali* ( *Who is the Missionary? Letters for the Spiritual Exercises*) printed by Edizioni Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, Roma, 1985.

final circular letter for the retreats prescribed by the Rule which he sent out in November of 1837, he said: ‘This is the last letter that I will be sending out.’ Then, shortly after that he added: ‘Let us begin with the first one that was sent at the beginning.’ At this point, I shall say that, before having pointed this out to Fr. Biagio Valentini, he had already ordered me to send out that first circular letter, which I then did in 1839. Then I mentioned to him that this was exactly what the Servant of God had said to me.” This was done in the following years.

In 1892, the general council of the Congregation felt the need to publish a small volume of 56 pages, *Metodo per i Santi Spirituali Esercizi di Regola e Circolari di eccitamento del Venerabile Gaspare Del Bufalo ai Missionari della Congregazione del Preziosissimo Sangue dal medesimo istituita* (Method for the Holy Spiritual Exercises of the Rule and Circular [Letters] of encouragement of Venerable Gaspar Del Bufalo to the Missionaries of the Congregation of the Precious Blood which he founded.) That booklet has played an important part in preserving the spirit of St. Gaspar in our Congregation. At one time in the Italian Province, the provincial director in his circular letter for the annual retreat would also indicate the circular letter of St. Gaspar that was also to be read.

The Second Vatican Council encouraged us to rediscover the spirit of the founder; the circular letters of St. Gaspar, along his other writings, have taken on a greater importance.

The occasion for this second edition is the bicentennial of St. Gaspar’s birth (1786-1986). As part of the general program for the celebration, the general curia assumed the task of preparing translations of the circular letters in the different

languages used in our Congregation. In 1985 the Italian Province scheduled retreats for all its members in which the circular letters were to be used. In order that each member would be equipped with the material, the decision was made to publish a new edition of the letters.

With our modern sensitivity to historical documents, *uti iacet*<sup>2</sup>, we were not content simply to make a reprint of the 1892 edition. We went through volumes in the general archives of our Congregation in search of material dealing with the method for retreats and the circular letters written by St. Gaspar in his time. We were fortunate in our search. Among some letters, we found one in the Saint's own handwriting (the letter of 1833) and others signed either by the secretary general, Fr. Giovanni Merlini, or by the pro-secretary general, Fr. Camillo Rossi. The copy of the *Method for Retreats* is also by Fr. Rossi.

The texts that are reproduced here are faithful to the originals, which was not always the case in the 1892 edition.

One may encounter some difficulty in reading the material on the Method and especially in the originals of the letters. This could be due to the use of punctuation and capitalization different from current practice or by the use of words and grammatical structures no longer commonly used today. Our fidelity to the originals has helped us overcome every temptation to tamper with them. Editorial changes involve only the substitution of titles and sub-titles inserted throughout the letters in order to identify the contents. The Latin texts have been retained as they occur in the originals even though, at times, they are not always accurately quoted

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2 As they were found, literally "as it lies."

from the Vulgate. A translation of the Latin is found in a footnote.<sup>3</sup> The work of locating the Latin texts, finding the translations, as well as selecting the titles and subdivisions was shared by my confreres Fr. Romano Altobelli and Fr. Luciano Bugnola, to whom I extend my deepest gratitude.

Now that the *Method* and the *Circular Letters* of St. Gaspar are available for our daily usage, we must now reflect on them wisely and with love. As we see ourselves mirrored in them, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin, we are motivated to be a faithful image of the Missionary of the Precious Blood according to the heart of St. Gaspar.

Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S.  
Provincial Director

Rome, May 24, 1985  
Mary Help of Christians

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<sup>3</sup> The English translations of the Scripture passages are now in the text and not in footnotes. These translations may be taken from several English Bible translations. Sometimes the translation has simply been made from the Latin in the text, which may differ in varying degrees from the Latin Vulgate text.

# PART ONE

## Method for the Spiritual Exercises<sup>4</sup>

### Method for the Spiritual Exercises prescribed by the Rule of our Community.<sup>5</sup>

The apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, our special advocate, wrote to Fr. Gaspare Barzeo to impress upon him that he should not omit *the practice of making a spiritual retreat every year*. Therefore, it is most proper that we, my venerable brethren, should place ourselves often in the presence of God in order to review the books of our consciences and to prepare ourselves to make that special account of the gifts God has deigned to grant us. *From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required* (Lk 12:48). If the apostle St. Paul was fearful that after preaching to others, he might become more culpable than all of them, what ought we to say, if the Apostle felt that way? Keep in mind that since we are to communicate a spirit of fervor to others, it is necessary that we be well supplied and filled in a special way ourselves. Therefore, let us willingly retire to a place of solitude; let us listen to the voice of God, which the Lord allows us to hear in a special way during these days. *Your voice is sweet* (Song 2:14). Let this enlighten our minds and sanctify our hearts so that we may become indefatigable workers in the eyes of God.

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4 In this translation, “spiritual exercises” will sometimes be translated as *retreat*.

5 This is from the *Scritti del Fondatore (Regolamenti)*, vol. XII, written in the hand of Missionary Camillo Rossi, who signed it “Pro-Secretary General.”

### **Schedule for the morning**

After awakening, we are to consecrate the beginning of the day to God: *O God, my God, to you I watch at break of day* (Ps 62:1). Time should be given to holy meditation which will be conducted by the one chosen to proclaim the divine word on these holy days. A generous amount of time is to be allowed for private prayer and for the individual practice of the virtue of humility. It is written that the wisdom of God is given to those who humble themselves and become childlike in his presence: *The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple* (Ps 19:8). The entire community should attend the meditation, which should use the themes found in the *Method* of St. Ignatius. They are to be adapted to our own communities and to individuals who are listening to the divine word. The meditation will be concluded around the usual hour when the first Mass is begun.

During that Mass, one of the Missionaries will lead the recitation of the *Chaplet*, to which the entire community will respond while recollected in their places and imploring the spirit of sorrow for sin and a tender devotion to the mysteries of the most Precious Blood of Jesus.

When the first Mass concludes, the others will follow. After breakfast, time is devoted to the topic of renewal. Where there are boarding students (seminarians) in the house, only the Missionaries will participate in this. The seminarians will recite the seven Penitential Psalms in their private chapel or in a room to be chosen, if a second chapel is not available. After the litanies and the accompanying prayers, the holy Rosary (that is, five decades) will follow.

After the period of reflection on renewal, time will be set aside on what had been heard for individual reflection in

one's room. The boarders will devote themselves to spiritual matters, contemplating the special enlightenment that God gives during the solitude of a retreat. After that, the little hours are prayed in common in our private chapel. The boarding students and the priests will also take part in the chanting of the psalmody, since some of them are also accustomed to reciting the office of the Blessed Mother.

One hour before the noon meal, the Missionaries will be questioned about their knowledge of the ceremonies for Holy Mass. They will study the rubrics for the Mass, the Office and the Ritual on Fridays throughout the year. At that same time, the boarding priests and students will make the Way of the Cross. If it necessary to use the chapel for making the Way of the Cross, the examination of the Missionaries on the ceremonies of the Mass can be done in the library without difficulty in making that change.

One half hour before the noon meal, the time is set aside for adoration of the most Blessed Sacrament, each one taking his place. At a quarter before the hour, a signal is given for the examination of conscience. During the period of adoration of the most Blessed Sacrament, each one privately recites the Seven Offerings to the Divine Blood, with the particular zeal of spirit that one can arouse in the interior affections of his soul.

During the noon and evening meals, there is the reading of the life of St. Francis Xavier or the letters written by that saint. At the noon meal, one is never to omit the reading of the Scriptures and the Martyrology. In the recreation periods, one should speak only of topics that are pertinent to the time of retreat so that everything contributes toward the strengthening of one's fervor in the pursuit of the greater glory of God.

### **Schedule for after the noon meal**

After the siesta and at the sounding of the usual community bell, within a quarter of an hour each should go for the recitation of Vespers and Compline, keeping in mind the directions for the recitation of the Little Hours. After Compline, time will be allowed for a bit of a walk inside, but without breaking the silence, except that one could confer with one's spiritual director or with the assigned spiritual director in a soft voice. While taking that walk, one might also read a spiritual book, but always without breaking the silence.

At the twenty-third hour,<sup>6</sup> there will be the period of renewal for the priest-boarders only. This will take place where the boarding students reside, and at that same time the Missionaries, using another location, will recite the seven Penitential Psalms and one third of the Rosary, as referred to previously for the boarding students. In those places where there is no arrangement for boarding students, the second session of the renewal for the Missionaries will take place. They are then at liberty for the recitation of the Penitential Psalms, for privately making the Way of the Cross in chapel, for reciting the Rosary, etc. Likewise, they are free with regard to offering mental prayer, conferring with their spiritual director, etc., at a time throughout the entire day when they can choose to perform those acts usually done in common.

Finally, a meditation in common called for by the Rule will take place, using the book of meditations for the month of June, dedicated to adoration of the Divine Blood. The schedule is arranged so that before the time for the evening meal, Matins and Lauds for the following day will have been

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<sup>6</sup> In that system of timekeeping, the 23<sup>rd</sup> hour would be one hour before sunset.

said. At the conclusion of evening prayers, the requests for a happy death are recited.

### **Schedule for the Brothers-in-service**

In the morning, they will be present for the meditation and the Mass of the Chaplet. During the course of the morning, they should be especially careful to observe silence, and while taking care of their duties, they should meditate on the mysteries, particularly of the passion and death of Jesus. It will be the Superior's task to arrange their assignments in such a way that in the course of the retreat they will have the time necessary to confer with their own spiritual director. Effort likewise is to be made, as far as possible, that there be no reason for leaving the house, at least not frequently.

In the afternoon, at the time when the Missionaries are reciting Vespers and Compline, the Brothers are to make the Way of the Cross before the church is opened. Immediately after the way of the Cross, their period of renewal will follow. Finally, at the twenty-third hour, in a place removed from the chapel where the retreat is being conducted, they are to recite the Rosary, which can be led by one of the Brothers. However, where there are boarding students, they should wait until the Missionaries have completed the recitation of the Penitential Psalms so that then they can join in the recitation of the Rosary. In the evening, they are to be ready to take part in the customary prayers in common.

### **Remarks**

The Novena of St. Francis Xavier can be conducted at a time that is considered most convenient for the people. Only an accidental variation in the usual schedule is allowed.

The retreat called for by the Rule can be conducted either by one Missionary alone or can be shared by two. If the retreat master is not selected by the Director of the Institute or by someone to whom that faculty has been granted by him, then a congressus of the community will designate the person to perform that service. Furthermore, eight days before the retreat, a congressus is to be held by the Missionaries to establish the schedule, to assure the reading of this Method and its scheduling in the refectory on the day preceding the beginning of the retreat. If a circular letter is sent in preparation for the retreat, that likewise is to be read in the refectory.

The *Veni Creator* will be sung on the night of the first day of the retreat. It will be sung again each morning before the period of meditation that is conducted aloud. At the end of the meditation, a brief conversation takes place. Before the period of retreat, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum* etc. is not sung but recited, followed by the prayer, one Hail Mary with the invocation "Seat of Wisdom" and at the end of the period of retreat, one Our Father and Hail Mary to St. Xavier, and the ejaculatory prayer Eternal Father etc. One must always remember how frequently Xavier invoked the help of the Divine Holy Spirit.

## TOPICS

to be treated in the retreat of the Missionaries

1. The duties of a Missionary in regard to his own sanctification and the means of attaining it, cognizant of the exact observance of the Rules and being led by the hand, so to speak, to acquiring the great spirit of God.
2. The duties of a Missionary in regard to his fellow

companions and to the Brothers, and how reciprocal edification is to be promoted in community life.

3. The duties of a Missionary, whether they relate to pious organizations that our Mission Houses private, whether private or public retreats or sacred Missions. Following this method, we are referring opportunely to the Mass, to the ministry of hearing confessions, to the manner of proclaiming the divine word, to the mortification of ourselves, to our love for suffering, our spirit of prayer, of humility, of obedience without which the holy ministry entrusted to us by God can never be properly regulated. Each one of us must recall that *a good listener will testify successfully* (Prv 21:28).

## TOPICS

to be treated for the boarding students

1. Duties of a boarding student in examining the signs of his vocation and the means for fostering it.

2. Duties of a boarding student in his relationship to the community in which he is living, and how the Rule is the means by which he is to develop it.

3. Duties of a boarding student in preparing himself for the external ministry and for a holy goal. These are to be set before his eyes from the very beginnings of his career.

## TOPICS

to be treated for the Brothers-in-service

1. Duties of a Brother with regard to purity of the inner spirit and a practical way of preparing himself for the reception of the Holy Sacraments with proper dispositions which will form a new era in our life.

2. Duties of a Brother in his relationship to his companions and to the community which he will benefit by the exact fulfilment of his own tasks.

3. The method of training the Brother in the practice of living a life of the spirit in the execution of his assigned tasks, in particular by not ignoring the rules for mental prayer and by continuing to call to mind that he lives in the presence of God.

We close this Directory with this beneficial observation: God leads our souls to this holy retreat to indicate his will for us for own sanctification and that of others, and in the ways that lead to the achievement of these ends so that we can be filled with the merits that await us with each good work. The Lord leads us to more intimate union here below and to the possession of eternal joys in Heaven: the intimate union with the Lord that is possible here on earth; and, the possession of eternal joy in Heaven: *When a righteous person fled from the wrath of a brother or sister, [wisdom] guided them on straight paths* (Wis 10:10).

To this end, the knowledge of the Saints supports us: *[wisdom] gave them the knowledge of holy things* (Wis 10:10). Through this knowledge we learn to work hard so that we will not be confused on the day of the final Divine Tribunal: *[wisdom] prospered them in their labors, and increased the fruit of their toil* (ibid.) in handing on to others the mystical inheritance of values of an Apostolic Man, and in behalf of those whom God continues to raise up in the ministry for his Church. The sovereign designs of his Divine Providence are fulfilled, as we repeat: *Wisdom prospered him in his labors* (ibid.). Amen. Amen.

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus  
Who with his blood has saved us.

*Camillo Rossi*, Pro-secretary General



## **SECOND PART**

### **Circular Letters for the Spiritual Exercises**

# FIRST LETTER —1826

## Circular Letter for the Spiritual Exercises of 1826

### To The MISSIONARIES

Twelve years have now elapsed since our Institute, as envisioned from the beginning, has experienced growth in the Church of Jesus Christ. You can readily see how it is well suited to the renewal of proper conduct and apostolic spirit in the secular clergy of our time. In this letter of encouragement, I do not intend to consider particulars. I wish only to rouse in myself and in you, my dearly beloved brothers, that true spirit which we must always seek to attain in the Congregation (*Opera di Dio*). It cannot be denied that up to now, because of the pressing matters dealing with our new foundations, we have been called upon to take care of a variety of things, that is to say, various objectives related to the sacred ministry which we exercise. But, like a painting that is first sketched, then realized, and finally perfected and ennobled, so also has it been with our Congregation (*Opera*), which now enjoys the good fortune of being perfected and ennobled for the greater glory of God which alone we must serve.

#### I. Mystical Stones

It seems to me that our missionaries represent so many mystic stones fashioned for the work to be done, reminiscent

of the words of St. Paul: *You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone* (Eph 2:20). These stones must be polished by the stroke of the mystic chisel to achieve that perfection which is required of us: *With strokes of the healthful chisel* (From the Breviary hymn *Coelestis Urbs Jerusalem*). This should take place during this retreat, which all of us should keep in mind so that we might construct that mystical building for eternal blessing.

Allow me, my dearly beloved brothers, to repeat both for you and for myself that *it is now the moment for us to rise from sleep* (Rom 13:11). These words are applied by the saints not only to sinners in need of conversion, but to all the redeemed children of God who should be aroused to greater holiness. *It is now the moment*: while preaching to others, we must not become worse sinners than they. *It is now the moment*: we must protect ourselves from the snares of the enemy of all, who tries to lay a trap for the ministers of Christ's Gospel who are engaged in the wonderful ministries of religion. *It is now the moment*: we must arm ourselves with courage, generosity and unshakable zeal so that we all may be one with Jesus Christ. *It is now the moment*: we must grow in virtue, continue to exercise deep humility before God, and acquire compassion for our fellow human beings. All this must be based upon the spirit of prayer. *It is now the moment* when we are to develop that interior virtue which balances the influence of our exterior occupations. We must realize our highest responsibility to God on account of our distinguished and lofty vocation. Therefore, we say with the Prophet [sic], *I meditate and search my spirit* (Ps 77:6) ... *for a most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule* (Wis 6:6).

## II. The call to the Congregation: an examination of conscience

Let us then meditate on the motives that prompted us to devote ourselves to this great Congregation (*Opera*). Let us also examine the dispositions with which we have carried out our duties up to now. Have we perhaps been discouraged by trials and tribulations, instead of meditating on the words of the Apostle: *I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction* (2 Cor 7:4)? Or were we negligent in our duties and in observing the Rule given to us? After all, we must remember that the Rule is only a summary, shall we say, of what we preach to others of our calling and whose practice we demand of them.

They are principles, however, that we ourselves may forget because of certain wellknown excuses, which are only diabolic delusions, *under the appearance of good*, calculated to disturb and upset the good itself in its principles and foundations. Clinging to one's own opinions and rejecting the advice of others, one can be led to believe that he is in our Congregation (*Opera*) for a purpose other than that of the Institute. But such is the miserable condition of humans, and what the saints have said is only too true: we are all patients in the hospital of the world. Infirmities are cured, however, by the oil of meekness, tenderness, docility; by emptying ourselves<sup>7</sup> through successful obedience to our superiors, loving one another with charity; by patiently correcting each other; and finally, by steadfastly bearing with one another.

Neither the walls of our houses nor those we live with will make us grow in holiness, but rather our own love for spiritual matters, the mystical childhood to which Jesus Christ calls

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7 The Italian uses the term *spogliamento*, probably an allusion to Phil 2:7: *Christ emptied himself*.

us, the unique spirit of his glory and for the good of souls — and nothing else. This is the heart of that holiness that we lack and which we absolutely must acquire as the fruit of the present retreat.

### III. Conversion and Sanctification

*Purge out the old leaven* (1 Cor 5:7). *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom 13:14). Woe to us if the hardness of our attitudes (*menti*), if the love our own comforts, if our failure to follow through with our good intentions, and finally our neglect of the spiritual life renders us accountable before God. Ah, the Congregation (*Opera*) will progress more easily to the extent that we are men of the spirit, and if, in the face of those tribulations that will never be lacking for us, that the enemy does not win: *For when I am weak, then am I powerful* (2 Cor 12:10). *Those who seek the Lord will not lack for any good thing* (Ps 34:10). Rather, we will see ongoing marvels in our lives through the goodness of that most merciful Father, who has so loved us and with such tenderness, who shows us his meek and humble heart as a tender refuge for those souls who thirst for Jesus Christ.

May it never happen that we who hold the deposit of God's treasures (literally, "the deposit of the heavenly mines") and dispense them for others, should remain poor and stripped of such benefits that adorn the daughter of Sion. It is not the place nor the habit we wear that form what is essential in our holiness. A holy life, longing for perfection, thirsting for genuine heavenly love, trusting in God and being available for him, and not holding back from any sacrifice—this is what makes us saints. The elder Fr. Segeneri would say that people

ordinarily hold us in esteem and venerate us, but that it is one thing to appear saintly and another to be truly saintly: *For it is not the one commending himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends* (2 Cor 10:18). If until now we have not seen a greater victory of the divine glory in the work that we have done, we must attribute the failure to ourselves, for our words did not flow from a truly contrite heart, or at least, one not adequately contrite, at the feet of the Crucified.

Let us, therefore, pray for one another! Let us put all our trials in the wounds of Jesus Christ. There we shall find a healing remedy, and thus consolation, encouragement, and salvation. Let us sincerely love our Institute *with the holy kiss* (1 Th 5:26) *so that we may also live a new way of life* (Rom 6:4) But above all, let us continually watch that the enemy does not deceive us; *and may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus* (Phil 4:7).<sup>8</sup>

### **To the BROTHERS**

Care and solicitude for your souls are deeply impressed upon our hearts, for God says: *But if anyone have not care of his own, and especially of those of their house, that person has denied the faith* (1 Tm 5:8). It would therefore be wrong for us to break the bread of the Gospel for others and leave you hungry. But praise and bless God *who satisfies your desire with good things* (Ps 103:5). Especially in this year of pressing need for renewal in the spirit through the holy retreat, you have a proof of the God's commitment to you. I would like

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<sup>8</sup> Gaspar's quotation reads: "...keep your hearts and minds in the love of God and in the patience of Christ." Jesus." This phrase does not appear in the NT text.

you to make three resolutions during this holy time. The first is concerned with God, the second with yourselves, and the third with the community in which you live.

## **I. God**

In regard to God, thank him for having freed you from abundant dangers of the world. With St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi exclaim: *O blessed walls! You enclose me, but you also defend me.* Let this be the daily food that nourishes you and keeps you in the way of virtue: profound humility, the vivid recollection of the divine presence, and the account you must render to the Lord for the gifts you have received.

## **II. You yourselves**

As for yourselves, remember that living in a mission house requires laying aside the old Adam. I mean that you should lay aside and subdue your passions in imitation of Jesus Christ. Let patience overcome your anger, charity overcome self-centeredness, and justice make you scrupulous in fulfilling your obligations. You are no longer your own: you belong to Jesus Christ, and your admirable example is to create a living mission for the people. We are debtors to the wise and to the foolish, so be careful in your glances, in your words, and your actions. If sometimes you escape the eye of the superior, you will not escape the eye of God in the tribunal that awaits you.

## **III. The Community**

Finally, since you are accustomed to attribute to the communities themselves the defects that are the faults of individuals, I urge you to look upon our Congregation

(*Comunità*) as a spiritual field in which to exercise virtue. Does not God at times permit the intellect of virtuous souls to be darkened, which, as a consequence demands a more heroic virtue on your part? Be careful not to cause the least discord. Be lovers of silence. Do not interpret and gossip about the actions of others, which is injurious to both charity and perfection. Let all things lead you to paradise and to deny your own will. Accept the sweet for the bitter and the bitter for sweet, and you will be saints. Whoever sows the field, sows with fatigue and labor. In the field of the Gospel, we sow with patience and suffering.

Did you think, perhaps, that Community life would be free from crosses? You deceive yourselves. Did you perhaps enter the Society from human motives? Or did you imagine that you would escape scolding in your home, throwing off the yoke of paternal authority, or avoid working in the field, or for similar reasons. Think again, my brothers, if you love the Institute. Examine yourselves and practice those same virtues that you ask of others. Keep the community and every single member close to your heart. Put aside all hatred, aversion, prejudice and pride. In their place put docility, humility, prudence and a sincere desire for the success of the houses where you are in service. In short, let the Society be your way to heaven. Amen.

November 12, 1826

For Canon del BUFALO Missionary Apostolic

GIVOANNI MERLINI Missionary Apostolic

## Words of Advice<sup>9</sup>

Let whoever conducts the spiritual exercises first practice what he preaches, lest he be told: *Physician, heal yourself* (Lk 4:23). Or, perhaps, he will say: *lest somehow after preaching to others, I myself should become disqualified* (1 Cor 9:27) May he shed many tears before the Lord and preach by giving good example, which must proceed from a pure heart.

Let those who give orders learn how to serve. They should rule their confreres by exhortation rather than by command. In example, prayer and charity, let them excel all others, joyfully and promptly administering to their ongoing needs.

Always show prudence, polite manners and a well-ordered courtesy toward each other. Our hearts must be free from all things that are not suitable. Love to talk with God. Be an apostle while working in the Missions and a contemplative at home in accordance with the prescribed norms. Finally, be angelic in all your ways.

## To the SEMINARIANS

During the retreat, let the students keep before their minds the purpose of the Institute. Let all be aware of the need to resist the devil strongly, for the assaults of the devil are directed especially against the young. May the spiritual father make them careful and circumspect. May he point out to them the way of salvation.

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9 The last two sections are in Latin rather than Italian.

## SECOND LETTER — 1827

### Circular Letter for the Spiritual Exercises of 1827

#### To the Missionaries

My venerable brothers, the time for our spiritual retreat, a time deserving of our greatest attention, is again at hand: *The time of visitation has arrived* (cf. Lk 19:44.) Our most loving God calls us to the mystical mountain. Moses heard the supreme commandments of the Most High from the burning bush so that he might later carry them out faithfully. In like manner, on the mountain of perfection we should willingly hear the voice of our most loving Father, so that we can then share with others what we have learned for ourselves.

How should we not humble ourselves before God when contemplating our sublime calling and the responsibilities which we have in virtue of our sacred duties, our talents granted by the Lord, and the heavenly treasures entrusted to our care!

Attacks still besetting the Church, the deplorable condition of the times, our lack of the wisdom of the saints, our habitual remissness at divine services and the disregard for our Rule ( a spiritual guide to remind us of the obligations which we have assumed, at the foot of the altar): these, dearly beloved, are the cause for our plea to God for the flood of tears that we should shed at the foot of the Cross. If in last year's retreat

God inspired us to recall together the obligations we have to further the progress of our Institute, this year he inspires us to recall the sentiments we experienced at that time. This was the counsel that the two missionaries, St. Leonardo of Porto Maurizio and St. Paul of the Cross, shared in mutual love: *The apostolic life is based upon the interior life of the spirit.*

## **I. The interior life animated by charity**

Are we men of the spirit? Do we have that love of God which qualifies us to enter the sanctuary and to teach the people and to sanctify their souls? If we ourselves are not deeply affected by the very truths which should move people to tears, we will be *as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal* (1 Cor 13:1). Even though we may sacrifice our health in the ministry, what will it avail us if we are not entirely animated by charity? *If I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not love, it benefits me nothing* (1 Cor 13:3).

But how blessed are we if we acquire the life of the spirit at the foot of the Cross. This life is, indeed, the soul of every holy undertaking. When we are absorbed in prayer, we will be able to understand and repeat the words of the Apostle: *But by the grace of God I am what I am* (1 Cor 15:10). *What do you have that you did not receive?* (1 Cor 4:7) And also: *I am not worthy to be called an apostle* (1 Cor 15:9). *If it is necessary to boast, I will boast about the things related to my weakness* (2 Cor 11:30). *I am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9). *I discipline my body and subjugate it, lest somehow after preaching to others, I myself should become disqualified* (1 Cor 9:27).

These are the principles, my most beloved, *whom I love sincerely* (2 Cor 6:6) ... *in the heart of Jesus Christ* (Phil 1:8)

which create the inner life of meditation on God within us. Certainly, the soul imbued with these thoughts will exclaim: *I no longer live, but Christ lives in me* (Gal 2:20). Father Avila,<sup>10</sup> a great spiritual master, once wrote that only when the love of God reigns in the heart will one feed the flock of the Lord well. He was accustomed to repeat the words of Christ to St. Peter: *If you love me, feed my sheep* (Jn 21:17). It was this love that compelled the Apostle to say: *For I could wish myself to be accursed from Christ for the sake of my brothers* (Rom 8:3). God's love sweetened the sufferings of his apostolate, so that he said: *I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction* (2 Cor 7:4). Finally, this divine love urged him incessantly to acquire the genuine wisdom by which he considered all other things as the merest dross: *I have suffered the loss of all things, and consider them dung, in order that I may gain Christ ... I even consider all things to be loss because of the surpassing greatness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord* (Phil 3:8).

## **II. Dead to ourselves, let us live for Jesus crucified.**

We may ask: how shall we become permeated by this heavenly fire? A reed is very susceptible to the action of fire because it is hollow and thus is easily enveloped by the flames. Now, are we emptied of ourselves? This is the most important examination to be made in the retreat to which God is calling us: *The just will shine forth and will run like sparks through the stubble* (Wis 3:7). Truly, my dearly beloved, the evil of which we must rid ourselves is rooted within us, not within the walls that surround us, not in our companions, nor in the places where we live. This is the cure: to be dead spiritually to

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<sup>10</sup> St. John of Avila, 16<sup>th</sup> century spiritual writer.

the world and to live only for Jesus Christ Crucified. I know very well that I am speaking to men of the spirit, but they are the very people whom the common enemy of good harasses most severely. Therefore, carry out the truths that have been handed down, *to establish your hearts blameless in holiness* (1 Thes 3:13) ... *in the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ* (2 Thes 3:5). Amen.

### **Reflections for the young boarders**

*The flowers have appeared in our land ... Sustain me with flowers* (Song 2: 12, 5).

From the garden of the Church, Mary gathers three flowers and places them into your hands: a white lily, a red rose, a pale violet. The lily is the symbol of purity of conscience and of life. The rose represents a tender love for God which also purifies, perfects, and elevates our heart to God. The violet is the emblem of the evangelical mortification which keeps us *white and ruddy* (Song 5:10) according to the desire of the Beloved of our heart *who pastures his flock among the lilies* (Song 2:16; 6:20). The picture of the lily draws you away from the world. The image of the rose unites you to Jesus Christ. Finally, the violet makes you partakers of the fruits of the Cross.

May Mary most holy, who presents you with these flowers, find them still in your hands in your last agony in order to bring you to the possession of that homeland, to which the true lovers of the Crucifix have access. Amen.

### **Reflections for the Brothers**

Here you are, dear brothers in Jesus Christ: the Lord visits us anew in these spiritual exercises. In the name of God, I must

offer you three considerations on which you are to humbly examine yourselves. The first refers to the goal for which you withdrew into our midst; the second, to the mode and method of life you lead with us, the third to the dispositions with which you entered upon this retreat.

St. Bernard used to ask his monks: *My sons, for what purpose are we in the monastery?* Meditate on this question yourselves and closely examine what brought you to the Institute. The purpose must be the welfare of your soul. This, in a few words, says it all.

Second, what sort of life have we led until now? Neither the walls that enclose us, nor the rules which guide us will make us saints. Holiness is the result of mortifying the passions and a spirit of prayer with God. Indulging in self-love, lacking docility and respect, failing to love our community deeply, failing to maintain harmony among yourselves: all of this constitutes opposition to the spiritual life. May heaven protect you against such diabolical evils.

Third, enter upon this holy retreat holding a book in your hands: this is the book of the Crucified. Shield yourselves against the onslaughts of hell. The shield is the protection of Holy Mary. Finally, strike down the pride of Lucifer with the powerful weapon of prayer. Live for God, live with God, and attain the most intimate union with God. Then you will be saints. Amen.

Sermoneta, 23 October 1827

By Canon DEL BUFALO, Missionary Apostolic, Director  
General

GIOVANNI MERLINI, Missionary Secretary General

## THIRD LETTER – 1829<sup>11</sup>

### For the Missionaries

*Fix your attention on yourself and pay attention to the public reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, that was granted to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders (1 Tim 4:13-14).*

Dear brothers, with the words of the Apostle in mind, we return this year to the spiritual exercises which may be the last of our lives. Should not devotion to the ministry and its responsibility before God and the people call us to a very careful examination of our lives? St. Paul, that exalted preacher of the Gospel, feared that in preaching to others he would become a worse sinner than they: *lest somehow after preaching to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Cor 9:27)*. What, then, will become of us, who through so many relationships, in profound humility, have reason to repeat before God: *I am not worthy to be called an apostle (1 Cor 15:9)*. Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Cor 12:9). How important it is to understand what the Apostle emphasizes in his letter to the Thessalonians: *aspire to live a quiet life, and to attend to your own business (1 Thes 4:11)*, Certainly, it is upon these points that we must direct our examination to achieve what is implied in the text we quoted: *Fix your attention on yourself.*

<sup>11</sup> There is no letter for the year 1828, and this letter lacks the customary title of the other letters.

## **I. Watch over yourself**

Is it not possible that while we are busy with others, we neglect ourselves, or at least do not sufficiently provide for the needs of our own soul? Time goes by; eternity is our great goal. We are the dispensers of the sacred mysteries. May we never experience what happens to those who toil and labor to amass a fleeting treasure. They already have the reward of their work, and that treasure is not their own. Let us conduct ourselves as we should, making use of the proper means. How often do we not dispense the divine treasures to others, while we remain poor and needy through our own fault? *Rekindle the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands* (2 Tm 1:6). This does not mean that we should abandon what we have undertaken, namely, the apostolate among the people, as St. Paul says: *Do this and you will save yourself and others* (1 Tm 4:16).

## **II. Three points for your examination and three means for attaining the goal**

This year, our examination at the foot of the Cross will focus on three points. First: acknowledging the defects of our nature so that we see our inadequacy before God. Secondly: we examine the observance of our "interior directory, which may be called *The Guide to Heaven*. Finally, we shall direct our attention, prudently and reflectively, to the external aspects of our apostolic work, not merely having knowledge of good in general, but seeking the greater good which can and must be furthered. With perfection in virtue and zeal, we must seek the greater glory of the God whom we serve. This searching of the heart will move us to practice what the Prophet [sic] proclaims: *I meditate and my spirit searches* (Ps 77:7).

Furthermore, this searching [of the heart] will make us eager to find the appropriate means to attain our goal. These means are threefold: a continuous inner conversation with God about our needs and interests; a thorough study of humility, that we may be capable of receiving special gifts from God for the renewal of our life; and a burning desire for the inner and hidden life in the adorable wounds of the Crucified. There the most glorious battles against hell are enjoined: *I have died, and my life is hidden with Christ in God* (cf. Col 3:3).

### III. Three obstacles to the ways of the Lord

To the things mentioned so far, we add yet a warning to forestall three obstacles which can be a hindrance for those walking in the ways of the Lord, whenever Gospel courage does not inspire us with the knowledge needed to overcome those obstacles through our faithful relationship with God.

The first obstacle to doing good is that lethargy the common tempter insinuates in the appearance of temporary virtue that is not sustained. This leads to sluggishness, laziness, dejection, and even the temptation to disgust at good itself: *my strength fails me; and the light of my eyes — it also has gone from me* (Ps 38:11). To what lengths does not the devil go to harm those who work for the glory of God? But *they have conquered the dragon with the blood of the lamb* (Rv 12:11). One glance at the divine Blood and we are stirred to toil with untiring zeal and to work in the true spirit of God: *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God* (Rom 8:14). We shall work but we shall be so well established in virtue that in our labors no demand of flesh and blood nor any other desire will ever be heeded: *flesh and blood has not revealed this to you* (Mt 16:17). We shall

work, indeed, but with joy and holy delight in God. We know that even though we now encourage each other to labor with joy and elation, later we shall bear the Cross of Jesus Christ in victory and triumph into a most blissful eternity. Since this Cross is the golden ladder to heaven, we shall never cease to exclaim: *With all our affliction, I am overjoyed* (2 Cor 7:4).

The second obstacle which may hinder our apostolic growth is excessive attachment to our own opinions, views and desires. From this flows the weakness to which I referred previously. Realizing this, the Apostle exclaims: *I am a prisoner of Christ* (Eph 3:1), which is the equivalent to saying: I desire to be bound by love to Jesus alone. If we think of the manner in which the Almighty manifests his will, this heavenly love will force us to cry out: *Who will separate me from the love of Christ?* (Rom 8:35). Every other bond is severed — the will of the Lord alone is triumphant!

Finally, we must guard against a lack of prayerfulness. Through prayer God communicates divine light, and the soul acquires heavenly wisdom. Precisely from the neglect of the spiritual life come the dangers about which you have been warned already. In thinking of divine things, our hearts are like a ship which, though buffeted by destructive winds and furious storms, carries its precious cargo safely to port. In other words, a prayerful soul, fixing its gaze on God, does not suffer shipwreck on the stormy sea of this world.

These are the sentiments, dearly beloved, which we impart during the present retreat for our mutual edification. We hope they will produce in everyone those effects which are the fruit of the divine word. May this be our mystical food and drink: to fulfill the sacred injunction: *Eat! drink! Rise up, commanders*

(Is 21:5). This text means: let us arise to the exalted estate which the Cross of Christ established for us: *Dominion will be on his shoulder* (Is 9:6). *He conquered the world not with iron but with wood* (St. Augustine). Triumphant over our passions, over the world, and over the infernal enemy, we shall one day sing the new canticle of exultation throughout the eternal years: *We will sing a new song in the land of the living*.

So may it be, dearest brothers, through the help of the Mother of God and the protection of St. Francis Xavier.

### **To the young Boarders**

*You are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone* (Eph 2:20).

These are the wishes of the Institute to which you, my dear young men, have dedicated yourselves. Now that you are in the edifice of your sanctification to accomplish the designs of our holy mother the Church, who leads you to the good of the people, you must put into practice what is understood by those sacred words.

### **I. Like the Apostles**

The apostles were called to follow the Redeemer: *They left everything and followed him* (Lk 5:11). You are likewise called to the apostolic mission. By the grace of God, you have left your homes and all that could hinder your generosity in preparing for ministry, and now you are here in the house of God. Behold God's fatherly care for you: *Bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord* (Ps 134:1).

The apostles, indeed, at first generously welcomed and followed the Savior wholeheartedly. Later, they became timid and weak and deserted him during the Passion: *Then all the disciples deserted him and fled* (Mt 26:56). So, it sometimes happens that a person is quick to dedicate himself freely to serve God, but in the course of time, the devil, enemy of such dedication, does what he can to the detriment of conscience. How often does your ineptitude open the way to disillusionment, gloom, melancholy, and even to regret the step you have taken? This is a source of delight for the enemy, but woe to you if prompt resistance is not offered to his diabolical suggestions!

## **II. Gathered together in the holy Cenacle**

How did the Lord deal with his apostles? He assembled them in the holy Cenacle under the noble patronage of his own Mother. He called them to recollection, silence and prayer that they might beg for a renewal of spirit and religious generosity: *with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection* (Act 4:33). So, too, God works in us during the days of retreat in order to be able to anticipate and forestall every attack of the devil.

My dear young men, God has called you to this figurative Cenacle, this retreat. He wishes to communicate his spirit to you in a particular way. He wants to strengthen your hearts, establish you in virtue and lead you to holiness, so that you may leave this retreat spiritually refreshed and, with youthful spirits, be able to fight the enemy of your soul with greater strength and courage. When you have subdued your foes from within, you become apostles of God's glory.

### III. Prepare yourselves for victory

For you, the hour of the great apostolate has not yet come, but now is the time to acquire the necessary dispositions for it. Now you must learn how to handle the spiritual weapons: *He trains my hands for battle* (Ps 18:35). Now the necessary provisions for the struggle are being made. Now the ambushes of the enemy are foiled, now at last we learn how to overcome and conquer him. Is this not a great apostolic undertaking? Take it up, my beloved. Like Samuel in the temple, listen obediently to the intimations of grace and be diligent in keeping them.

### III. Under the guidance of teachers

Ponder well the full meaning of the text previously cited: *You are part of a building, that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone.*

As the prophets of old proclaimed future events, so now will your superiors, with love and zeal, make known to you the means for learning those things which pertain to the sacred ministry. For God has given them to you as guides in your vocation and to help you in building upon the mystic foundation of the apostles which always rests on the mystical rock, Jesus Christ. Your superiors will warn you of the dangers you will encounter. They will announce to you what Jesus himself declared to us: *You will be hated by all on account of my name* (Mt 14:9). *I send you as sheep among wolves* (Mt 10:6). Together they will support you as you fight your battles valiantly.

In the name of Jesus, they will offer you the assurance which is promised in the sacred pages: *To him that overcomes I will give the hidden manna ... and a new name* (Rv 2:17). That

manna is indeed everything that God has prepared for you as the food of your souls, your sustenance and support as you walk the way to perfection. May the spirit of humility toward God, meekness toward your neighbor and charity among yourselves direct you in this holy task that you have begun. Remember that *No one who puts his hand on the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God!* (Lk 9:62)

May the grace, peace, and love of Jesus always be with you. May the powerful protection of Mary and the great Xavier be our support in life, our comfort at the time of death, and may they run to lead us into the holy reign of God. Amen.

### **To the Brothers**

*I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God,  
rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners (Ps 84:11).*

Dear Brothers: These are the mystical tabernacles in which you are sheltered for one purpose only, namely, to flee the dangers of the world with a greater spirit of perfection and to seek earnestly to imitate Jesus. *I have chosen to be an abject, etc.*

### **I. Imitate Jesus**

But how is Jesus to be imitated? Look at him for just a short while. As an example to us, he is obedient to Joseph and to Mary and lives in the humblest of homes. He is employed in manual labor, shows himself to be a model of silence and is withdrawn from the world, a benefactor to all. In persecution and mockery, he keeps silent and forgives those who mistreat him. Tortured and afflicted, the Man of Sorrows, he joyfully embraces the cross for the welfare of souls and on it completes

the Great Sacrifice. Strive, dearly beloved, that *the life of Jesus be manifested in you* (2 Cor 4:10).

## **II. The virtues of a Brother**

At the time you became members of the Society, perhaps the world with scorn and derision sought to make you falter in your determination. As you live in the Congregation (*nell'Opera santa di Dio*), the enemy would like that love of your own comforts, the hardness of your opinions, rudeness in conversation, insubordination, and lack of humility would undermine your good intentions. What does God do, however, God who is always loving? He presented you a way to ground yourselves in humility, in obedience, in denial of your own will, in a life that is hidden and modest, and he rejoices when you repeat to yourself: *I have chosen to be an abject*, etc.

Open the eyes of your minds and learn that everyone is called to suffer, and that through that suffering, virtue strikes deeper roots in the hearts of all. Therefore, in your desire to imitate Christ, set aside all complaints. May evangelical simplicity, obedience to your directors, and reverence towards the ways of Providence make your life virtuous not only in name but in deed.

## **III. Apostolate of the Brothers**

While there are many “brothers” (we are all brothers in Jesus Christ) contributing to the achievement of good works, it is you in particular who relieve them of numerous obligations which would stand in the way of other activities for the glory of God. The designation “Brothers-in-service” describes your calling. Seek, then, to be of service to the Work

of the Lord and respect the will of the Creator in his creatures. No task is menial if it tends to glorify the Almighty. On the contrary, your work is like that of Jesus Christ who aided his foster father, St. Joseph. Purity of intention alone is necessary for you to properly control your interior and exterior actions. Realize, too, that a hidden and humble life is a special shield against vanity and human glory.

In concluding, I would like to describe the moral order that that should be yours. I shall use the example of Noah's dove and the ark. The Institute is, for you, an ark. It shelters you. The dove represents the purity of life you should possess. The mission of the dove is an example of the duties that you are given to do. You are sent out on your mission to defeat the crafty enemy of souls. You should return to the ark carrying an olive branch to the ark as did Noah's white dove, a symbol of victory. Therefore, live for God through the holiness of your conduct. Live with God in service to his Work, our Institute to which you have dedicated your lives. Always live in God by walking in his presence, conscious that he is everywhere. Do this not only to become holy, but also to seek the perfection of holiness: *Walk before me and be perfect* (Gen 17:1). Through the intercession of Blessed Mary and of our special advocate St. Francis Xavier, may the Almighty fill you with heavenly blessings. Amen.

## FOURTH LETTER — 1830

### Motivation<sup>12</sup> for the Exercises of November of 1830

*Note that where there are no boarders,  
omit the reading of the article that pertains to our young men.*

#### To the MISSIONARIES

Dear brothers, God again calls us to this remarkable time of retreat. This year, in particular, it must be for us a mystical source of heavenly blessings. In the past year, leaflets have been sent to our mission houses to invigorate and to portray our holy Institute in its various relationships and ways of doing good, so that we may better carry out God's will. In calling us to the apostolate, God wants to take delight in the perfection of our works, which respond to the sovereign designs of God's providence.

In those leaflets, we have gone into minute detail, since God is pleased to see exactitude in small matters, just as in the objects in relief symbolized in the pupil of the eye, and as the smallest objects are portrayed as a thin hair: *You have wounded my heart with one of your eyes, and with one hair of your neck* (Song 4:9). This entire holy system in itself tends to be orderly in production and fruitful in merits, and of distinctive virtue in its effects. One could never hope to see

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<sup>12</sup> The Italian has *eccitamento*, which has the connotation of exciting or provoking.

it promoted properly without that inner spirit which must always be renewed in good people so that it corresponds to God's approval.

We do not deny that up to now, by the grace and mercy of God, much has been done for the welfare of our foundations, our houses of studies, and finally for the various areas of our work in the apostolate to which God has deigned to call us. But have we finished the work which Providence has entrusted to us? Scarcely yet! My beloved brothers: Much remains to be accomplished in holy discipline in our own individual lives, in the communities in which we live, and in the apostolate to which we are directed.

## **I. Nurture growth in yourselves**

As for ourselves, have we not every reason to cry out: O great God, who deigned to choose us for the very sublime ministry of your great glory, what happier progress would we not show, were we animated with that ennobling spirit of deep humility, unalterable patience, and unwearied zeal in response to the heavenly gifts given to us! *I am one that sees my poverty* (Lam 3:1). Oh, our self-love, obstinacy in our own views, neglect of the those means suitable to our perfection offered by the Institute — what motives they give us for due sorrow and deep regret in your Presence! Come then, O divine Husbandman, visit the mystical vineyard of our souls this year, possibly the last of our lives. *Turn again, O God of hosts, look down from heaven, and see, and visit this vineyard, and perfect what your right hand has planted* (Ps 80:15-16).

With docility may we listen to your just complains *I planted you a chosen vineyard, all true seed: how then have*

*you turned into that which is good for nothing?* (Jer 2:21). These are the laments of a father concerned for the welfare of his children. Already we see in ourselves the fulfilment of the word of Scripture: *My soul melted when my beloved spoke* (Song 5:6).

Oh, these are days that are blessed by God who speaks to our heart in a special way. He wants to purify and free it from every bond and raise it to lofty aspirations of holiness, so that our holiness itself will shine in the external works of our apostolic life. These days are blessed since we are united with Mary in this mystical Cenacle, imploring the gifts of the divine Spirit so that we can leave the solitude of the retreat with the sweet comfort of willing, with divine grace, to fulfill what was said in the Scriptures: *The just shall shine and shall run about like sparks among the reeds. They shall judge nations, and rule over people, and their Lord shall reign forever* (Wis 3:7-8).

## **II. Give good example to your Confreres in the community**

*The just shall shine ...* behold the Gospel worker who has put on Jesus Christ: *Put on our Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom 12:14). He, through the mystical lamps of virtue, illuminates his neighbor: *His lamps are of fire and flames* (Cf. Song 8:6).

The minister of the Gospel is not satisfied, however, to fulfill God's will in himself by the uninterrupted study of the science of the saints. He seeks, in addition, to edify the others in the community in which he lives in a special way. He recognizes that his first duty is to be an example to all. *The just will shine*. He has regard for every member of our community, and, indeed, does everything to gain all for Jesus Christ. He has

sympathy for human misery, understands human weakness and frailty, and seeks to inspire all to put off the old Adam, to be, as we have said, newly clothed in Jesus Christ Crucified. He knows that the first duty of the apostolate is care for his own, *for if anyone have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel* (1 Tm 5:8).

Aware of this fact, what does he not do for the sanctification of all in the beautiful Heart of Jesus? How does he not exert himself, in all discretion and zeal, that the supreme decrees of God be carried out and our communities be seen as mystical reeds that burn? *The just shall shine and shall run about like sparks among the reeds.* Since a reed is hollow and fragile, it is easily swayed by the wind. Thus, the soul, to be clothed with the holy fire of God's love and responding to God's grace, will seek to withdraw from worldly things that leave no room for God's love.

Furthermore, the soul recognizes its own frailty and through that knowledge it does not stop living a humble life. Finally, the soul becomes aware of the energetic efforts of the devil to upset the soul and therefore cries out: *God is my strength, whom shall I fear?* (Cf. Is 12:3; Ps 27:1). It could indeed happen that an apostolic person, realizing that he or she is deficient in this regard, could seek this example of life from others. Besides prayer, the means that will lead to the attainment of our purpose in life include prudence, charity, and evangelical meekness.

Here let each one examine his own personal conduct in relations with our brothers in the community.

### III. Make yourself an efficacious instrument of God in the Apostolate

Lastly, a missionary, filled with the true spirit of God, will become an instrument in the hands of the Lord, to confirm the second part of the text quoted previously: *They shall judge nations, and rule over people* (Wis 3:6). With zeal and the practice of the ministry, *They will judge* in the living practice of the ministries; *they will rule* because of the impression they make on the people through those ministries and God's glory will be radiant: *Their Lord will reign forever* (Wis 3:8). They will point out a vice, and they will not hear the rebuke: *Physician, heal yourself* (Lk 4:23). In particular, they will judge sinners, yet in such a manner as urged by the Apostle: *Be imitators of me as I am of Christ* (cf. 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). They will inspire a beneficial awe of divine judgment which should fill the one who preaches. They will preach to the heart from the heart: *Not seeking what is their own but what is of Christ* (cf. Phil 2:21).

Their bearing should be dignified and humble, prudent, simple, and patient. There will be no room for rivalries, disputes, vanity or self-interest. The only interests that will animate us are God's glory and the good of others and of ourselves. Like fighters, we will support the cause of religion; as indefatigable tillers of the field of the Gospel, we will continually insist on new plantings and will prune the adult plants to establish flowering vines, in order to fulfill the Scripture: *the vines in flower yield their sweet smell* (Song 2:13). We will plant a hedge to protect the vines from those who persecute the good. This is the basis for offering moral applications in conferences and in the meetings of

the lay associations (*ristretti*). Our Institute calls us to do this where we have our foundations or among the people when we are giving missions or retreats. And are we not aware that the Lord tells us: *I have chosen you ... that you should go and should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain* (Jn 15:16)?

We must examine ourselves especially on this last point, lest we be able to read the accounts of St. Paul's journeys without being moved to tears. There we learn how he would visit his people, and when he was not able to do so, he would send his disciples or ardent letters to encourage the good people and to shake up those who had fallen into new sins. He never stopped praying for everyone.

This is the origin of the visiting or occasional sermons mentioned in our Rule that are preached in areas near the mission houses or of the tridua offered in more distant places.

#### **IV. The Blood of Jesus: fountain of apostolic zeal**

At this point, my dear brothers, we must offer the following admonition. Do we not feel in our hearts that same burning zeal for the welfare of souls, at least in the area of concern to which God calls us through the retreat this year? We must acquire fervor and spiritual thirst for souls. But who will discover this if not the one who stands at the mystical sources of the wounds of Jesus Christ and there meditates on the mysteries of the Divine Blood? Let us be on fire with a great zeal for the salvation of the people, so that we cry out with the Apostle: *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not on fire?* (2 Cor 11:29). *I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ, for my brothers and sisters* (Rom 9:3).

When we imagine that we have lived a life with a plentiful harvest in our ministry, we are just beginning. We tremble before God, and without losing hope let us tremble for ourselves and for the responsibility in the matters that we have been entrusted with, and perhaps for the lethargic manner we have fulfilled them. In other words, *When a person has finished, they are just beginning* (Sir 18:6). This exhortation anticipates every possibility, precludes every evasion. The times are critical, the conditions are miserable. All the more reason, then, that you should commit yourselves to become the light of the world and the salt of the earth: *Always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist* (2 Tm 4:5). Also recall the text: *If anyone serves me, the Father will honor them* (Jn 12:26). So, let us be resolved not only to walk, but to run along the way of our apostolic calling. God has chosen us; let us pray for one another, that in holy concord and unity of spirit, strongly united *in the bond of peace* (Eph 4:3) and in the Heart of Jesus Christ crucified we may be able to reach our blessed goal of Paradise laden with palms of victory. Amen.

### **To the Boarders**

My dear young men, you have already heard the sacred truths of religion regarding the apostolate for which you are prepare in this house of formation (*ecclesiastico Convitto*). Allow me, on God's behalf and in his adorable name, to direct but one appeal to you. As the Apostle says: *Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves* (Tt 2:6).

Moderation, then, is especially prescribed for you, besides being enjoined upon all: *Be sober, be watchful* (1 Pt 5:8).

Moderation implies the mortification of our various desires, our perverse inclinations, and our excessive appetites which seek to rule the human heart. The enemy, the adversary of everything good, vexes young people in particular, and especially priesthood students, to prevent those mystical seedlings from setting sufficiently deep roots of lasting virtue. The enemy would have them sprout as plants that are not trained to grow straight at the proper time, so that they become twisted and gnarled as they grow. Oh, what harm to souls!

*Be vigilant*, therefore, against the outward attacks with which the tempter tries to entrap you. *Be vigilant*, too, for the interior attacks which he seeks to set against you. *Be vigilant* over your observance of the Rule, which furnishes you with the weapons of defense. Finally, *be vigilant* in fervent prayer with God, in your self-examination during these days, in achieving inner renewal for the edification of your neighbor, so that, even though you are young in years, you may become spiritually mature in virtue. *The understanding of a person is grey hairs* (Wis 4:8). Do not fail to continue to pray for the Institute which has received you, which educates you for the sanctuary and the temple of God and directs your steps for the welfare of your souls and for the good of the Church. Amen.

## **To the BROTHERS**

May the spiritual principles which will be explained to you in the course of the retreat bear fruit. Receive them, my dearly beloved, in Jesus Christ with these attitudes: 1) as coming from God who speaks to your heart; 2) as acts of charity on the part of the Institute for the benefit of your souls; 3) as means directed for your sanctification.

You are dedicated to the service of the House of God and to the sacred institutions devoted to give him glory. Therefore, glory in your title of “Brothers-in-service,” (*inservienti*), a title which religion ennobles and uplifts, which holiness enlivens and promotes, and which humility especially guards and perfects. You serve God in serving God’s Work, the Congregation. Never think that engaging in external and earthly work is a hindrance to the welfare of your soul. There is no family or community, not even the most rigorously contemplative, which does not call for such activities. Only determine that you yourselves will not become the cause of your own spiritual loss.

Learn from Jesus Christ, who during his private life was subject to his Blessed Mother Mary and St. Joseph, whom he served with manual labor, so that he was considered to be *the son of the carpenter* (Mt 13:55). He teaches us that external and earthly works, when they are not separated from the life of the spirit, ground the soul in humility and also in patience, charity and meekness. He shows us how they can raise the heart aloft to the desire of heavenly things.

When you go about your duties, therefore, think of God in whose immensity we have our being. Think of obedience which sanctifies the entire person. Think of the good example you give in this way. Make every thought of sadness, dejection and sloth be far removed from you. Serve God and serve him in cheerfulness. Out of love for him, display the joy of the just, even in doing external works. Give evidence of that modesty which is surely the fruit of an internal purity of soul: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all* (Phil 4: 4-5).

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus  
Who with his Blood has saved us.

CAMILLO ROSSI, *Missionary, Pro-Secretary General*

# FIFTH LETTER — 1831

## Letter of Encouragement for the Exercises of the Year 1831

*The King brought me into the banqueting house,  
and his intention toward me was love (Song 2:4).*<sup>13</sup>

On the occasion of this holy retreat, let us withdraw into the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is the center of peace, the furnace of love, the ark of safety, and the mystical wine cellar. Our purpose is to raise our souls to that height of virtue and sanctity through which we became dear to God and acceptable to others: *beloved of God and people* (Sir 45:1). The urgent need that we have of profiting spiritually from the good that is to be done, the twofold spirit that we must acquire for our own renewal as well as that of others, the particular and general needs of the Church — all of these furnish us with special encouragement to benefit from the voice of God during these days. *The King brought me in*, etc.

### I. Christ calls us to communion with him

The peace-loving and meek King Christ Jesus brings us into that banquet hall to accomplish in us wonderful and surprising things. He assumes the title of king to signify the magnificence of his gifts, the extent of his infinite power, and

<sup>13</sup> The Vulgate reads: *He brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me* (Douay translation).

his most tender love, by which he leads us into this haven of peace. He will make us rich in merit and virtue, if only we respond to his graces.

He uses the image of a banquet hall to remind us of the conduct that we should observe so that we might receive and cherish his heavenly favors by means of a most intimate recollection in prayer. Let us learn how to make progress, so that the most loving Lord will offer us that substantial food and saving drink, which can renew our heart and refresh our spirit for the saving works of eternal life.

## **II. The three traveling companions**

Now, the soul may find itself in three states: the first is the state of lethargy, the second of dejection, and the third, a need for greater fervor and energy in laboring for God's glory. Take the example of three companions who are traveling toward a certain city. Let us imagine that one of them grows weak because of illness. The second, although in good health, finds himself exhausted because of the harshness of the journey. The third, though robust, feels the need of nourishment to sustain himself and keep the powers of his body active so that he can complete the trip that he has begun. Would it not be necessary to adapt the method of providing sustenance in these three cases according to the needs of each?

My dear brothers, let us apply the example to ourselves. Let us examine it in a spirit of profound humility before the adorable throne of the mercy of Jesus Christ, which is the Cross. Let us withdraw into the banquet hall of his divine Heart, as was proposed at the beginning, and speak to the divine Redeemer in this manner. O Lord, observe the lethargy

that spiritual infirmities have produced in our souls; we need a cure and we already know that you assured us through the Prophet that you are willing to heal our maladies. *[God] heals all your infirmities* (Ps 103:3).

### **III. The curative power of the wine and the bread**

The first thing we need is that mystical wine of contrition which takes away that lethargy and invigorates our souls anew. *You have made us drink the wine of sorrow* (Ps 60:5). As a result, in accordance with our need, once we are remorseful and contrite of conscience, we find ourselves again on the road that leads to paradise, and how this strengthens our hope! We also experience an urgent need for the heavenly bread and mystical wine of God's divine love. It takes away the despondency into which we could so easily fall were it not for you, O Lord, who propitiously supply us with nourishment. It is that very same nourishment that produces cheerfulness and gives rise to the courage to follow the road to the mountain of perfection. Therefore, the Prophet [sic] said: *Bread strengthens the human heart ... and wine cheers the human heart* (Ps 103:15). Yet the nearer we get to our beloved home, heaven, the more necessary it is that we grow strong in merit and rich in works before God. It is on this account that the dear Lord preserves for us special and choice wines, such as those mentioned in the Song of Songs: *My beloved is a cluster of cypress [in the vineyards of Engedi]* (Song 1:13). Intemperance in drink is forbidden, but in the spiritual order, blessed is the one inebriated with celestial and holy love, symbolized by the choicest wines of the vineyards of Engedi.

#### **IV. Cultivate and guard the mystical vineyard**

These wines, however, require the soul to cultivate the mystical vineyard of the heart, and here there should be vines that produce those wines. The divine Husbandman is Jesus. It is left to us to allow him to cultivate us, cooperating with the designs of his divine Providence. Then, indeed, will the prophetic words be fulfilled in all of us: *The flowering vines gave out their fragrance* (Song 2:13). Attracted by this fragrance, the people shall come to receive suitable nourishment. For this reason, it is also necessary to keep the protective hedge well-tended so that, while helping others, our mystical vineyard is not trampled underfoot, and its produce destroyed.

#### **V. The wine press of the Cross**

The wine cellar is fitted with a wine press to squeeze out the juice of the grape to produce those precious wines which we have been speaking. Indeed, using the wine cellar as a type, was not the Heart of Jesus put under the wine press of the cruelest suffering? And does not all the profit which comes from his sufferings pour into our souls? *I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with me* (Is 63:3).

My beloved in Jesus Christ, it is time for us to cultivate the vineyard of our souls, to suffer willingly under the wine press of present trials. The love of Jesus, represented by the wine, will take away our lethargy, will provide against our dejection, and will give us strength and comfort for the journey to our dear home in heaven, where we shall rejoice triumphantly for all eternity.

Let these sentiments be impressed upon the minds and hearts of each one of us. Let the image of the wine cellar remind us to fulfill our obligations in response to a God who is so lavish in giving gifts. May it remind us to scrupulously examine ourselves, to rouse us toward the cure of our spiritual ills. May it help us aim at the most lofty degrees of holiness. Since the King of Glory has brought us into this banquet hall, let us establish here our own peaceful abode in time. Let us reinforce the foundations of the holy city of God with the bonds of charity.

Let us remember that the nuptial bed of the peace-loving King is the Cross, and that on this nuptial bed our souls yearn to embrace Jesus with tender love. Jesus has redeemed us through love, has shed all his Blood in love, and through him we have a mystical dwelling in his heart. *[The King] brought me into the banqueting house, and his intention toward me was love* (Song 2:4).

*Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus,  
Who with his Blood has saved us.*

# SIXTH LETTER

## Letter of Encouragement for the Exercises of 1832

*May the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be ever  
with us. Amen. (Cf. 1 Cor 13:13)*

Venerable brothers, the time for the holy spiritual exercises is at hand. Once again, our benign God calls us to our retreat. *The time of visitation has arrived* (cf. Lk 19:44), and each one of us will repeat these words with grateful hearts: *Lo, I have gone far off ... and I abode in the wilderness* (Ps 55:8). However, we must examine ourselves during these particularly appropriate days. Let us first review some points briefly.

### **I. We are instruments of the glory of God**

The first duty to which the Almighty calls us is to contemplate his immense goodness in having chosen us as instruments of his glory and raising us to the heavenly and divine ministry. The Apostle says to each one of us: *I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands* (2 Tm 1:6). *As servants of God, we commend ourselves* (2 Cor 4:6). *He called us with a holy calling* (2 Tm 1:9). From this we see how noble and dignified our way of life must be, mindful of what the Prophet [sic] says, namely, that the mystical mountain of holiness constitutes the foundation

upon which Sion the beloved rests: *On the holy mountains stands the city he founded* (Ps 87:1). The mountains are the apostolic men through whom souls are led to higher sanctity and, consequently arrive at the mystical gates of Sion, which is the eternal salvation attached to the holiness of our ministries. *The Lord loves the gates of Zion* (Ps 87:1).

Therefore, the soul of an ecclesiastic dedicated to the growth of souls is that mysterious city about which great things are announced: *Glorious things are said of you, O City of God* (Ps 87:1). *A city on a hill cannot be hidden* (Mt 5:14). In this city, the just have their spiritual abode, and with spiritual joy each one longs to profit from the great benefits which God offers. *All who rejoice have their home in you* (Ps 87:7). What a great incentive this is for our constant and serious consideration.

## **II. Set up a bulwark against the torrents of vice**

A second reflection which must engage us during these days of silence and recollection is the urgent needs of the calamitous times in which we find ourselves. The person who does not sense nor see the obligation to serve the honor and glory of Jesus Christ is ungrateful and hard of heart beyond words.

See how today the majority of people mock the Divine Majesty, the law is trampled underfoot, the Holy Name of the Lord is profaned, and no thought is given to the inestimable price of our redemption. Oh, how deep the darkness that envelops the minds of people because of their sin! See how they malign the sanctuary, and how they seek to overturn good order, eradicating the peace that is found only in God. How we must make a bulwark against the torrent of vice and

be a wall defending the House of the Lord. Oh, how we need to say with the Prophet [sic]: *Strengthen me with a perfect spirit* (Ps 51:14). But how do we acquire this second spirit if by withdrawal during the Holy retreat?

### **III. Humility: terrifying to the devil**

Since the Lord makes use of humble souls for the grand works of his glory, and in order to come into special communion with God, let us this year resolve to acquire deeper humility. May this virtue govern our thoughts, affections, words, and deeds that we may again find favor in the eyes of God. Did not the Savior once say to the apostles? *I send you like lambs among wolves* (Cf. Mt 16; Lk 10:3). Did he not humble himself for the love of all, even to death on a cross? *He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even to death on the Cross* (Phil 2:8).

Through his humility, the humble shepherd Moses challenged Egypt with his miraculous staff; just so will a humble Gospel worker, with the mystical staff of the Cross, become terrifying to the devil. Thus, the wellspring of all holiness is a humble life. From it flow fraternal charity, docility in obedience and, above all, assiduous prayer before the throne of divine clemency. Through it we obtain greater graces, courage and strength for the ministry.

### **IV. The time is short**

May we be encouraged to fulfill all that these few words express in the brief time we are given to work: *The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.* (Rom 8:18). Also: *For*

*our momentary light affliction is producing in us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure and proportion* (2 Cor 4:17). Also let the thought that we are attached to an Institute which offers such broad opportunity for laying up treasures in heaven during the short span of our lives animate us to run the apostolic course with bold and swift steps that will fill our days with merit and virtue: *Full days shall be found in us* (Cf. Ps 73:10).

We add a special reflection for our seminarians. They must form in themselves the qualities that are needed for ministry, so that as they mature, fervor of spirit may grow in them, as well as their application to gaining knowledge and in the glory of God in giving good example to their brothers and sisters.

This example may help you young men. Just as soldiers are intent on furnishing themselves with weapons and providing themselves with ammunition for battle so that they will not fail in serving the prince, just so is it with those who are preparing themselves for the ministries of the Church and are training with the weapons needed for that ministry: *He trains my hands for the war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze* (2 Sam 22:35).

A reminder also to you, Brothers, who cooperate in the work of our Institute when missions and retreats are being conducted. We recommend that you imitate the angels who praise and bless God and, at the same time, act as custodians of the divine will on behalf of the human race. What do I mean by this? How are you to imitate them? It means this: that you learn how to unite the active life with the life of contemplation. Always walk in the presence of God and yearn for God. Immerse yourselves in him as in an ocean

of all goodness. Speak to him in daily and frequent prayer. When you are serving the Institute, remember that you are serving God.

My dearly beloved, be angels in your conduct, be angels in the love of God, be zealous for God's honor. Know that just as an angel was placed by God in custody over the earthly paradise, so too does our venerable Institute depend heavily on you for the safekeeping of our houses, which are havens of peace, places of special sanctification and quiet havens for so many who are then able to hear the voice of God in retreat. For this reason, the observance of the Rule, the maintenance of silence, and the good example to be given all form a part of your work of protection and custodial care.

Finally, let us all be united one to the other *in the bond of peace* (Eph 4:3) and *in the love of God and the patience of Christ* (2 Thes 3:5), in the adorable Heart of Jesus Christ. There, ponder the words of the Apostle: *Christ loved us and washed us in his Blood* (Rev 1:5). Let us implore an increase of fervor in the devotion to the divine Blood, the price of our redemption, the medicine and bath for our souls, the comfort and tenderness for our hearts. Amen.

Rome, 10 November 1832

*By the Director General*

GIOVANNI MERLINI, *Secretary General*

# SEVENTH LETTER — 1833

## Encouragement for the Exercises of the Year 1833

*They will be on the mountains,  
like the doves of the valley (Ez 7:16).*

Since we are called by God to the mystical mountain of perfection, which is proper to our state, to our ministry, and to our relationship with souls redeemed by the inestimable price of the divine Blood, during this retreat it will be valuable to reflect on the words quoted above. *They will be on the mountains, like the doves of the valley.*

### I. The purgative way

My dearly beloved, God surely wills that our conscience and our life present that innocence which the image of the dove offers us for consideration. Do we appear so in the eyes of the Almighty? Let us count with gratitude the years of our life, the blessings we have received from the Lord, the good works we have promised, and how we have carried them out. Let us see how urgent it is to cleanse our hearts: *Wash! Make yourselves clean!* (Is 1:16). Remembering also that nothing unclean shall enter heaven, to what perfection must we not aspire in this particularly acceptable time that we offer to the most

loving God? *Behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation* (2 Cor 6:2).

With this truth firmly set in our minds, let us spend some time, especially during these first days of retreat, in considering what the spiritual writers have to say about the purgative way. The dove, indeed, sighs more than the songbird sings. Truly precious is what Cardinal Bellarmine wrote in his work entitled *De gemitu columbae*. Yes, dear brothers, let us bewail our faults, our failings: *My sighing is not hidden from you* (Ps 38:9). *My eyes stream with tears* (Ps 119:136). *I roared with the groaning of my heart* (Ps 38:9). Let us weep for the needs of our times and the sins of the people. *Between the porch and the altar, the priests of the Lord will weep and say: spare, O Lord, spare your people.* (Jl 2:17). Lastly, let us lament with feelings of love for Jesus who says to us: *Look at me and weep* (Zec 12:10). Those tears will not produce excessive sadness, but rather will moisten the heart with that holy fervor which animates and directs the works that lead to eternal life.

The white dove is timid and watchful. When pursued by a hawk, it plunges into water. Similarly, the truly contrite soul during this holy retreat will adopt for itself that new manner of life which maintains alertness and watchfulness. The fear of God will make the soul ready to flee every occasion of relapsing into sin. It will imitate Noah's white dove, and in the mystical ark of the divine Heart, it will seek that peaceful mansion which contains a foretaste of paradise within. In that way, when the devil, like the cruel hawk, lies in wait, it will plunge itself courageously into the waters that flow from the fountain opened by the wounds of Christ. By coming in contact with those mystical waters of eternal life, it again will find comfort

and peace, while gathering new strength to conquer and rout the common tempter.

## **II. The illuminative way**

To make the means proportionate to the end, therefore, the soul must place before itself the marvelous teachings about the illuminative way. As the dove is without bitterness, so the soul strives to imitate it by constant mortification of the passions, symbolized by bitterness. Even in the smallest matters, the soul endeavors to be directed in such a way that makes humility, patience, meekness, love and all the other holy virtues habitual. In that way it acquires the fruits that are worthy of being offered to the heavenly Husbandman: *Let my Beloved come into his garden, let him eat his choice fruit* (Song 4:16). As the eyes of the dove are open and clear, so also will our intellectual vision of God and of heavenly things become open and clear. With a pure intention we shall seek nothing but his glory and the true benefit of souls. It is then that the Lord, transported in love and joy, exclaims: *Your eyes are doves* (Song 4:1; 5:12), *they overwhelm me* ( Song 6:5). These reflections, these truths, O venerable brothers, enable us to harvest abundant fruit from this year's retreat, and to acquire the science of the saints, the only center of the desires of our hearts.

## **III The unitive way**

Because virtue acquired is very pleasing to our spirit, those who seek righteousness become sick at whatever leads away from God, and they thirst only for God, and long for God continually in the unitive way. The doves are ordinarily

*along the streams of waters* (Song 5:12). Let our souls dwell near the fountains of eternal life, and like the deer, go in search of the favorite stream to quench its thirst. Thus, we thirst for our most loving God: *As a deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God* (Ps 42:1). And what does the Lord say? *All who are thirsty, come to the water* (Is 55:1). *Those who drink of me will thirst for more* (Sir 24:21).

On the other hand, the dove also spreads out its wings in flight: *the wings of a dove* (Ps 68:14). We too, by advancing in virtue and the desire for perfection, should seek to fly to the throne of the Lord. This refers to the perfection which we must acquire by degrees; but *who will give me wings?* (Cf. Ps 55:7). God answers us: *Imitate the dove*, and let your glossy wings open in flight: *You will be like the wings of a dove covered in silver* (Ps 68:13). Glossy and silver ... resplendent is whatever good promotes the interests of divine glory: *the wings of a dove covered in silver and its pinions in gold*. Such is the sweet yoke of the priesthood! What a goldmine available for us to amass our riches in heaven! These are the victories of holiness which come from living on the mystical mountains of the sanctuary, imitating the qualities of the dove: *They will be on the mountains, like the doves of the valley* (Ez 7:16).

#### **IV. Humility**

Finally, let humility be the foundation and support of every good work and holy affection, but let it also be the guardian of the merits which are acquired through divine grace. Let it be our guide, our counselor, our teacher. May it lead us to the knowledge of our duties and of our failings. May it lead us by the hand to the fulfillment of all that God asks of us. Let

humility confirm charity. Let it arouse souls to be united with the adorable heart of Jesus Christ and make us one day the partakers of his most blessed kingdom in heaven. Amen.

*They will be on the mountains, like the doves of the valley.*

# EIGHTH LETTER

## Encouragement for the Spiritual Exercises of the year 1834

To prepare you for the spiritual exercises this year, I am pleased, my venerable and dear brothers in Jesus Christ, to use those memorable words which we repeat so often during the course of the liturgical year. They will rouse us from any laxity into which we might have fallen, and with the grace of God and our own good will, lead us to wholehearted and fervent resolutions. These are the thoughts which God places before us. *Your saints, O Lord, have walked along a wonderful way, fulfilling your commandments, that they might be found unhurt in the midst of the mighty waters.*<sup>14</sup> We will comment on these words.

### I. Called to holiness

We are called to holiness: *This is God's will, your sanctification* (1 Thes 4:3). It is the sanctity willed by God, taught by the Church, and desired by the people. It is that sanctity which brings order, reforms the individual, and gives that person a desire for accomplishing good works, focusing every effort on true and lasting happiness in God. For what other purpose are we in this valley of tears, if not to shine as the light and thus prepare ourselves for our cherished home in heaven?

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<sup>14</sup> Taken from the *Roman Breviary*.

That religious idea should grow not only from general principles that we briefly call to mind, but also in particular reflections, which have a special bearing for our life. God does not only lead our souls on a common path of virtue, but on a marvelous way: *We have followed a marvelous path (Roman Breviary)*. That is to say, it is a path separated from our family and from anything that might hinder us, a path of dying to ourselves so that we might fulfill the divine commandments: *Keeping your precepts (Roman Breviary)*. And are these not the shining evidence of God's wonderful conduct toward us, comforting us and promising us a hundredfold and eternal life? *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields on account of my name will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Mt 19:29)*. Happy the one who reflects on these things, who lives only for God, fulfilling these words: *Your saints, O Lord (Roman Breviary)*.

Here is the material for our self-examination during the days of the retreat: the exercise of profound humility, of sincerest gratitude, or generous courage to acknowledge the time spent in listlessness, tepidity and faintheartedness. This is a time to rally new strength not only to walk, but to run the course pointed out to us by the Lord. In this way, we can free ourselves from the sway of anything that is detrimental to our souls.

## **II. The Blood of Christ: our special path to holiness**

My dear brothers, one need only gaze on Jesus. With the staff of the Cross, he has opened for us a path through this pitiful sea of the world. In that path we are free and safe from any flood or storm: *That they may be found unhurt in the midst*

*of the mighty waters (Roman Breviary)*. As the Lord never fails to support the needs of every creature, so he offers us the Red Sea, a symbol and type of the mysteries of his Precious Blood. It is in that Blood that we find provisions for our welfare. The mystical soil of souls, arid because of sin, is cultivated and watered. A way is prepared for the sinner to leave Egypt, an image of this wicked and broken world.

Jesus encourages the penitent person and those souls burning with love for him as travelers shipwrecked in this mysterious sea. This is the triumph of the kindness of God, the Redeemer of humankind: *Dry land appeared and out of the Red Sea, a way without impediment (Wis 19:7)*. How many truths are contained in these few words! Jesus the Savior wants this retreat to be a time for recollection, and he invites us to study the great book of the Cross that we may acquire heavenly wisdom for the sanctification of ourselves and others. But my dearly beloved, what will we read in the wounds of Jesus Crucified if not this: that Christ is the mystic rock struck with the staff of the Cross? *He struck the rock and water flowed and streams gushed out (Ps 78:20)*.

Through him we enjoy those mystic waters in abundance. They symbolize the graces issuing from the merits of the divine Blood to enable purity of life in ourselves and in our neighbor. Let us, then, listen to the convincing voice of the Savior who shows us his sufferings as an incentive to be zealous for souls, for they have been purchased at an inestimable price: *You have been bought at a great price (1 Cor 6:20)*. The apostolic labors, the perseverance in the duties of ministry, the suffering in defense of the work of salvation, should not depress us but should stimulate us to imitate our divine Master

and exemplar. In this manner *we have walked in marvelous ways (Roman Breviary)*. We will fulfill the words of Scripture: *Though the elect be punished in the sight of men and women yet is their hope full of immortality forever (Cf. Wis 3:4)*. What a sweet consolation to be able to spend our life as a worthy sacrifice for the greater honor of God and the welfare of souls! What an interesting and glorious career the Almighty offers to us! And, what laurels, what crowns as a reward! *Therefore, they have earned triumphal crowns (Roman Breviary)*.

### **III. Revitalizing our vocation**

Let us pray to reach such a goal. Growing stronger in brotherly love, let us endeavor to understand more and more the purpose for which God has united us together in our mission houses, namely, to be a mutual help in attaining the spirit of fervor and knowledge, in doing the work of ministry, in wielding the mystic armaments of the spirit, and no less in acquiring the means helpful to attain our goal: *Because of the covenant of the Lord and the laws of their fathers, the saints of God lived in brotherly love, for one spirit and one faith was always in them (Roman Breviary)*.

Blessed, then, are they who, according to their calling, dwell in the house of the Lord, either preparing themselves for the ministry, as our seminarians, or engaging in ministerial work, or engaging in their respective occupations as do the lay Brothers. I say: *Blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord; they can ever praise you (Ps 84:5)*.

In conclusion, it is something holy and delightful to live united in charity for the reasons just stated: *Behold, how good it is and how pleasant when people live together in unity (Ps*

133:1). It is *good* because it helps us toward sanctification; it is *delightful* because it redounds to the glory of the ministry. Therefore, let there be unity of spirit and harmony of will in all things, so that, founded firmly on the mystic rock of the Cross, we may repel the darts which hell constantly aims at us. Let us fashion a noble crown for beloved Sion. Amen.

# NINTH LETTER — 1835

## Circular Letter for the Exercises of the Year 1835

[To the Missionaries]

*May the grace and the love of Jesus Christ be ever in our hearts. Amen (Cf. 2 Cor 13:13).*

*Fix your attention on yourself (1 Tim 4:16). Be attentive to the public reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you (1 Tim 4: 13-14).*

Dearly beloved, God uses these memorable words to call us to the spiritual exercises this year. Even though, with the grace of God, we constantly apply these words to the aim and object of our priestly work, nevertheless we must refresh our spiritual forces so that we can persevere in good works and with greater eagerness promote the glory of God.

### **I. Refreshing the strengths of the spirit**

It cannot be denied that to maintain and support the exterior life requires the cultivation of the interior life. The resulting zeal and fire of charity for the welfare of souls will be proportionate to the effort that we expend in immersing ourselves in that work of renewal. Therefore, the Apostle urges each of us: *Fix your attention on yourself ... for by doing this you will save both yourself*

*and those who hear you* (1 Tim 4:16). What would happen to us, if while dispensing the mysteries of our holy religion to others, we would not apply them to ourselves? What would so much good avail us, that good which the apostolate offers and to which God has deigned to call us, if our apostolate is not animated and directed by the true spirit of God?

May the following words never be justifiably applied to any one of us: *we worked hard through the whole night, we caught nothing* (Lk 5:5). The years are passing and fleeting time, which will never return, is drawing us toward an endless eternity. Let each one, therefore say to himself: *Why are you sound asleep? Get up! Call on your God!* (Jonah 1:6). *Physician, heal yourself* (Lk 4:23).

## **II. What is a Missionary?**

Who are the authentic workers of whom the Apostle speaks? They are those who act in a true spirit of the Lord and show themselves to be true ministers of the sanctuary: *Let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God* (2 Cor 6:4). *Those led by the Spirit of God are the sons and daughters of God* (Rom 8:14). The older I become, said St. Vincent de Paul, the more I know what a missionary should be: he is a man sent by God *to give his people knowledge of salvation* (Lk 1:77). He is a visible angel sent to the people to bring divine messages: *I saw the angel of God face to face* (cf. Judges 6:22). He is the mystic trumpet of the Lord calling those who have strayed to return to repentance. He encourages those already converted and leads the just to greater holiness: *Raise your voice like a trumpet* (Is 58:1).

What is a missionary? He is a man who, spiritually dead to everything which could hinder the purpose of the ministry and his holy vocation, lives in union with God and for God's glory alone: *To me, living is Christ* (Phil 1:21). He is a man who nourishes himself with no other food than with the heavenly food to which the sacred text refers: *My food is to do the will of my Father* (Jn 4:34). He thirsts after justice and sanctity: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice* (Mt 5:6). His heart, animated by the heavenly fire of the love of God, is pierced and moved when he sees that men do not love God: *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not on fire?* (2 Cor 11:29).

So, let us consider how we ought to examine ourselves in these days on the things that we have mentioned up to this point, so that we might renew within ourselves the passion of the kind of life which confirms what Jesus once said to his apostles: *You will testify about me* (Jn 15:27). *With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus* (Acts 4:33). By this self-examination, we will come to realize better how our Institute provides us with these means through which we are to advance toward an increasingly vigorous life of virtue: withdrawal from the world, recollection, silence, examination of conscience, and all the other means enumerated in our practices. These practices help develop the spirit to make progress in priestly perfection: *[The saints] shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall fly and not faint* (Roman Breviary; cf. Is 50:31).

This interior cultivation of the Spirit is the foundation for the exterior life of ministry. We are ordained to perform duties towards God, towards our communities, and towards our

neighbor. Each of us should fulfill the words of the Lord when speaking of the just person who seeks always to advance and mature in holiness: *[Blessed is the one] who chooses the holy journey. Passing through the valley of lament ...* (cf. Ps 84:6-7).

### **III. Be like Mary: listen so that you are listened to**

My dearly beloved, let us diligently keep these few sentiments in our hearts, and let them be deeply engraved there. Let us imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, who cherished the words of our blessed Savior, for she was the very mirror of sanctity: *Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart* (Lk 2:19). After Jesus, may our good Mother be our guide and teacher, our prototype and model. In a spirit of deep humility, let us listen to and cherish those teachings of God which are given in the sacred passages quoted above. May our hearts be filled with those holy desires which seek a more intimate union with the highest Good. May God always direct our tongue in announcing the eternal truths to the people: *My heart is moved with a good word* (Ps 45:1). *Lord, open my lips* (Ps 51:17).

In closing, let each of us heed the following: *I will hear what God, the Lord, will speak, because he will speak peace to his people* (Ps 85:8). Did you notice? First, I myself must listen, so that I may then be listened to by the people. With the grace of God and in accordance with each one's capacity, there will be realized both in me and in others that very system of peace which establishes the kingdom of God firmly in our hearts: *I will hear what God, the Lord, will speak, because he will speak peace to his people* (Ps 85:8).

### **Reminder to the Young Boarders**

to be read where there are boarding students

Already when the retreat was first announced, you heard the voice of God in your hearts. Remember the lofty obligations that you are going to assume as you prepare for ministry. Seriously consider sacred matter and in acquiring solid virtues, so that you become light of the world, and, by developing the skills of ministry, the salt of the earth. Imitate the private life of Jesus and examine yourselves on this especially during these days: *That the life of Jesus be manifested in us* (2 Cor 4:10).

Consecrate the first fruits of your calling to God and remain as lilies in the garden of the Church, and the most loving Jesus will find special consolation in you and will always fill you increasingly with rich blessings. You should ask for all these things with deep humility, particularly during this retreat. Habitually maintain a singular purity of intention, so that you act with exceptional charity to be true children of light: *Walk as children of light* (Eph 5:8). *Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you* (Jn 12:35).

### **To The Brothers**

United as you are here during the retreat, my dear Brothers in Jesus Christ, remember the ways of divine Providence, who called you to be of help in our holy Institute.

Examine yourselves regarding your response to God, on the practice of the virtues, and on your beneficial use of the means God has given you for becoming holy.

Remember that in serving the Institute you are serving a work that is from God. You must be diligent and eager in

fulfilling the obligations that the Lord has entrusted to you, which you easily understand.

Do not blame others for your failings but lay the blame on your own lack of virtue. With the grace of God, you will, however, acquire that virtue during this retreat. May the Lord *satisfy your desire with good things* (cf. Ps 104:5), so that as you are saints in time you will triumph in eternity. Amen.

### Words of advice

1. Let the spirit of prayer, of humility, and maintaining union with God grow in all, and let us pray for ourselves and for the souls God entrusts to us.
2. Everyone should have a spiritual director (*una Guida*), but not only in name, but according to the prescription of our Albertini in *Direttore Diretto*.
3. Let each have a great attachment to the Institute and pray for it, and for the growth of its works and let us fear losing our vocation through our own fault.
4. Let charity triumph in all encounters, and in recreation speak of those matters that edify. Let us not judge by that which God has not entrusted to us; let us not get lost in trivial matters, especially when dealing with an apostolic man.
5. The first apostolate among us and our Brothers should be to edify by example. Let this maxim be taken to heart by all: *Love to be forgotten and esteemed by no one* (*Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, ch. 2). *When you have done all the things you were ordered to do, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done what we were obligated to do' (Lk 17:10).*

6. Obedience is the mystical ship that conducts us to the port, but let it be blind, generous, long suffering. I say nothing about zeal, and diligent charity, with which one must promote the good, having a genuine thirst for souls, and never for those things that are repugnant to virtue. From this derives seriousness together with tenderness, impartiality in action, and the contentment that God disposes for us, and without allowing laments, ostentation, and similar actions.
7. Let all have a tender devotion to the Divine Blood and let them be attentive to the speedy spread of the devotion using the methods already mentioned. Let Holy Mary, St. Francis Xavier, and our guardian angel guide us on the road that takes us to paradise.

[There follow three paragraphs devoted to temporalities, indulgences, and the general archives.]

*For Canon DEL BUFALO, Missionary Apostolic,  
Director General  
GIOVANNI MERLINI, Secretary General*

# TENTH LETTER — 1836

## Encouragement for the Exercises of November of the year 1836

### To the MISSIONARIES

To follow the usual method of encouraging one another to a renewed fervor in virtue in the spiritual exercises, to which our lovable God calls us, here are some brief reflections the Lord offers us for reflecting on our holy vocation in this time of recollection. I do not deny that the spiritual thoughts that we briefly call to mind now, my dear brothers, may have been presented to our heart on some former occasion, and I am convinced of this. In any case, they are reproduced here for us to recall, these holy lights of God that are given us to be more extensively elucidated: *The unfolding of your words gives light, giving understanding to the simple* (Ps 119:130).

The three points which must be made the primary objectives of our meditation this year are: first, a fuller understanding of the sublime task for which God has chosen us; second, the good use of the means which the mercy of God continually offers us for the attainment of our end; third, the obstacles which the evil spirit places in our way, which not only retard our spiritual progress, but likewise impede our ministry in its grand goal of giving glory to God.

## I. Our vocation

In regard to the first point, we should like the time to consider the question which the Mellifluous Doctor [St. Bernard of Clairvaux] proposed to each one of his monks. *Why have you come here?* Yes, let each one of us ponder these words and thus better understand the purpose of our being in the Institute. A true detachment from all things and from all others, self-conquest and consequently the eradication of disorderly inclinations are, without doubt, prerequisites for accomplishing a well-regulated, disinterested and holy work entrusted to us by God. Every human attachment lessens our good work, alters its degree of merit, and is a great hindrance to perfection. Job said: *I become afraid of all my sufferings* (Jb 9:28).

St. John of the Cross, that great master of the spiritual life, illustrates this point by means of the following analogy: the hunter who uses just a very fine thread attached to a bird will readily hamper its flight through the air; in like manner, the attachments of the soul, no matter how insignificant the ties may be, inevitably retard its mystic flight to God. It is not sufficient, therefore, that I merely do something good, but I must likewise work by that spirit of the Lord which animates, directs and raises that good work to the greater glory of God: *All who are moved by the spirit of God are the true sons and daughters of God* (Rom 8:14). How blessed are we, if prompt fulfillment of the divine will serves as the mystical food to nourish and strengthen our souls. *My food is to do the will of the one who sent me* (Jn 4:24).

What, then, is a missionary? He is one sent by the Lord *to give his people knowledge of salvation* (Lk 1:77). He is an extraordinary minister who offers new means, beyond the

ordinary, for the sanctification of the people. Since such a sublime career demands an eminent degree of virtue; the laity expect and demand it from us. Since we are all aware that the ministry is branching out into so many various fields of operation, can anyone fail to understand that this very fact should also be a strong incentive for an irreproachable life? Profound humility, ardent charity, steady and indomitable patience amidst suffering, mystically alive through virtuous acts: these should be the abundant adornments for our sanctification and that of others: *The Lord greatly desired the daughter of Jerusalem. adorned with her jewels. (Roman Breviary)*^

We note that the soul consecrated to God is compared to a valiant woman, demonstrated in the moral application of this text: *Her hands she puts onto the distaff, and her palms hold a spindle (Prov 31:19)*. The hand is the instrument ready for work. So, a steady and painstaking fortitude in our work will make us acceptable to the heavenly Spouse who, out of love for us, advises us to weave a choice garment. In other words, we are to delicately fashion the work of sanctity in ourselves and in others. Once this valiant woman had applied herself to the task of weaving with a thread of the choicest silk (an allusion to her various virtues) she was able to present that most precious garb spoken of in the words of the text: *She makes for herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple ... and she laughs at the future (Prv 31: 21, 25)*. It is no wonder, then, that she could be acclaimed with words of praise. *They will proclaim her most blessed (Prv 31:28)*.

My beloved in Christ, let us reflect deeply on these truths and absorb their meaning, so as to renew in ourselves that spirit to which God is constantly calling us. Let us often repeat

the words of the prophet: *renew a right spirit within my bowels* (Ps 51:12). And, in the remaining days of our pilgrimage here below, let us keep in continuous contact with the Lord so that *full days may be found in us* (Ps 73:10).

## **II. The three means of cooperating with the designs of God**

It is not enough for us to take note of the lofty relations of God with us unless we consider the means by which we cooperate with those designs of the Most High. We must likewise consider the most suitable means by which we ought to cooperate with almighty God's plans.

I observe that there are three principal means which that valiant woman used with special diligence that assured her of the acclaim expressed in the quotation above. The first is her love of reserve; the second, her constancy in prayer; the third, untiring zeal for work. So, too, an apostolic worker, a soul consecrated to God, must be fond of recollection, in which God communicates with us in a way proportionate to our external life of ministry. A missionary must be a mystic in his own room, and a laborer in the field. Let him unite the interior life with the exterior and live in harmony with God.

In other words, the interior life is the basis upon which the exterior life builds. Lack of interior life deprives the edifice of its foundation. If the foundation is not firm, the exterior edifice cannot be erected in keeping with the divine Will. Prayer, moreover, directs the construction of the edifice of the interior life, gives it a splendid design, softens the work involved in building it, and finally knows how to adorn it so that it calls people

to admire the Lord's works: *Come and see the works of the Lord* (Ps 46:8).

The souls entrusted to our care should be persuaded to make this spiritual edifice their mystical abode. With the help of God, they will then find a remedy if they are infirm, strength if they are weak, and courage if they are faint-hearted. For the redeemed, it will be their protection, their defense and their sanctification.

However, there will be those who obstinately resist the divine Mercy. In order to overcome that resistance, we must have zeal, be tireless in work and unflinching in trials, always energetic in sacred functions, and becoming all things to all people to gain all for Christ. In reference to this, it is said of that valiant woman: *She tasted and saw that her efforts are good* (Prv 31:18) ... *She has opened her mouth to wisdom* (Prv 31:26) ... *she has not eaten her bread idle* (Prv 31:26) ... *she has strengthened her arm ... the heart of her husband trusts in her* (Prv 31:17). Therefore we are fortunate, particularly during these days when we are close to Jesus our Master, when we are moved by his love and allow our actions to be the fruit of these sentiments.

### **III. Foresee and overcome the obstacles**

A soldier, who has been well drilled in training camp, will advance cautiously upon enemies in order to discover their ambush and eventually bring them under control and triumph over them. Just so we must conduct ourselves in the apostolate which has been entrusted to us, being mindful of the words of the Apostle to his beloved disciple: *Labor as a good soldier of Jesus Christ* (2 Tm 2:3).

In applying the means which I have just proposed, means that furnish us with those weapons of light which we should constantly employ against the infernal host, we will be tempted to become discouraged, bored, lazy, proud, or angry. These will trouble our spirit and blind us to the importance of the priesthood, keep us from being successful, and discourage us in the face of opposition. But let us be united in our endeavor to conquer the flatteries and deceptions of the tempter *lest my enemy say: I have conquered* (Ps 13:5). Since the demon is constantly bent upon defeating every good work, how great an effort will he make towards obstructing the great work of our apostolate? Let us always keep in mind: *I can do all things in him who strengthens me* (Phil 4:13). *Who will separate me from the love of Christ?* (Rom 8:35). With the well-fashioned mystic staff of divine grace, let us overcome the haughtiness of the enemy, just as the staff of Moses once humbled the pride of the Pharaoh. In grasping this staff, we find support, encouragement and assistance in our trials: *Your rod and your staff give me comfort* (Ps 23:4).

Now that we have communicated these important spiritual reflections in the bond of charity among us, let us carry them out promptly. To use a scriptural phrase, may they serve as the mysterious seals which thoroughly close the doors of our hearts to the enemy of good works. May they bring us that peace of heart which is a foretaste of paradise. Thus, serving God with a ready spirit, we fervently desire to possess him for all eternity. Amen.

### **To the SEMINARIANS [and BROTHERS]**

My dear young men, God gives you a special message.

You are the new plantings of the Institute. We look upon you with tender religious affection. In you we offer our tireless care and solicitude, so that as you advance in years you may also advance in virtue and spiritual fervor. But what means shall you employ for accomplishing your goal? Holy obedience: that is the virtue on which you must examine yourselves: *An obedient person will speak of victory* (Prv 21:28). Obedience is that mystical lamp whose light points out the way of eternal salvation to you. It uncovers the snares of the enemy, gives you security in what you do, sets your mind and heart at rest, and calls into practice the other virtues that crown us with merit for our heavenly fatherland. It will make you true imitators of Jesus Christ, the model of perfect obedience: *he became obedient unto death* (Phil 2:8). We must not allow our own way of thinking, vanity (which so easily inserts itself), and false principles (which are so easily adopted) to rule our steps, but rather the spirit of the Gospel, the example of conduct of the saints. These inner patterns stirred by religion should sustain our sobriety of life, good example, and preparation for the ministry.

Since they are equally useful for all, these admonitions can serve, in a special way, also for the brothers. May the peace and love of Jesus Christ always be in our hearts. Amen.

*Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus,  
who with his Blood has saved us.*  
For Canon DEL BUFALO, Missionary Apostolic,  
Director General  
GIOVANNI MERLINI, Secretary General.

## ELEVENTH LETTER — 1837

### Spiritual Thoughts to be Considered During the Exercises of the year 1837

[To the MISSIONARIES]

Dearest brothers, in years past God has offered us reflections that are greatly beneficial for our spiritual life. He has provided us with the wholesome food of his heavenly and divine words so that we might walk in the way of holiness with vigor and strength. Let each one of us examine himself in the presence of God on how we have responded to these divine favors. Once again, we have arrived at that happy time during which we are called by our most loving God to look over the record book of our consciences. We must examine ourselves diligently and zealously on how we have made use of the graces, the talents, and the time which God has so far given us so that we may lay up treasures for heaven. May we never become like the idle servant who buried his talent, like the steward wasteful of the goods of his master, or the foolish virgins who carried empty lamps. The Apostle trembled when he uttered those memorable words: *Lest somehow after preaching to others, I myself should become disqualified* (1 Cor 9:27).

What, then, should we say, who are so wretched in the sight of God? Each one of us might well repeat: *I am a person who has seen misery* (Lam 3:1). May our holy mother the Church pray that strong workers rise to meet the needs of the time

and wage war against vice and sin with the mystic weapons of the ministry. Now especially during the present retreat, God will teach us the use of those weapons: *He trains my hands for battle* (Ps 18:35). I suggest three things in particular for our consideration during these days.

## **I. Why are we in the Institute?**

First, we will examine ourselves in the light of the question which the Mellifluous Doctor [St. Bernard] was accustomed to ask his monks: *Why have you come?* For what purpose are we in the Institute? It is to cooperate with the great designs of divine Providence in the sanctification of ourselves and others; to be united in the bond of charity in order to set up a rampart against the sinfulness of the world, and to quench the thirst of Jesus for souls, to imitate more closely the life of Jesus Christ through detachment from home, parents, worldly comforts and, above all, *from ourselves*. How all of this contributes to our genuine benefit and to the glory of God! Therefore, I am not in the Society to work according to my own opinions, or to cater to self-love, even in spiritual matters, or to foster petty animosities, acting according to my own likes and dislikes. Rather, I am in the Institute to look after the life of my soul, to offer myself for the glory of God with a holy abandonment in God, and to train myself in humility and obedience, so that I may better know God's divine will by being completely reliant upon him as I should.

## **II. Love for our communities**

The second point about which we must examine ourselves is the religious and sincere love that we are to show towards our

communities and towards one another. We should always act according to the spirit of the Lord. *Those are the true children of God who are moved by the Spirit of God* (Rom 8:14). We should act in such a manner that we, too, might have stamped upon our hearts the saying of the great Xavier: *May my right hand be forgotten, if I forget you, Society of Jesus* (cf. Ps 137:5).

In this matter, may our love be very special. Let it be generous and outgoing, patient and longsuffering, judicious and vigorous. Let us apply to ourselves those memorable words: *If any do not care for their own, and especially of those of their house, they have denied the faith, and are worse than unbelievers* (1Tm 5:8). *But who are the members of God's household?* (cf. Eph 2:19), ask many interpreters [of the Scriptures]. They are those who are especially called to the sanctuary, to the convents, to a more intimate union with the Lord. Now who does not know that the abundance of the harvest depends on cultivating those mystic plants? The heavenly Husbandman is pleased with them and expresses his delight.

May God grant that in the case of our communities these words will be realized: *The flowering vines give forth their fragrance* (Song 2:13). The vineyard, however, has its protective hedge, so that the foxes may not creep in stealthily to destroy the vineyard. So, too, by way of comparison, the Rule is also a hedge which prescribes withdrawal from the world, silence, proper conduct with outsiders, prudence in our dealings, and virtuous diligence in our activities. The cultivation of a vineyard requires skill, toil, vigilance and fruitful rain. Likewise, in the cultivation of our communities, we need special graces. These are obtained through prayer, through working strenuously

to accomplish good works, in being orderly, and in being attentive to gathering the desired fruit. In a marvelous way, our instructions and our Rule, which cannot be too highly recommended, work together for this.

### **III. Promoting the glory of God in the apostolate of the Institute**

Finally, the third point for our meditation is our activity in furthering those objectives which lead towards the glory of the Lord. We do this by seeking to give them permanence through the commitments which our Institute places before us, using the means that it specifies as well as the practices which it encourages. Here, let the apostle St. Paul speak. In his letters he reveals a very profound zeal for the salvation of souls and for nurturing them tirelessly: *I have begotten you through the Gospel* (1 Cor 4:15). *I would wish to become anathema for the sake of my brothers and sisters* (Rom 9:3). *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is caused to sin, and I do not burn with indignation?* (2 Cor 11:29). *The love of Christ drives us* (2 Cor 5:14). *With all our affliction, I am overjoyed* (2 Cor 7:4).

### **IV. Spiritual reflections for growing in charity**

My dear brothers, let us meditate on these citations, and so that the thoughts expressed in this letter of encouragement might have the fruitful results intended by God, let us set before ourselves a few spiritual reminders that can serve as sparks of fire that will ignite the flames of charity:

1. External life, if not guided by and based on the interior life, will exhaust the physical strength of a worker, but it will not make him irreproachable before God.

2. Whoever loves withdrawal from the world, a humble and lowly life, and ensures the practice of virtues will not lose holy and Divine Love. A person will not permit a precious liquid to evaporate, ascetic writers are wont to say, but will use all care to preserve it.
3. One who is content with the lesser good through idleness stands close to evil. The one who stands far from evil always aspires to the greater good.
4. It is the greatest form of wretchedness to be rich in intellectual gifts, popular acclaim, oratorical skills, and so forth, if these are not linked to virtue and are not seen in their relationship to God.
5. It is the language of the world to speak well of oneself, evil of others.
6. Whoever lives in obedience encounters God's will, maintains peace of heart and furthers the edification of his neighbors.
7. The efficacious means to obtain zeal in accomplishing all that we propose to do is devotion to the divine Blood. May it be the joy of our hearts.

### **Spiritual reflection for our Seminarians**

In the practice of virtue there are three different degrees. The first occurs when a person sometimes performs acts of virtue. The second occurs when they try to apply themselves in such virtues on every occasion. The third is that in which one aims at perfection in virtue.

Let everyone examine himself in this regard.

### **Spiritual reflections for the Brothers**

In order that a Brother might be a worthy son of the Institute and fulfill his obligations well, let him remember these brief but significant words: *Speak little! Work hard! Bear with everything!*

These sentiments, especially directed to the seminarians and brothers, are also useful for every member of our community.

May the grace, the peace, and the mercy of Jesus Christ always abound in our hearts. Amen

6 November 1837

On behalf of Can. DEL BUFALO, Missionary Apostolic,  
Director General

GIOVANNI MERLINI, Missionary, Secretary General

