

MIGUEL ÁNGEL ASIAIN

**CALASANZ' VOCATIONAL
EXPERIENCE**



MADRID/ROMA, 2021

MATERIALES

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Calasanz' vocational experience

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PRESENTATION

The Pious Schools have declared the year 2012 as the PIARIST VOCATIONAL YEAR, a year destined to strengthen the vocational dynamic throughout the Order, with a clear and definite objective: *to place Vocation Ministry at the source of the life of the Pious Schools, as a core element of our revitalization process and as one of the keys that will make possible the diverse the various objectives that we have set.* To take a more intense and systematic Vocation Ministry is one of the keys to the future we dream of and yearn for.

In order to contribute to a deeper and more Calasanzian reflection on Vocation Ministry, the General Congregation asked Fr. Miguel Angel Asiain to publish a new book focusing on what St. Joseph Calasanz thought about and proposed regarding the process of incorporation of young men into the Order founded by him.

I am convinced that the Order has to go more strongly along the *road of identification with Calasanz*. It must do so in all senses, in all areas. And possibly one of the most significant is this: what can we learn from Calasanz in relation to our capacity to raise up, welcome, accompany and form the new Piarist vocations.

This is the aim of the book you hold in your hands. I hope that this publication contributes to the success of the Piarist VOCATIONAL YEAR and help us all to understand more clearly how we have to live and work so that, as Piarist, we may be witnesses of a charism to which we have consecrated our lives. The capacity that the charism of Calasanz has to arouse life among children and young people is extraordinary; but it depends fundamentally on the life it provokes in us, the Piarists, and on the vigour with which we live and work and on the discernment and wisdom with which we accompany the processes of young people.

Brothers, let us learn from Calasanz. Let us enter into his thoughts, let us analyse his concerns, let us delve into his advices and his priorities. I am convinced that there is much vocational richness in his writings and teachings.

I thank Fr Asiain for his work and his willingness to write this book, whose content is very interesting for the Order. And I thank you all your efforts and dedication to the Piarist vocational proposal. Let us do it, like Calasanz, *in the name of the children and young people who need, today and always, Piarists, for the glory of God and the usefulness of our neighbour.*

Pedro Aguado, Father General

September 12, 2011

Most Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- AC *Analecta Calasanctiana* (Revista).
- Bau, BC *Biografía crítica de S. José de Calasanz*, (Madrid 1949).
- Bau, RV *Revisión de la vida de S. José de Calasanz*, AC 10 (1963).
- C *Constituciones de la Orden de las Escuelas Pías*, (Madrid 2004).
- CC *Constituciones de Calasanz*, (Madrid 2004).
- EP *Epistolario di S. Giuseppe Calasanzio*, vol. I-IX (Roma 1950-59).
- Giner *S. Giner, San José de Calasanz. Maestro y fundador*, BAC maior 41, Madrid 1992.
- MT *Memorial al cardenal M. A. Tonti*, (en, J. M. Lesaga, M. A. Asiain, J. M. Lecea: “Documentos fundacionales de las Escuelas Pías”, Salamanca 1979).
- Moncallero G. L. Moncallero – Giuliana Limiti, *Il Codice Calasanziano Palermitano* (Roma 1965).
- RC *Regestum Calasanctianum*, sección del Archivo General de las Escuelas Pías (Roma).

THE PIARIST VOCATION YEAR

1. A new proposal

Vocations are an essential element in every religious Institute. They are the most delicate and the best it has. The most delicate, because with them a new life is being born. It is necessary to take care of it. It has a long way to travel. At the beginning it is tender and weak; it will become strong and mature. But for this, you have to take extreme measures. It is the same as a baby. It is the best thing in a family. What all its members love and care for. It is what gives joy and produces tenderness. Before a little one, smiles are born spontaneously.

Minds wonder what will become of it. Everyone imagines the best. Unfortunately, this is not the case everywhere in our world. But where a child does not smile, life is extinguished. Where a little one doesn't raise a smile, the best of life is lost. Yes, it is the most delicate. Such is the vocation in an Institute.

But, at the same time, the baby is the best thing in the family, because this child assures the future. And it will be able to give life to others in the future. It is the promise that the future is possible. And he or she is cared for and looked after because it is expected to collaborate in a better future. So it is with vocations. There is the conviction that the mission that will touch them, the dedication of their life to a finality, it is a promise that a better future is possible because with them new possibilities and new strengths are being born.

What we say, it applies to the human family and the same applies to a religious family. Yes, if in a religious family there are young people who enter it, love it with passion, prepare themselves with commitment and docility, that family, that Institution can look to the future with hopeful eyes. The one that is, yes, in God's hands, but in which the human hand collaborates with all its commitment and energy.

The year 2012 is a vocational year in the Pious Schools; a year dedicated in a special way to vocations. In a letter addressed by Fr. General “to all the religious of the Order and to all those who trust in our Piarist presence”, signed on December 25, 2010, he announced that “the General Congregation convokes a ‘Vocation Year’ for the Pious Schools. It will be in 2012”.

2. The joy of the past

This is not the reason for the convocation. It could be because it has enough entity and symbolism to be the reason for this initiative. Well, who does not rejoice, celebrating something, when it coincides with the past? Who does not rejoice celebrating something that coincides with a more or less important event in the family? How can there not be joy if a son’s wedding day coincides with the fact that 30 years ago on the same day his parents got married? The son does not marry for that reason; he does it for love, but the coincidence increases the joy and happiness.

This also happens in this “Piarist Vocation Year” (PVY). It is also an invocation to Mary who protects this Work and continues to take care of the Institute, her Work, according to Calasanz, through “poor and simple” vocations.

Yes, this year 2012 is a Piarist family year. The letter we are commenting on says it: “This year 2012 marks the four hundredth anniversary of a small Piarist event: the incorporation of Glicerio Landriani, a young and enthusiastic seeker, to the nascent Pious Schools of Calasanz. This family memory, together with the generalized conviction that we can and must reflect on the Vocation Ministry in a new way, has encouraged us to call for a Piarist Vocation Year in the whole Order”.

Abbot Glycerio was a young man of noble birth. He led a carefree life, but God held him tightly. Calasanz testified: “I know also that as he was in Rome at the house of Bishop Fabricius, his brother, with silk dresses and human honours, touched by the Holy Spirit, he left all the comforts he had enjoyed before, and gave himself up to a life so mortified and exemplary that he exchanged the silken garments for very poor ones and a very simple food, causing great admiration; which he did because of the great faith and interior light that the Lord God had communicated to him. He also exhorted others to have great faith in God and to abandon the things of the world in order to serve God”.

The Founder placed his hopes in him. Simple, a great catechist, intensely loved by the Founder; on February 15, 1618, when he was a novice, he died and left Calasanz as an orphan. He had thought to appoint him in the service he had been rendering to the Pious Schools as General of the Order. God is unpredictable. His ways are not ours. And once again, as so many others, God thwarted the saint's plans. And Glycerio undoubtedly worked for the Pious Schools, but from "the other side".

3. Do we not need it?

The vocational theme is very important for religious Institutes and, in general, for every human or religious activity. It is always the need of people to continue a work, an activity or a mission. In this writing, we always refer to the Pious Schools.

This need is pointed out in the Constitutions themselves, when in no. 103, they say: "Each and every one of us, trusting in the Lord who does not cease to call, we devote ourselves with ever greater ardour to the pastoral work of awakening and consolidating vocations, remembering the word of the Lord: The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.

In the Special General Chapter, celebrated after the Second Vatican Council, from 1967 to 1969, in the "Decree on Vocations and Houses of Formation", it is said: "It should not be forgotten, however, that our religious, by the example of a life which openly manifests the true paschal joy, can be the best invitation to embrace the religious, priestly and educational life" (no. 486). In order that pastoral action may bear rich fruit, it is first of all necessary to remember the words of the Gospel: "Pray to the Lord of the harvest..." (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2). Therefore, let us frequently ask God for the vocations of our Order, whether privately or collectively" (no. 487).

And Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation "Vita Consecrata", wrote: "The mission of the consecrated life and the vitality of the Institutes undoubtedly depend on the fidelity with which consecrated persons respond to their vocation; but they have a future to the extent that other men and women generously accept the Lord's call. The problem of vocations is a real challenge which directly concerns the Institutes, but which is of concern to the whole Church. In the field of pastoral work for vocations, a great deal of spiritual and material energy is invested in this area, although the results do not always correspond to the expectations

and efforts made. It happens that, while vocations to the consecrated life flourish in the young Churches and in those that have suffered persecution by totalitarian regimes, they are scarce in other countries traditionally rich in vocations and missionaries.

This difficult situation puts consecrated persons to the test. They sometimes question their ability to attract new vocations. It is necessary to have confidence in the Lord, who continues to call us to follow in his footsteps, and to entrust us to the Holy Spirit, who is the author and inspirer of the charisms of consecrated life. Thus, as we rejoice in the action of the Spirit who continues to rejuvenates the Bride of Christ, making consecrated life flourish in many nations, we should address a constant prayer to the Lord of the harvest that he will send labourers to his Church, to meet the demands of the new evangelization (cf. Mt 9:37-38). In addition to promoting prayer for vocations, it is urgent to make an effort, through explicit proclamation and adequate catechesis, to foster in those called to the consecrated life the free, but prompt and generous response which makes the grace of vocation operative” (no. 64).

We are reminded by both Matthew and Luke, that the Lord tells us to ask the Master of the harvest. We have seen references, both in *Vita Consecrata* and in the “Decree” of the Special General Chapter.

The Order needs vocations, given by God, who respond to his will, who commit themselves in the field chosen for them by God himself. We see, on the one hand, that we speak of vocations - that they may be according to the Lord - and, on the other hand, that all those who belong to an Institute, are encouraged to pray to the Father of heaven to send collaborators, continuators of the Work in which they work.

It is, therefore, an excellent initiative that the Order, considering what has been said so far, has convoked a “Piarist Vocation Year”.

4. The focus

From the perspective we are analysing, one objective directs all the work of this year 2012. This is what we are told: “The objective of increasing the number, and the human and evangelical quality of the young people who wish to live the Piarist religious vocation is a common challenge for all of us who are committed to the Piarist Schools. It is not only a desire of the Piarist religious; it is an objective of all of us.

An objective that is a call to all. Sometimes when we talk about the vocational topic, many people may understand that there are already religious in the Institute whose main mission and task is to take care of vocations. To think in this way and, even worse, to behave in this way, indicates the mediocrity of one's own life. The desire for offspring is something that springs normally from within people. There may be exceptions, but they are just that, exceptions. Those of us who are dedicated to the Kingdom, who have given our lives to the Lord's command, "Go and preach to the whole world", feel the desire that there be more and more vocations of people who will take their hand to the plow and follow Jesus, working for the Kingdom in the ministry to which they have been called.

It is true that every Christian must collaborate in the work of the Kingdom; but now we are referring to those who have been called to lead a life similar to Jesus in this world, when He has become the whole of a person's life. The laity, too, collaborators with the Pious Schools, are also affected by what we say, but we will speak of them later.

For all these reasons, Father General writes: "I am writing this letter to you on the responsibility we all have in sowing, proposing, accompanying and welcoming the Piarist religious vocation; about our ability to help the young person to discover the call to the complete donation of his life for the Piarist cause that God sows in his heart; on our commitment to propose with audacity our vocation. We usually give an "official" name to all this: Vocation Ministry specific to the Piarist religious and priestly life.

5. Gift and work

No one can say "I want" and choose a path that is vocational; he cannot say it if he has not been called. He must first discern in his heart and in his intentions, thoughts, desires, and the "reason" of that "I want". If there is no obedience to God, it is useless. The best desires, when the moment of the test arrives, if they are not settled on the "rock", on the foundation of the Lord's call, they will become the greatest disaster, the greatest frustration that a person can experience. So we must say that vocation is a "gift" of the Lord. Gift is love; gift is the Lord's desire for a life to enter a specific path. Gift means that the Lord is the support. Gift is not a disregard of others. Does not everyone in life have his or her gifts? What does Paul states in 1 Cor 12 and Rom 12? In the Body there are many gifts, each with its own importance, and no one can say to another,

“I don't need you”. Thus, the vocation to the Pious Schools is a gift. And the one who receives it cannot look down on someone who has received another gift; nor can it be the other way around, to envy another gift. Gratitude is a sign of love, of correspondence, of gratitude, of being happy with what we have in our hands, knowing that it is undeserved. How can one be proud of what is received, if it is precisely received, that is to say, given? And how can one be sad because he has not received something, if he has received other gifts that he did not deserve? Let us remember the Gospel, “Are you going to be angry because I am good?” (cf. Mt 20:15)

The fact that it is a gift does not mean that it does not imply effort, commitment, care, attention, that is, human work. It is a gift, yes, but it is also a struggle. The fact that it is a gift does not exclude the need to struggle. Struggle does not mean human work.

Father General writes: “We know that every vocation is a gift of God, but we also know that we must work to make it possible. Like all the nuclear elements of the Gospel, which are always both gift and task”. And a little further on: “Never forget: it is God who calls, not us. But it is God who needs us; yes, he needs us, so that his calls can become, through a whole educational and pastoral process, a personal project assumed and incarnated by a hopeful young person”.

This is the reason why, when we speak of vocations in this book, we also refer to the interior experience of those already consecrated. In this way, we can achieve a deep interior life of personal vocational experience, and thus be a call to others to enter the Institute.

6. The need to ask

Who has not heard with joy the promise of Jesus that whoever asks receives, whoever seeks finds, and to whom knocks it will be opened? (cf. Mt 7:7-8). It is true, we must ask with faith; we must ask with total trust, because if it is not total, it is not trust; we must ask in obedience to his will, knowing that what He gives responds better than we think and expect, to what we ask for.

Vocations must be asked for, begged for... and worked for. They are a gift from heaven, and gifts from heaven are to be received with open hands. To open one's hands is a symbol of many things: that one does not want to snatch anything, that one is content with what is given, that one

is grateful for what comes to one's hands, that what he receives is not his own, but it is entrusted to him. The more you open your hands, the more you receive. The more you close your hands on what you have received, wanting to appropriate it, the less place is left to receive more.

It is true that in the Pious Schools we pray for vocations. But the problem is not whether we pray, but how we pray; it is not whether we ask, but from where we ask; it is not whether we want more vocations, but for what purpose we want them.

That is why Fr General in his letter exhorts us to pray for the vocation ministry. And if it is always necessary to do it, in a more intense and special way this year dedicated precisely to this reality. Father General says: "We invite you to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest. Prayer transforms our hearts and brings us closer to the heart of God. Let us ask the Father to send us generous young men who wish to give their lives as Piarist religious and may He transform us all into Co-operators with the Truth, so that we may collaborate with Him in His love for children and young people, working for Piarist vocations".

7. Centrality

"The central objective of this year is clear for us. It is about to place Vocation Ministry at the source of the life of the Pious Schools, as a nuclear element of our revitalization process and as one of the keys that will make possible the various objectives we have set for ourselves. To carry out a better, more intense and systematic Vocation Ministry is one of the keys to the future that we dream and yearn for".

In recent years the Order has undergone an intense process of revitalization. It is what springs from its entrails of love for God and passionate dedication to the children and young people of its presences. The Order works to have richer life projects, more evangelical outlooks, more efforts that are in accord with God's will. It wants, in a word, to revitalize itself, to become more alive, a better life, more evangelical, more attentive, both to its Founder and to the new needs of our times. Revitalization is the deep commitment that guides all its efforts, the reason for all the work it is doing. An element as fundamental as that of restructuring has no meaning except as a way, an aid to revitalization. The structures are not important; what is important is life, a new, exciting and innovative project.

This is the place of vocation ministry, understood not as a static element or a simple period of life, but as something dynamic and broader. We are all involved in Vocation Ministry.

The General Chapter of 2009 emphasized several objectives that it believed necessary for the next six years; objectives to be promoted and to be worked for in the Order. Father General now affirms that precisely the Vocation Ministry is “one of the keys that will make possible the different objectives that we have set”.

8. To whom it is addressed

We should thank God for many reasons. Not the least of these is the growing number of lay people who come to the Pious Schools to collaborate with them. Lay Piarists who are committed in varying degrees to the Pious Schools in their struggle to achieve their mission: to achieve, as far as possible, a better, more just world, more fraternal, more supportive, more human, and all this by means of evangelizing education. This number of lay people is growing in two dimensions: in terms of number and in terms of quality of commitment. It is interesting to see the itinerary they are following, the ministerial assignments to which they dedicate themselves, the time - months or years - that they devote to the mission, the growing identification that they are achieving with the Order.

If this is true, and it is, it is also normal that the worries, the concerns, illusions, works and dedication of the religious is also that of these lay people, in the measure of their commitment and identification with the Order. For this reason, Fr. General in his letter also addresses them. Earlier we have seen a few lines of the letter, quoted several times, which ended as follows: “To this [to which the year 2012 is dedicated] we usually give the official name: “vocation ministry specific to religious and priestly life”. He continues: “And I do it [the fact of boldly proposing our vocation] not only to the religious of the Order, but to all the people who are part of the various Piarist presences and who feel co-responsible for the construction of the Pious Schools”.

9. On the way

But, what is going to be done during this time? What actions do we intend to put in place to make possible what have been pointed out so far? I would say that we are looking for more quality than quantity. Yes, there

will be things” to be done, but more important than what is done is “how” it is done. More than a year restricted to a few people, who are the ones who are directly involved in Vocation Ministry, it must be a year in which, in some way engages all religious. For this reason, there will be actions that will affect small groups, but there is a call to all religious with spiritual actions that all can do. We are told clearly: “Everywhere, this year should be especially dedicated to Vocation Ministry, with the objective that we can make in the Pious Schools a significant change of step in this topic so important for all of us. It will be a year in which we will come together, we will plan, convene and reflect in depth on how to carry out, more and better, the mission of being mediators between God’s calls and proposals, and the free and generous hearts of young people. It will also be a year in which we will take special care of our individual and community prayer for young people, and their availability and courage to respond to the Lord’s calls.

10. What is asked of us

Father General and his Congregation, concerned about Piarist vocations, make some requests to the religious of the Order. In particular, two. The first: “The General Congregation asks all the Piarists and people who share our charism and mission to send us suggestions and proposals so that this Vocation Year may be truly fruitful for the Pious Schools. We ask everyone, but we invite especially the young Piarists, close in age to the possible new Piarists, to make an effort to offer suggestions and possibilities that we should take into account, including ideas for a good slogan to give unity to this Vocation Year. Let’s see if you have good inspiration. There will be also a logo and a poster for this vocation year. In due time we will provide you with information.

We hope that this request will awaken in many young Piarists the courage to send suggestions and proposals that will help the good development of this year, and that will encourage the General Congregation to carry out actions rich in vocational content. This request is addressed to all the people “who share our charism and mission”, but it is the young people who are the most challenged by this request.

The second request: “We ask all religious communities, to all the Piarist Fraternities, to Piarist Christian Communities, to all the people who share with us the Piarist Mission, to the families and to all our collaborators, to assume with illusion and hope this great Piarist challenge: to make

it possible for some of our young people to assume the Piarist religious vocation. It will be a clear sign of the quality of our Piarist commitment”.

The request is addressed to all, and here the range is enlarged so that we assume with illusion this challenge of great importance for the Order: “to make possible that some of our young people can assume the Piarist religious vocation”.

11. An anecdote that becomes a category

I do not know if it was the fuse that set in motion the concern that the General Congregation undoubtedly already had for this topic of vocations. In fact, we can see how often the theme of vocations appears in many of Father General's “Salutatio”. That is why I say that I do not know if Fr General's anecdote that we transcribe was the spark that caused this fire. What I do know is that it became a driving force for the Pious Schools. Father General narrates: “A few months ago, during a visit to one of our Demarcations, I met with a group of young people, students and alumni of one of our schools. They were young people who are in vocational accompaniment, thinking about the possibility of becoming Piarist religious and priests. It was an intense meeting, very participative, very funny. When we were finishing, one of the boys said to me, with eyes like saucers: “Father, you say that you will be back in two years from now. Please call us together again, we need strength and courage to make decisions. And, besides, some of us will give you a great joy, since we will already be living with you”. I asked him to write to me and and sign that sentence. And he did, solemnly. They were boys from the Bolivian alti-plano, students and alumni of our school in Anzaldo”.

“I have never forgotten this phrase, which has made me think a lot: “Call us together again, we need strength and courage”. I think it expresses well the experience of so many young people who come to us, summoned by the Lord to discern, with honesty, if God is calling them to incarnate the Piarist religious vocation, the vocation that St. Joseph Calasanz assumed and consolidated. Young people need to be called”.

12. In the center and in the horizon, the children

We do not want vocations simply to grow in number. We do not want more vocations in order to be more important, since we are happy being

small. The yeast and the mustard seed are very small and we know the fruit they produce. We do not want more vocations to overtake other Institutes in number. The vocational desire is born from the same Calasanzian root; the need to do good to children and young people, to reach out to a greater number of them, to teach many “piety and letters”, to succeed in redeeming as many children as possible. This is what moves all of us to work on the theme of vocations. We follow in the footsteps of our Founder. He was attracted to the poor, abandoned, ignorant children, with no possibility of being something in the future. It pained him to see the religious ignorance of those who did not receive education in any school. It was a wound in his heart to see how so many talents were lost. He suffered at the sight of the waste of time of that immense crowd that wandered, senseless and fruitless, running around through the streets of Rome. And then sprang up, by grace, the desire to dedicate himself to them, and that there would be many people to follow in his footsteps.

Therein lies the ultimate reason for the Piarist Vocation Year: “We do not convoke this “Vocation Year” thinking only about the Order. Children and young people, especially the poorest ones, need new Piarists religious who dedicate themselves to them in an enthusiastic and generous way. This Vocation Year is called in their name, in the name of all the children and young people who desire, hope and need the close and educative presence of the sons of St. Joseph Calasanz.

13. What is the purpose of this paper?

We see, with all that has been said, how the Pious Schools want to raise the vocational level. If so, what would Calasanz tell us? We cannot invent his answer. And we must keep in mind that his circumstances are different from ours. For this reason, in the following chapters we are going to see how he dealt with vocations; how he spoke of those who were going to enter the Order; how he was concerned about the novices and novitiates; how he wanted to form the students to make them true servants of the poor children; how he wanted to be our religious in order to attract other vocations. Knowing the goal, one can choose the way to reach it.

We have already said that the circumstances are different. We must therefore grasp the spirit of the Founder in what he tells us, to distinguish the accessory from the important, and apply it to our times.

We explain the thoughts of Calasanz and we make some reflections. But we leave the way open so that the formators themselves, and any Piarist who works or can work in vocational ministry, continue to investigate in the saint and, above all, applying to our days what he said in his time which is our yesterday.

A VOCATIONAL JOURNEY: CALASANZ

1. Preparation at home

That Calasanz thought of becoming a priest at a very early age, will be seen in a moment. But it is clear that often the vocation, when it appears in the first years of life, has its humus in the family. Many priests, in narrating their vocation, cite the family and the first years of their life as the support for their vocation, as the environment in which it appeared and became clearer and clearer.

It does not seem that Joseph Calasanz had in his family any clergyman living in his house or near it, who could be a reference for his vocation and who could have induced it. And we know nothing of the influence that the parish priest of Peralta could have had on him. Peralta had a parish priest when José was a child; it seems sure; certainly, when Calasanz wrote to him in 1592, months after he had arrived in Rome, once he had settled there and the first months of his stay in the eternal city had passed. That years before, when Joseph was a child, he could already have had a parish priest in his village, it is possible and it is not necessary to discard it. But what interests us in this matter, is that we cannot affirm anything of the influence that it could have had on the vocation of the child Calasanz.

Another thing is also certain. When many priests recall the birth of their vocation, they point to the family and the atmosphere in it, as a place conducive to the appearance, almost unconscious at times, but manifest at others, of his vocation. The environment was the care of his parents, Christian piety in the family, the presence of prayer in common, especially of the holy rosary, and sometimes the father's figure and demeanour, kneeling with his head uncovered, praying humbly with the whole family. Great and important had to be the Lord to whom we prayed, when the father, a man of integrity, to whom everyone professed respect, humbled himself before God in this way.

And if the father was important, the mother was no less so; even if in a different way, often with a more direct action on the children.

That this atmosphere reigned in the Calasanz-Gaston family is clear from the testimonies that have come down to us from those who have heard Joseph himself tell in his old age. Brother Lorenzo Ferrari, who was the saint's secretary during the last years of his life, declared: "Once when he was exhorting me to and other young subjects to Christian piety, he told us that as a child, he attended to devotions and always prayed the Small Office of the Virgin and other devotions but most particularly the Most Holy Rosary. And then: "I heard Fr. Joseph himself say that his father and mother brought him up in the fear of God and made him learn the good letters... his parents educated him by separating him with great care from bad company". And Fr Scassellati: "Inasmuch as a fellow disciple of the said Fr. General, who was of the same age as him and whose name I do not remember... Father Joseph's childhood was timorous of God and with signs of not mediocre sanctity. He frequented devotions very much and exhorted the children of his age to the fear of God and Christian piety" (Bau, BC, p. 11-12). It is quite possible that the source of these remembrances was Joseph Musquez or Marquet, who recounted various anecdotes about the saint when, being in Rome, he attended Fr Joseph's funeral. Still were in his mind the memories of his fellow countryman, however old he was.

And from the same priest may come what Fr Scassellati also says when he adds that the schoolmaster sometimes used to place little Joseph on a chair and in front of his fellow pupils he would make him recite the Mysteries of Our Lady, by Berceo, which his mother had taught him at home.

Knowing the future of this little boy, it is not surprising that the source of his vocation, apart from God who bestows his gifts as he wills, we have to think of the family that was his lot and that cared for him throughout his childhood.

2. First vocational manifestations

Little Joseph's life went by with simplicity and normality in the environment we have mentioned. And he left home to study. This was decided by his parents, even though his brothers were men-at-arms. From

Peralta he moved to Estadilla to attend his first studies in the convent of the Trinitarians. It is not unreasonable to think that with all the simple but deep Christian background he carried from his home and with the environment he found, - a religious community that cared for this child and taught him and showed himself to be an element of reference-, the small and weak vocational sprout that was born in Peralta, was developing and maturing. We can also deduce it from the fact that some of his companions also reached the priesthood. It seems, then, that Calasanz found an environment conducive to the clear manifestation of his priestly vocation.

The first document we have in which Joseph's determination to become a priest appears dates from 1571. Calasanz was then thirteen and a half years old. He was still very young, but already then his parents knew that he wanted to become a priest. We know this because his father, on March 8, 1571, made a will and Fr Poch explains that "in one of the clauses he instructs and commands his son and heir, who was called by the same name as his father, Peter, not only to maintain him (Joseph) with the decency that corresponds to his quality, giving him all that he may need, but thinking to be a clergyman, that he may be given sufficient patrimony to be able to reach up to the sacred orders, if he does not already have any benefice" (AC 22 (1966) 266).

It is clear that little Joseph wants to become a priest, and it is also clear that there is no reticence or opposition on the part of his father, as it has sometimes been affirmed, saying that Joseph's father was tenaciously opposed to his son's vocation because he wanted him, like his brothers, to be a man of arms and to dedicate himself to the militia. That, as his father and brothers had occupied honorable military posts, Joseph had to do the same in order to continue the family tradition.

The decision of the son to be a priest and his father's acceptance would continue are clear in the following years. We see it because in 1576, five years after that March of 1571, in the marriage contracts of the son Peter, dated February 20 of that year, the parents again declare the eldest son as universal heir and reserve to the youngest son, Joseph, the appropriate patrimony. Let us keep in mind that Calasanz had already received the clerical tonsure the previous year. It remains clear, that in the father there is no repugnance to the state that the youngest of the brothers of the family had chosen. It is possible that these capitulations

were made because at that time the first-born John had died, and the father, like all good fathers, wanted to leave all things in order, and made a will naming Peter as his heir, with whom his estate and family name are safe, and little Joseph can follow his priestly vocation.

3. Overcoming a difficulty

Joseph continued his studies. The desire to become a priest was in his heart and he prepared himself with his studies. First, the University of Lerida, where he studied arts and law. It was in the middle of the academic year 1574-75, when he was studying the first year of law and was 17 and a half years old, that he took his first serious step towards the priesthood. He goes to his bishop, the bishop of the Seo de Urgell, and asks to receive his first tonsure. Thus he would be incorporated into the diocesan clergy. The bishop granted his request and in mid-April he went to Balaguer and climbed up to the hill on which the Sanctuary of Christ of Almatá had been built. And there, on April 17, 1575, he received the clerical tonsure. Four years before, as we have already recalled, on March 8, 1571, his father had written his will referring to him: “trusting him to be a clergyman, be given sufficient patrimony to go up to the sacred orders, if he does not already have any benefice”.

He was already a cleric; his vocation was confirmed, the way seemed to be open to him. He only lacked something that was not a problem for him, the necessary studies to become a priest, the desire to reach that goal, and the decision to love God and then to give himself to those whom God the Father would place in his hands.

From Lérida Calasanz moved to Valencia. Why? Because in the city of river Turia there was an important faculty of theology and he wanted to study theology well. He was always diligent in his studies. Calasanz always sought the best because he wanted to prepare himself well for the priesthood. He stayed at the College of St. Paul run by the Jesuit Fathers. There he got to know them; there he appreciated them. In the future they were to be his rivals as they were rivals to the Pious Schools. But he always had admiration and respect for them. For this reason, in 1644 he wrote: “It could give me no greater joy than to give satisfaction and pleasure to the Jesuit fathers.... Keep the due reverence and obligation to the said fathers, whom I have venerated since I was a young boy as fathers sent by God into the world with doctrine and example so efficacious as clearly it appears

today, especially to those who remember the previous relaxation. With particular affection I ask the Lord to increase the spirit and fervour in the fathers of the Society, so that in this second century they may double the fruit of the first, for the greater glory of his divine majesty and greater usefulness and extension of the holy Catholic faith” (EP 3704).

Studying in Valencia, where does he stay? We do not possess any document that tells us. All we know is the fact, which in the sobriety with which it is narrated does not give us a glimpse of anything for an adequate answer to the question. The narration of the event is found in the *Breve Notizia*: “It happened that he was asked to act as secretary to a very noble lady, who, observing his modesty and manners, became so fond of him that, having sent her ladies to other duties, she was left alone in the room and called our Calasanz, to whom she revealed her lascivious desires, but he, in the guise of another Joseph of Egypt, fled from that house in search of his confessor, and there he determined not to enter the house of that lady, as he did” (Bau, RV, p. 11).

It could be thought from what is narrated that Calasanz lived in that house and that the position of secretary justified his presence and compensated his expenses as a pensioner. But it could also be that he lived elsewhere if his work was well remunerated and he went to the noblewoman’s house simply to do his work. In the end, nothing concrete we can say.

Brother Lorenzo Ferrari, who received so many confidences from the saint, also narrates the fact: “Insisting once on the care with which one must flee from evil, he told me what had happened to a person whom he did not name, but whom I know it was him, because on another occasion he had declared himself with I do not know who of our fathers; and even once in confidence and for the sake of training me, he told it to me; and it was that while he was away from here, in his country, when he was a young man with a very advantageous job, of very great interest and profit to him in that place, a woman asked him to do evil. And, to flee from the occasion of sinning, he left that place, without paying attention to the profit he was abandoning there” (Bau, BC, p. 105).

It is Father Berro who expressly mentions the city of Valencia, adding at the end of the story that “so as not to incur again in such grave danger, he also left the city”. Here we have Calasanz who not only leaves his work in the lady’s house, but also leaves the city of Valencia.

And there are those who add that, after going to his confessor and encouraged by him, he left everything to go to Alcalá de Henares. This is narrated in the *Breve Notizia*, which means that Calasanz had his confessor or spiritual director. If as we have said, he studied at the college of St. Paul, run by the Jesuits, it is easy to suppose that the confessor or director was also a Jesuit, and that he was the one who advised him to go to Alcalá, where he would find, next to the University, a Jesuit College that taught theology.

The Valencia event was a test. A test that any Christian can undergo and that, with the grace of the Lord, he must know how to resist and overcome. But in Calasanz his priestly vocation was at stake. Acceptance of the temptation could have led his life in other directions; but he was determined to follow the priestly path.

4. Illness and healing

One day in 1579 Calasanz received the news of the death of his brother Peter. In 1577 a rebellion had begun and a regime of terror had been established in the lands of Ribagorza that lasted at least ten years. It was a very complex revolt, in which members of the petty nobility sympathized with the rebels, although the majority supported the count. Even the clergy was divided on both sides. And in the one and in the other side participated criminals, assassins, bandits, even hired mercenaries.

Father Luis Cavada, in his visit to Peralta de la Sal in 1677, collected many news of the family of the saint and among them the following: "The eldest [son of Peter Calasanz and Maria Gastón] was called Peter Calasanz... and he was killed in the year of the Lord 1579 without leaving succession, his father still living" (Giner, 134).

The news of the death of the older brother must have made a deep impression on Joseph. Not only because of the death, which was already a lot, but also because of the tragedy that was being created and in which he was involved. Until that moment both his father and mother had agreed that he should walk toward the priesthood. Peter, his son, signified the succession of the family name and was the "hereu", the "heir". But now, suddenly, these realities were cut short. Peter, father, consulted with his wife who seemed to agree to call Joseph to Peralta, to propose marriage and make him the "hereu". The Calasanz surname could not be lost.

Joseph, on the other hand, remained unwavering: he renounced the inheritance, since it meant a marriage and, therefore, a farewell to the

priesthood, and stayed in Alcalá. Two elderly farmers from Peralta, relatives of the Gastons, testified. Juan Gaseu said: “having died Peter Calasanz his brother and heir of the house and estate of his parents without children, the said parents wanted to make heir to the said Joseph Calasanz of his goods and estate, and that he did not want to and it is true”. Juan Lajanuy, said: “that the said parents after the death of the said Peter Calasanz his brother, wanted to make heir of his estate to the said Doctor Calasanz and he did not want to be it and this is true” (Giner, 135).

Joseph, therefore, continues in Alcalá with the intention of finishing the course 1579-80. But soon after, he received the second piece of news, the death of his mother. It was too much. He understood that he could neither stay in Alcalá nor refuse to return to Peralta. And he went there. But here the personal tragedy occurs. As soon as he arrived, his father and sisters did not cease to insist. He had to be the “hereu”, the one in charge of taking care of the family, the one who had to give offspring to his parents, the grandchildren who would carry on the family name. And the predictable happened. Calasanz fell ill. Causes? The pain of his brother’s death, and soon after of his mother; the continuous pressures of his father and sisters to leave what he so longed for, the path to the priesthood. All this creates a great pressure on him. He feels bad. The stress is great. And he ends up in bed, with bad symptoms, even seeming to die. Then the father, Peter Calasanz, is faced with the choice: either a son who may die if the family continues to insist on his purpose, or a living son, even if he is not the “hereu”, even if he does not give him grandchildren, even if he does not contribute to preserve the family name, on his way to the priesthood. In any case, he understands that in neither of the two ways will the Calasanz surname be preserved. The father gave in: better a living son than a dead one.

The pressure is relieved on Joseph. Once again, the way is open to him. He no longer feels on his back the stress of all that he has lived through in the last few weeks. The illness subsides, and Calasanz is completely cured. His vocation is moving forward.

5. Ordinations

Cured of his illness, Calasanz does not return to Alcalá. He went to Lérida, although this University had never been distinguished for its Faculty of Theology. But he did not want to stray too far from Peralta after what had happened to him and seeing his father grow old. And there, in

the General Study of Lérida, he did the last two years of theology that he lacked, between 1581 and 1583. Possibly during the first semester of 1583-84 he did the academic exercises required to graduate as a “bachelor in theology”.

Calasanz decides to follow his path and moves to Huesca, where the bishop celebrates general ordinations during the Advent Seasons. Dispensed from the interstices, in two consecutive days he received the four minor orders and the subdiaconate. The first ones on December 17, 1582, in the bishop's private oratory, and on the following day the subdiaconate, in the Cathedral.

In the middle of the second semester of the same academic year 1582-83, he once again asked the dimissories letters to the same Curia of Lérida to be ordained as a deacon. After solving some difficulties, he received the dimissories from the Vicar General, stating that the ordinand Joseph Calasanz had been “examined, approved and dispensed from interstices”. So on April 9, Holy Saturday, Monsignor de la Figuera ordained him as a deacon in the church or chapel, now disappeared, of Saint Sebastian, in the town of Fraga.

That year he finished his theology course and took advantage of the following months to go to Peralta and live with his father and relatives. It was close to Christmas, he went through the prescribed formalities, but this time he did them in the curia of his diocese of Urgell, and finally, on December 17, 1583, Saturday of Tempora, he was ordained to the priesthood in the castle of Sanahuja, the winter residence of the bishop of Urgell. He was ordained priest by his own bishop Fray Hugo Ambrosio de Moncada.

He had finally arrived at what he had longed for and to which he felt called by God. How he lived this event and what the priesthood meant to him can be deduced from some of his words. At the age of 73 he wrote to a religious who was about to be ordained a priest: “To be a priest it is not enough to be twenty-five years old, but also the necessary knowledge, and, most important of all, a great humility to know how to deal with such a high and tremendous ministry” (EP 1588). And two years later, he wrote to another: “May the Lord reward you with spiritual goods and give you the grace to know the priestly dignity and the humility and reverence due to such a high ministry and sacrament” (EP 4572).

How he was to live the priesthood and the fundamental moment of the priesthood, the celebration of the Eucharist, we can deduce from what he advised to his religious: "I am glad that the two whom you sent have been ordained priests. Teach them how devoutly they should speak to the Eternal Father and to the Trinity. So that they may derive all possible benefit from the Mass, that they may understand the meaning of the words they pronounce and say them with all reverence and humility, and do not get into the habit of saying them hastily" (EP 3669). And on another occasion: "Be very careful to be a good priest and to celebrate Mass not as quickly as some are accustomed to do, but with much reverence, considering that you speak with the Eternal Father of very serious problems, and it must be done with great reverence and attention. If you do not do this, it would be better not to be ordained, as did St. Francis, who understood the purity of heart that a priest must have" (EP 3706).

6. In search of canonries

The vocational itinerary of Calasanz seems to have ended, but it is not so. God still had new challenges in store for him. Leaving aside other known elements and thinking only of the topic that concerns us, we must mention his trip to Rome. He was not yet 35 years old. Perhaps it is true that there were several reasons for Calasanz departure to the eternal city. Perhaps, because at least the strength of the documents that have come down to us do not support in the same way the authenticity of the different motives that are alleged.

The investigators have focused on three, and they have chosen them as best they have judged. Having read the latest writing on the subject, our position can be summarized as follows:

- a) That Calasanz went to Rome, pretending dignities, seems to us certain and documented without the slightest doubt.
- b) That Calasanz left for Rome, supported by a certain inner illumination, or by a certain inner intuition, could be (in order not to leave bad to the past hagiography, and given that recognized historians like Sántha, Picanyol, Bau and Giner accept it).
- c) That Calasanz went to Rome by mandate of his bishop, to carry out the "*ad limina visit*" of the diocese of Urgell, and as a substitute for R. Durán, is within the possibilities, but documents are needed not only to make it possible, but also to prove it.

Many things could be said about each of these reasons; this is neither the time nor of interest to us for our subject. The first of them is undoubtedly true. We have repeated letters from the saint that show his effort to obtain a canonry, and not only that, we also have testimonies that affirm it, from people who knew Calasanz. Let us hear some witnesses: I have heard that Fr Joseph came to Rome to obtain something ecclesiastical...”, said the painter Francisco Gutiérrez. A Tomás Simon, in the apostolic process of 1686, affirmed that: “He later came to Rome... for the pretensions of being provided with benefits...”. Fr Berro, says it differently: “...he went to his town for a few days, not to stay, but to settle his affairs in the hope of making his way to the Roman Court, as his virtues promised...”. And Caputi: “...his desire to prosper in order to return to his homeland with some important dignity” (Giner, 268).

With all this we want to say that Calasanz had a motive for staying in Rome: the desire for a canonry persisted in his heart. And there the Lord was waiting for him.

7. The real crisis

When Dr Joseph Calasanz saw that he did not obtain what he thought he would obtain, the famous canonry, and being a good priest, he gave his name to the Confraternity of the Twelve Apostles. He wanted to fill the time he had after doing what he was asked to do in the palace of Cardinal Marcantonio Colonna, where he was staying.

As a confrere he began to visit the churches of Rome and so he got to know the city. Rome was not a big city, but Calasanz had always moved in a certain circle and deep down he did not know the real, popular Rome, with which he had no dealings. So he began to realize what was really happening in the eternal city, poverty, ignorance, destitution. Countless children lived in total poverty and ignorance. Berro tells in his *Annotazioni*: “On the occasion of our Dr Giuseppe’s visit for six or seven years to the whole city of Rome many times, as Visitor of the Confraternity of the Holy Apostles, as mentioned above, and he himself wrote to me in a letter, he had found an almost innumerable multitude of children who, because of poverty, could not be taken by their parents to the schools; and for the same reason they lost themselves corporally and spiritually, giving themselves to all the vices that necessity and idleness are used to teach. In addition to the fact that many did not even know the Our Father, the

Hail Mary, and the indispensable things for salvation, he saw on the other hand many others of promising wit, who, if they used it well, would give excellent results, to the extraordinary benefit of their souls. Impelled, as he himself told me, by this almost extreme need of the poor and seeing that..." (Giner, 387).

The experience of real and stark poverty, the pain he felt when the children knew neither letters nor the most necessary things of Religion, and that because of their ignorance, they were not able to get out of the state in which they found themselves; the pain he felt at the loss of the intelligence of so many children who could do good to their fellow men and to society, prompted him to commit himself to them. We know how, and he himself in a letter wrote to Fr Berro: "As for the beginning of the schools, I found myself with two or three others of the Christian Doctrine who were going to Trastevere to teach in certain schools that were held in Santa Dorotea, where, since a large part of the students paid each one a certain amount per month; and of the companions I had some came in the morning and some came in the afternoon; I decided, when the parish priest, who lent us a small room and an area on the ground floor, died, to put them in Rome; I was aware of the great poverty that existed there, because I had visited for six or seven years all the districts of Rome, being a member of the Confraternity of the Holy Apostles. And of the companions I had in Trastevere, only one followed me; and the Institute was established in Rome, which little by little became a Congregation and then a Religion" (EP 4185).

Seeing all this, a question arose within him: what does God want of me? God wants me to continue seeking the canonry and once I get it, to return to Spain, or to dedicate myself to these poor and abandoned children? This was the deep crisis of Calasanz.

8. Founder

The last attempt to secure the schools - he had made many others - was his union with the Congregation of the Mother of God. At first it seemed to be going well, but he soon realized that all was going to fail. And so he asked the Pope to separate the Schools from the Congregation of the Fathers of Lucca after three years of living together.

The separation of the Pious Schools from the Lucca Congregation, according to the saint, had as its motive the defense of the Calasanzian

ministry. He recounts in the *Report of 1622*: “But seeing that the said Fathers of Santa Maria in Portico did not wish to embrace the institute of the schools with the required poverty, His Holiness the Pope Paul V, of happy memory, revoked the said Fathers, and erected anew the Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God with the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, appointing the said Father Joseph of the Mother of God as its superior” (EP 132a).

And so the Pope, at the same time that he separates the two realities, institutes the Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools. And he appoints Calasanz as General of the same.

Here are some texts of what such a Congregation meant: “The institute of these Fathers is to dedicate itself to the pious erudition and education of children, especially the poor, beginning with the first elements...”. “The Religion of the Clerics Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools has as its particular institute the pious education of children, especially the poor”. “The Institute of the Pious Schools, which consists in the erudition and Christian education of children, especially the poor...”. “The mind of Father General -says the same saint- has always been to teach the poorest and most abandoned children. For the rich pupils there are other schools...” (Giner, 533).

The vocational itinerary of Calasanz ends up being the Founder of the first popular and free school, dedicated to the poorest and most abandoned children. Something he had never thought of, but God's ways are not ours.

FIRST STEPS

1. Main principles

Vocational Ministry is an expression of our times. We cannot, therefore, find it in the writings of Calasanz. And not only the “words”, but also the way it is carried out, the way it is understood, the orientation given to it today and the space of time in which it is concretized. Time is like the wind, it sweeps some things and brings others. And given that we find ourselves in this topic with Joseph Calasanz, it is logical that we speak with his categories, translated later, as far as possible, into our own. This is an element to be taken into account in the whole development of this work.¹

1 It is important to make a warning in order to understand what the present work is about. We have already said that “vocation ministry” is a term and concept that does not appear in Calasanz as we understand it today. For this reason, and given that the year 2012 is dedicated to Vocation Ministry, it was appropriate to say something about the Founder. In this sense there is a basic question that runs through all this work: what would Calasanz tell us today, to the Piarists, with his language and categories, about this topic? For this we have taken the term Vocational Pastoral in a broad sense -it was the only way to apply it to him-, that is to say, including all the time that goes from the time a person asks to enter the Pious Schools until makes his profession. We can find this in the Founder. He speaks of those who ask to enter and how they should be. He refers to the novitiate as a time of discernment and indicates how to be during that time in the life of the spirit and in studies. And so on in other elements. Then, looking for an answer to the question, “What would he ask of those already religious in this area so that their life would attract vocations?”, we developed some themes that seemed to us to better answer the question. Well, with all this we want several things: to insist on raising the vocational level of the Order; to intensify the personal vocational experience of each religious and, consequently, of the whole Institute; and that all of this be an incentive this year of 2012, not only to reflect on Vocation Ministry, but also to live and deepen the vocational call we have received. This is the commitment of the whole Order. Therefore, in short, we are dealing with Vocation Ministry - in the sense of Calasanz - and with the pastoral care of the vocation of those who have already responded positively to it.

Calasanz was certainly not unaware of the importance of vocations; on the contrary, he knew it very well. He undoubtedly experienced it throughout the time of his formation, in the various stages described in the previous chapter. He was so convinced of this reality that in the Preamble of his Constitutions, which is like the fundamental nucleus of his Constitutions, and which the Pious Schools, in the various drafts or changes of the Constitutions, has always kept, he says: "For if we do not proceed with great discernment in the selection and admission of the novices, and if they are not given a very careful formation, our work, like any other, no matter how holy it may be, will crumble" (CC 7).

This is the thought of Calasanz. He founded a new Congregation. Cardinal Protector Giustiniani asked him to write Constitutions for the new Institute. And Calasanz, neither short nor lazy, points out what his Institute must take into account, so that if it does not take into account what has been said, the whole thing will collapse. And that is precisely the "selection and admission of novices"; in our categories, a well-done Vocation Ministry, carried out with care. This is the only way that the Institute, which is in its beginnings, is sustained and does not collapse in the future.

This warning of the Founder is fundamental for the whole history of the Order. We never know the difficult situations through which it can pass; the threats that may be looming over it; the ups and downs it may go through in the course of its history. Well, both in those moments and in the present, when we want to raise its vocational level, this affirmation of the Founder must be taken into account if we want to attain this goal.

From what has been said, we can obtain some principles that Calasanz enunciated and that the vocational pastoral must take into account. And they are:

One of them is the concern for formation. The problem of the pastoral ministry does not lie in obtaining abundant vocations -which is undoubtedly a good thing- but in having the capacity to form them. Otherwise, we pay for the consequences. And they are usually disastrous. So many times many religious ask themselves how it was possible to accept a certain person, who is nothing but a stumbling block in the community, who possesses no communitarian capacity, who gives the impression that his religious spirit is rickety and does nothing but cause difficulties everywhere he goes. It is often the result of poor discernment or of think-

ing that the person who at the first moment of life is judged unfit for the religious life, will be fixed in the following stages of formation, and so he is allowed to pass from stage to stage, until he reaches the priesthood. This was not the Founder's thinking. He stated very clearly: "It is better not to not accept than, while accepting, not to form well" (EP 2739). It is convenient to keep this in mind because it will avoid many future regrets.

What the Founder desired was the spirit necessary to live the religious life. We will see later on the instructions he gave regarding the conferring of the habit. He loved the schools, he loved his children, he wanted to do them the greatest good, he wanted to welcome as many as possible. But this was no reason to betray his principles. Moreover, he knew that betraying them would do no good to the Institute, quite the contrary. One had to have the spirit to ask for the habit in such a poor Institute, at that time so small and so despised by many who did not accept the education given there for the good of the poor.

Precisely in seeking the good of the poor, this second principle arose: "... it is better to dress and be few than to be many religious and without spirit. And this cannot be learned except by a great deal of retreat" (EP 3384). It is not a question of quantity. He did look for it, if it was good, but rather he look for quality. On this occasion, a little further up, in this same letter, Joseph refers to those who had been accepted earlier and wonders about the result. He was not blind. He was not deceived. He followed each of the houses where the habit was given to candidates to the Piarist life, and he took care that it was done well always. In vocation ministry there are temptations that must be overcome.

Calasanz took care of the schools with all his determination as we will see in the following chapters. They were the apple of his eye. For them he had given his life. He cared for each one of them. And he wrote constantly so that the teachers would take care of them as they should, would not neglect them; and the priests and clerics did not devote themselves to other occupations, avoiding the schools when that was precisely their vocation. But in addition to this solicitude for the schools, because it was the way to do good to the children, there was another motive, which we can present as the third principle, and that was the vocational aspect. It was expressed in the following way: "If the schools are doing well, there will be no lack of suitable individuals who will ask for our habit" (EP 3798). "It should not have been admitted to the habit, being

a native of Bologna and having wandered through various parts of Italy, because for us the young men who learn in our schools are more suitable. We can see whether they are of good or bad liking, whether or not they have good intelligence, and by educating them well they give good results” (EP 2581). Schools as a vocational seedbed. He believed that if the students perceived the work of the teachers, their concern for them, the attention they paid to them, if they saw their unselfishness and that they only sought their good, there would be students who would ask for the habit, wanting to imitate those who were in front of them, giving themselves to them. Therefore, the Piarist ministry, well carried out, had a double result: to teach and educate those who needed it so much, and to awaken a vocation, the desire to be like their teachers in students who could end up being Piarist religious.

Another principle that was clear to the saint in this matter was that one should not admit novices if there is no novitiate in a place. He told Fr. Alacchi who was in Palermo: “As long as you do not have a novitiate, you should not give the habit”. In this way he also removed a certain scruple that Fr Salazar Maldonado who was in Moricone (cf. EP 2352). Joseph did not want the novices to be outside the novitiate house, because they would not be well cared for, educated and taught all that they had to learn at that stage. For this reason, he would strive to establish novitiates or else, he would entrust a candidate to the care of a particular Father.

For the same reason, it should not found a house if there were no suitable subjects or no formators who could deal capably with vocations. From this we can see the precariousness with which Calasanz sometimes came across with regard to the pastoral care of vocations. He wrote: “As for clothing some novices who are apt to help the Religion, I hope that with the arrival of these two Fathers, Y.R. will be able to attend to it and we cannot try to introduce the Institute so soon in other places without first having formed suitable subjects. Let us see to it that the children be instructed in the holy fear of God and in the frequency of the sacraments” (EP 3898). “On the clothing of youth of a young age and of good intelligence, the opportune time has not yet arrived because we have neither spiritual formators and teachers such as are required for them, and we have to make rapid use of candidates because there are so many who ask for our work” (EP 1849).

Finally, the Founder was very reluctant to admit those who had been living at ease: “As for this Mr. Otto, we must be very careful, because it is

difficult for them to accommodate to our Institute those who have been accustomed to live in their way. Pray very much for this and along with Fr Provincial, deal with it, and whatever you decide to do, let me know, so that a decision can be made; in the meantime, I will also pray” (EP 995).

It is clear from what has been said how Calasanz was concerned about those who would enter the Piarist religious life, that is, what we now call vocational ministry. It was necessary to take care of this element so that the Institute would not collapse. It was necessary to form them well, otherwise it was better not to admit them. Not to be carried away by the abundance of requests, but rather by the quality of the requests. He was convinced that the schools, if they were run well, were a favourable place for the birth of vocations. And it was not necessary to accept them in those places where there was no novitiate or where there was a lack of suitable religious to take care of those who asked to enter the Institute. If his wishes, recommendations and mandates had always been carried out, many of the situations that Joseph had to live through his life, and that continued even after the saint’s death, would not have done. Attention, then, to vocation ministry.

2. Vocational discernment

If there was one thing the Founder wanted, it was to know well all those who were going to enter the Institute. In this sense, we can affirm that required an effective vocational discernment. It was not possible to accept who asked to join the Pious Schools without further examination. We speak of this discernment in this section.

Before admitting candidates to the Institute and giving them the habit, it was necessary to know each one well. Knowing a person is the best way to avoid from the beginning what is more difficult to eradicate later on. Calasanz did not want to make a mistake in this aspect. Thus he was telling Fr John Garcia del Castillo, in the community of Frascati: “There is no place for now in the novitiate for that young man. It is necessary to walk very cautiously and to know each one well before giving them the habit” (EP 853). Because of the experience that life had given him, he did not want exceptions in this field. He had to know everyone, even if those who asked to enter were already priests: “For the love of God, be careful to know the priests before giving them the habit, because last year four or five priests entered and it seems to me, they will only

serve to say Mass" (EP 2177)". As can be seen, he was disappointed by what had happened the previous year with other priests, who had been accepted quietly, without any further inquiry, and after they did not serve in the ministry of the schools, but simply to say Mass. And that was not what the Founder wanted.

It was even necessary to examine in secret the motivations of those who asked to enter. Only later, if there were no impediments, it was time to accept them into the Religion: "As for the young Calabrian who wanted to go with Fr Francis, Your Reverence, please inform yourself about him, as well as about his uncle, about the reason why they are not in their town, and this, secretly. And depending on whether or not some impediment is found, they can be admitted to the habit and sent to Rome. And this because "to Religion one comes to suffer in this life and to do penance, and not to be a relaxed" (EP 164).

Prudence was the virtue that the saint demanded of all his religious when it came to accept someone into the Institute. Prudence, caution, care, everything was little when it came to something as important as a vocation. He wrote to Fr Sciarillo who was in Campi: "As for the dressing of novices, I am certain that you and the other Fathers will have the prudence that is due in the choice, and also to educate them in the novitiate as it should be done, since the novitiate is usually the foundation of the Province" (EP 4035). Therefore, he was extremely careful and asked for it over and over again. What for us is an indication of the importance he gave to this aspect: that everything in the candidate be clear, both externally and internally. And behind this acceptance was the honour of the Institute. We can well affirm that if everyone had behaved in this way, many of the things that happened in the history of the early Pious Schools would not have happened. This is how the saint thought until the end of his life. It was the year 1644 and wrote to Fr John Dominic Franchi who lived in Podolin; he was writing, therefore, with the experience of many years to a man who was in the new foundations of Central Europe: "Your Reverence will be very careful in receiving to the habit, if they are persons not very suitable to increase the credit of our Institute" (EP 4176).

This need to discern well the vocation of those who aspired to enter required, according to the saint, to lengthen the time of admission and not to promise immediately that they would be admitted. In this way, the aspirants could be better prepared, and those who were going to decide

whether or not to enter had more time to know their vocation. But it was always necessary to give them good words so that they would not be disappointed, unless the Fathers were very clear about the case in question from the very beginning: “Always give everyone a good word, but do not assure them that they will be admitted, unless it is a question of some extraordinary talent. That it is better to entertain them, in order to know their vocation” (EP 352).

At times there was the temptation to send a vocation from the place where it had arisen to another so that he could be given the habit there. This did not convince the Founder. He believed that the best thing for each one was, if a novitiate was there, to enter the place where the vocation had been born because that was the place where the candidate was best known. And it has already been said that a fundamental element was knowledge of the vocation: “It does not seem right to me to give him the habit here, where we are not well informed of the qualities of the person, when we could receive it there, where he is known in detail” (EP 215).

From the letters we have, we can say that the Founder did not object on some occasions to receiving young boys of 11 and 12 years of age. In this case, they had to be with the novices, they had to be attended to with greater care, they had to make good use of their time so that they would not forget the knowledge with which they had arrived to a Piarist house. The saint was already an old man, we are in 1642, and he had relationship with Fr Manzella, who was at the Duchesca in Naples, and also with the superior of the community. To the former he said: “As for the young boy of twelve years of age, of whom you write to me, it is possible to have him among the novices, to see how he turns out; but let him also try to study, so that he does not lose the little he knows, so that he may continue and be better able to help his neighbour” (EP 3883). Half a month later, he returned to the matter: “As for the young man received at home, let him be educated at home, with the novices, and let him not leave the house except in the company of the novices; see to it that he devotes himself to study, and educates himself with great modesty, as if he were a real novice” (EP 3900). On the same day he wrote to the superior of the community: “I also hear that you have a young boy of 11 or 12 years of age, to educate him in letters and piety, in order to make him a religious; you must keep him in the company of the novices, and not let him go out of the house except when the novices leave, and it should be punctually ob-

served; and it seems to me that, since Fr Mark is busy, Fr Thomas of the Passion should give him some exhortation, who, as a person of age, will always give him very good advice” (EP 3899).

It was therefore possible to accept these young men, but the saint wanted them to be devotees: “I would be very unhappy if these young people who are determined to leave the deceitful world and to follow in the footsteps of Christ, do not go out as devoutly as some Florentines tend to do here, who, once they have entered the spiritual life, tend to do great things. You, as for the journey, have compassion on them, but, every morning and evening, force them to do some spiritual exercise” (EP 1882).

Here is an aspect that should not be forgotten or overlooked in the pastoral ministry of vocations, and that is the deepest possible knowledge of those who aspire to enter the Pious Schools; knowledge of the persons, their qualities and the motivations that impel them to enter the Order. In the saint's time and later, until recently, young boys who showed vocational aspects were accepted. Today, in the Pious Schools, in the majority of places this fact does not happen, and they look for older people. And it seems congruent with what young people are today and the need for maturity. Besides, the vocational follow-up in younger people can be done personally, if necessary, without crowding these people as was done in the past. It is true, God works as he wills, but man also attends to the evolutionary development of persons.

3. Acceptance of the Order

Throughout the epistolary we find a Calasanz who wants candidates to enter, but from whom he asks many things. It depends on the cases, on whom they speak or write to him, and on what he thinks is best for the Institute. Let us simply cite some of these requests of the Founder.

From Naples, in 1626, he wrote to Fr John García del Castillo and told him how in that city there were vocations for the Institute, but in the face of the requests he received, he was cautious: “If we had a novitiate here, we would find vocations, but I am very cautious” (EP 552).

He also preferred vocations born in our schools. They had advantages because the persons were known and he was sure that by taking care of them they would give good results: “For our purpose, the young men who are educated in our schools are preferable; we can see whether they are

well or badly inclined, whether they have good wit or not, and by training them well they give good results. What I am writing, even though I do not command it by virtue of holy obedience, it is to be put into practice as the word of God, coming through the superior” (Moncallero p. 271).

In order to receive those asking for entrance, they must have all the required qualities. He insists on this repeatedly: “Fr Evangelista writes to me that there are some young men in Cosenza who were his students and who are asking him for the habit. I have replied that if they have the required qualities, he can dress them and send them to the novitiate in Naples” (EP 3905). “[Tell] Br Lucas that he can send the student whom you have judged suitable, but from there we need the money to give him the habit; because, if he is given the habit and it is not for him, then they forget, and you cannot get it, if it is not with much insistence, which I do not want to use with anyone.” (EP 445). “I have read the two letters that have come to me by this mail. I tell you that, as for the young man who wants to wear, if he has the required qualities and the money to make the habit, please send word to Fr Jacques that I consent to have him dressed as soon as possible” (EP 594). “As for the young man proposed by Fr Caravita, if it seems to Y.R. that he is suitable, you can accept him; but since we are poor and also we have some debts, he must procure the things necessary for his own clothing” (EP 576).

From the cited texts, we see how Calasanz, to give the habit, asked the cloth of the habit or money to buy it. It is clear that he felt compelled to do so because of the great poverty that existed in the Institute. Sometimes it was not possible to give the habit to people who asked for it precisely for lack of money to buy it. It is not strange, then, although it may seem so now, that he acted in this way. The poverty lived that time in the Institute sometimes prevented candidates from entering the Pious Schools.

He also wanted to dress those whose parents were convinced that they had a true vocation. On the one hand, it was necessary to be sure. On the other hand, vocations should not be wasted: “With regard to the Sicilian cleric, if it seems to you that he has a vocation and that with his fatigue he can help the Work, you can dress him” (EP 567).

In order to give permission to enter Religion, he wanted the consent of the candidate’s parents. He did not wish to displease anyone, least of all the parents of a future religious. He always took special care of them.

And when someone professed and belonged completely to the Calasanzian family, he never failed to help the parents in need of his religious. "I am not worried if they dress the youngsters because here (Naples) I have dozens of very good wit and very good behaviours, but if the parents are not happy, we do not want to displease anyone" (EP 607).

His religious sons dedicated themselves to the school, to teach, and for this it was required to know how to speak well. For this reason, if there was a candidate with facility in speaking, such a quality was not to be wasted and he was to be admitted. The saint was attentive to everything that would facilitate the ministry in his schools and he sought the best for his students. That is why he states in the Constitutions: "All the postulants must possess grace in speech, so that they may have facility in teaching" (CC 15).

This dry and forceful affirmation, given to Fr Cherubini, who lived in Naples, indicates another of the elements that he asked of the candidates: "It is not for Religion an unhealthy subject" (EP 1209). He repeats it on different occasions and to different religious. Again to Cherubini: "If it seems to you to dress him, do so, being healthy as it is believed" (EP 1380). "As for Benedict Ghirelli see how he resolves himself, not being in good health it is not for him the Religion" (EP 1385). And to Fr Busdraghi: "As for Br Diego, you may be sure that he is not fit to be religious, especially among us, because he is always indisposed, and is an enemy of all mortification. Before giving him the habit, it should have been well looked after, since, due to lack of health, I believe that neither the Carthusians nor the Dominicans wanted him. May the Lord give him his grace in the world" (EP 1491). Also to Fr. Fedele: "As for the priest called Costa, if he is a robust and healthy man, he could be admitted to the Religion" (EP 3510). "As for the priest named Andrew Costa, I wish to know if he has some emolument for the dress of the Order, in order that the novitiate in Rome may also see his usefulness, in addition to the expense. You can give him the habit there, provided he is in good health and has no debts, nor is he wanted" (EP 3514).

Naturally, the entrance into the Institute must be for the good of the candidates, and therefore, upon entering, they should not be scandalized by the way of speaking of those who are already inside: "With the opinion of the house, you can accept the two novices you are writing to me about. Be particularly careful that the professed, who are in the novitiate, do

nothing or say anything that could serve as a bad example to the novices. In this particular, use all your rigor against the professed who give a bad example” (EP 3391). On the contrary, he wanted them to see devotion in the religious of the house they entered.

When he writes to the new foundations of Central Europe, he wants the following: “Having a novitiate, Your Reverence will try to give the habit only to those who are very suitable for founders, being the first house in that kingdom, because it is better to be few and good than many and relaxed” (To Fr Conti, Nikolsburg, EP 4031). This is normal because the Pious Schools were being born there and the saint was very concerned about the start of his Work in the different places. And even more so when the Pious Schools were starting in Central Europe.

At other times he wanted someone to enter, but he fixed some limitations. Thus he tells to Fr Fedele and Fr Peri in the following texts: “As for a mendicant for that house, if you find him suitable, you will be able to clothe him; but on this condition, that he must not pretend to go further, but remain in the office of serving all the time of his life wherever he is placed by the Religion” (EP 2619). “As for the two mendicants, if you find them ready, you can give them the habit; but let them be such, that they do not study, nor receive the first tonsure” (EP 2684).

Those who wanted to enter the Religion, not only had to have the family’s approval, but there had to be no family difficulties. This was the case if the candidate had no father, his mother was poor and he had only sisters. The saint feared that if the family had no security of life, the candidate’s entry into the Institute might endanger family morals. He wrote to Fr Trabucco in Naples: “As for clothing, if there is occasion for someone who is suitable and who does not have a poor mother or sisters, it is possible to accept him, but take care that they are suitable and of good wit; take particular care to educate them well” (EP 3809). In addition to the above, it was necessary that they should be “capable to learn quickly in the schools” (EP 2194), since he needed religious who would not spend much time later on in their studies, because the requests for foundations were many and the saint’s heart did not want to refuse any of them.

Depending on the circumstances, both of place and of persons, he sometimes would show himself with tact and care, as when he wrote to Fr Cananea, telling him not to treat the three young men who had ar-

rived with the same narrowness as at St. Pantaleo (cf. EP 30). On other occasions he was more rigid, as when he wrote to Fr Busdraghi: "Warn him also about that young man he took with him, and especially of his companion, the one who was with him in Nursia, not only separate them, but also keep them under rigid discipline" (EP 1472).

In any case, at times the situation of those who entered and then the little constancy of their perseverance was such that the saint said: "I have seen what you write to me about giving the habit to that cousin brother of yours in the second degree, who is already 16 years old. It seems to me that you can bring him, giving the habit there, and seeing to it that he brings with him two shirts, two underpants and a winter and summer vest, leaving the money he brings in that house in Genova for his clothing. Let him also bring the secular clothes, so that, if temptation overcomes him, he may repatriate with his clothes; but I think it is not necessary. He can come in company with you on the first occasion" (EP 3538).

4. Discouraging

Calasanz, who put so much effort into vocations and needed so many religious because of the many foundations he was asked, took great care in accepting candidates, which shows us how he exercised his vocation ministry. In this brief section we indicate some of the refusals he gave as they appear in his letters. In this way we will know on what basis he did not want to found his Institute.

He did not want anyone to enter without first being rigorously tested. To accept simply because a request could fill the Institute with unsuitable people. Let us listen to some of the saint's letters on the subject: "In the future, be very careful not to give the habit without first having tested very well, and in particular to examine whether they are willing to come to Rome at a sign from the General, so that they may divest themselves of that deep affection for the homeland and relatives, since our true homeland is paradise" (EP 1396). "That young man who says that he is from Monte de Competi or Ascoli, cannot so readily be admitted, even if he knew the letters, if it is not first proved what his vocation is. You should not act as you did with the last two from Frascati; he can stay a little while and try to learn, and when he knows enough, if the vocation lasts, we will dress him" (EP 352). "As for the young man, for now there is no place in the novitiate. We have to be very careful and get to know one

before giving him the habit” (EP 853). “As for the young man of Carcare, there is much to meditate on, because it is not advisable to dress here without being well informed of the conditions of the person when they can dress him there where all things are known in detail, as was the case with Fr Francis Mary of Savona, who was a bandit of that country. But if the said young man has the desire to become a religious, there is the novitiate in Genoa, and in Savona and Carcare have the faculty to dress, and it will be better for him to dress there than here. And this is my opinion, but etc.” (EP 215).

He was also reticent about those candidates who had come from another Institute and asked to be admitted to ours. Normally, if they had been good religious, they would not have left their Religion or they would not have been dismissed from it. It was therefore necessary to be careful: “As for the young man proposed by a Somascan Father, Y.R. be convinced that if he were suitable for them, they would have received him for themselves, having been with them for such a long time. For that reason, I can answer that for the moment I am not resolved to accept him unless after some time. But, if he can get into another Order, let him not lose the occasion. Thus, years ago, we admitted one, a Genoese, at the request of a Father of the Somascans, and it did not turn out very well, who was Michel Angel” (EP 906). “As for the servant of Massa, who has been with the Fathers of La Scala; you must believe that if he had been on purpose for them, they would have given him the habit. Therefore, such rejected people is of no use to us, even if the Fathers themselves have recommended him; so it was with John Angelo Francesco, recommended by the Somascan Fathers, and who had a not too convenient result” (EP 1383). “As for the one who has been in the Christian Doctrine, if his brothers, who are of the Reformed of St. Francis, judge him fit for their Order, they can give him the habit among them. But in that Order they must not want him, and they want us to receive him. Since he is already old and is not a priest, you can tell him that for now, there is no place for him; and with good words you can send him away” (EP 567). “To him who has been with the Theatines for three years, send him in holy peace” (EP 573).

He did not want the habit to be given to vagabonds (cf. 2670, 2581), nor to young boys (cf. 1129), but neither to old men who even offered him money already now and more at the time of his death (cf. 1209, 1315). His desire was this: “I want you to know what I have refused from

novices, from one five thousand scudi, and from another three thousand, because I want them to enter poor..." (EP 732). (EP 732).

He takes special care when those who take the habit are going to be founders of the Institute in a place: "So it is impossible for Fr Peter to go to those lands for the time being, but there will be no lack of subjects. When it is built enough so that it can be inhabited, I will send the Master of Novices, who, although he was educated in Italy, was born in Spain. However, Your Reverence, do not give the habit to anyone until his arrival, for you will not do little in view of the construction and in doing so, try not to bother or upset anyone, nor be light in words or angry, but have great gentleness with all. For the Catalan nation has no equal in all the world for those who behave well with them, and vice versa with those who behave badly. So, this being the first place where we should give the habit and educate some novices, who will have to be founders of the Institute in other communities, it seems to me necessary that no one should be given the habit until the necessary fathers have gone there. If the affairs of the Working Brothers are settled this summer, perhaps in the autumn our Brothers will leave for Barcelona. Attend to the construction with diligence and never be disturbed, for it is a very great grace of God that a man should be master of himself and a great example to his neighbour. If I were not 80 years old as I am, I would gladly go to that foundation" (EP 29).

5. Behaviour of the Founder himself

How did the Founder personally behave in this matter? What he wrote to Fr. Cherubini in 1627 to Narni is striking: "I, thank God, have never asked anyone to wear our habit, even though I have been impertuned by many" (EP 610).

And it is not that he was not asked to do so. He tells openly: "There are many here who ask me for the habit, but I intend to be a little more severe than in the past" (EP 103). We do not know why the saint acted this way. Perhaps it can be understood by making a simple distinction. He says that he did not "beg anyone to enter". It is like saying (we have already heard him write that 'he has been pestered by many'), that he did not ask anyone to take the habit, but that he has been asked to take it; and it seems that the saint regrets not have been always more cautious in receiving them than he has been in the past.

That is why he rejoices when he is told that there are young people with the vocation to be Poor of the Mother of God. Calasanz loves his Institute deeply and what more does he want than for as many as possible to enter it, provided they fulfil the requirements mentioned above: “I rejoice that there are some young people who are willing to be truly Poor of the Mother of God, out of pure love of the Lord. If it is sincere, the vocation will be confirmed in the time until next spring. And then you will give me your opinion again and also that of those Fathers. Tell them to pray that, if it is to be to the glory of God, the business will end well” (EP 2503). “I like the fact that you have prepared the novitiate and that you are beginning to give the habit to some who have the qualities to help our Institute; and if among the professed there are some, clerics or priests, who have a good disposition for writing and abacus, let them learn, since I would like this teaching to be given by the priests, since this school of writing and abacus is of great importance” (EP 3625).

At times he himself wants to examine the vocation of the candidates or he wants to verify the knowledge they possess. It is his concern to know the candidates and their dispositions personally. He says to Fr Cananea: “As for the young man who says he knows the abacus, I would like to see him and question him a little about his resolution” (EP 314). And to Fr Castilla he writes: “I want to see these two young men here, in a feast, before I give them the habit, to see what they have to say about their resolution. Therefore, send them, they will be able to return very soon and we will determine the day” (EP 477). For this same reason he asks the Provincial of Naples, Fr Casani, to be cautious and to consult him about some candidates: “Fr Provincial should be very cautious and considerate in accepting novices because the profit and progress of the Religion depends on knowing the vocation. Let him consult the General beforehand, advising him in detail of the qualities of those who ask for our habit” (EP 727a).

It is evident, also in this section, the saint’s concern for vocations. He wanted good candidates. He was not in the custom of calling but there were many who came to him asking for the habit. Knowing his religious, he sometimes advises prudence, sometimes asks that they consult him and let him know the qualities of some candidates. He was mortified by the experience he had of the haste shown in the acceptance of requests sometimes; and he had become aware that at times there had been a lack of discernment, accepting people who had come from other Religions.

He wanted novitiate houses to be opened in the Provinces. Regarding Naples, schools which he loved so much because he himself had gone to that city to found them, he said: "If the novitiate is not opened in Naples, things will not go well, because it is not possible to provide for these two houses and many others with only a novitiate in Rome alone; but if the Novitiate is opened there, there will be no one to take care of it, because Y.R. has many external concerns and the novitiate requires one who is not occupied with anything else, and there is no one there. However, by introducing some changes from those schools in Porta Reale, I will try to remedy the matter of the novitiate. But as long as we do not have a novitiate, it is not opportune to clothe subjects and not attend to them as they should. Because those who came here after having been there for some time without a novitiate caused a great trouble to reduce them to the simplicity that is due. Our entire Institute depends on good novitiates" (EP 925). He remembered what had happened in that city, so it was necessary, as has already been said, to test those who asked for entrance there: "As for the two young men you propose to dress, it will be good to test them until spring, because the first ones who are to take the habit I want them not to be ordinary people, but good or nothing, because in Naples the fact that at first ordinary young men were dressed, has been the reason why no one of worth has asked for the habit; but I want you to keep those two you say until further orders, which will be the safest thing to do, and I will send you people who can help you in everything" (EP 1937).

Also at that time there was opposition among the regions, because of what some cardinals had told him. To Fr Cherubini, in Naples, he wrote: "I have been warned by many and by the first Cardinals of the Court to go very slowly in dressing people of Naples because in some Religions there is great discord between this nation and the others; advice should be taken from the other Religions" (EP 989). And in a general way he wrote: "Houses cannot be maintained if novices are not dressed properly" (EP 3867).

6. Petition to the Lord

But vocations are a gift of the Lord. It is not something gotten by man's own strength. And all vocation ministry must be on its knees before the Lord, because it is he who sends vocations: "The Lord will help the Religion by sending proper vocations, and by sending away those who are not" (EP 3749). This is why we must pray to God with all our

strength: “Let us all pray that the Lord may send us suitable subjects not only for the novitiate, but also for studies” (EP 1817).

And since we are weak and fallible and the vocational theme is so important, we must ask the Lord for light to see if someone is suitable or not for the Institute: “Let each one pray to God personally and without speaking to anyone else in the presence of his Creator and Lord, “Let each one pray to God personally, and without speaking to anyone else, in the presence of his Creator and Lord, determine within himself [if this young man] is guided by the Spirit of God for the Pious School” (CC 227). All the more because the Calasanzian vocation is hard, laborious and full of difficulties. Therefore, if it is not examined in the light of the Lord, it is dangerous to behave lightly in this matter: “[It is necessary] to have many workers... of a great spirit... and called with a particular vocation... [because] they are going to encounter difficulties that derive from a life mortified by the obligatory dealings with young people, laborious due to the continuous effort of the work, and despicable in the eyes of the flesh, which considers the education of poor children as vile” (MT 24).

It is necessary to make the right choice. We have already mentioned how the saint thought that if this was not done, the Institute could collapse. Yes, we must pray to know how to make the right choice of vocations. “Before admitting to the habit, let us pray so that we may know how to make the right choice” (EP 226). “I tell you that I will pray, and I will pray earnestly, as much as I know how to pray to Our Lord, to give you the light to know how to make the right choice, because it is a question of *summa rerum*, which is the vocation” (EP 1236). It is true that for the ministry of the Pious Schools chosen persons are required. “We need people chosen by God to reform the youth in these regions, which is an apostolic office” (EP 3692).

This is how Calasanz faced the vocation ministry, as we call it. He was concerned about this reality and in spite of failures and people who entered not having to do so, Calasanz achieved an Institute that knew how to resist the serious setbacks of the last years. An Institute that is still alive. An Institute that struggles more and more to achieve religious who live in love with their ministry, and what the Founder set in motion with it. If we ask ourselves today about the candidates that it is necessary to have, we could point out some characteristics: they should be at least 18 years old, because times have changed and we need people who know

what they want to do with their lives. It is convenient that the knowledge of them be done as it is possible in our time, not Calasanz' time. That is to say, that a psycho diagnosis of their personality be made, to know that they have no serious disorders and not to repent later, when there is no remedy; with a normal intellectual quotient; with a certain attitude of truth, of not deceiving themselves, of knowing how to deal with the conflicts that will not be lacking in their lives; with a certain autonomy of the self, capable of taking risks, of not seeking religious life as a place of security; with a vocational process that is coherent with their personal history; accompanied by a trusted person in their vocational discernment.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

There were many candidates to enter the Pious Schools. Requests abounded. But not all could be admitted. The reasons were various. Sometimes because the houses were too poor to afford the habit for those who wanted to enter; others, because the candidates did not seem to be suitable for the Institute or because they did not have the conditions required to enter it. On the other hand, other candidates did not find any difficulty in achieving their desire and received the habit with joy, personal of Calasanz, and of the house that welcomed them, especially that of the novitiate. Thus, to be or not to be. To be apt for the Religion and the ministry, or not to be, and to leave the Institute or not to be admitted to it.

There were impediments that did not allow entry into the Religion and, therefore, there was already an objective vocational discernment. These impediments had been collected by Calasanz in his Constitutions. Some were serious, which excluded them from the Institute, others less serious, which did not exclude them from belonging to the Pious Schools. Besides those that the Founder gathered in the constitutional text, other impediments appear in his letters when, addressing the Masters of Novices, or the Superiors of some houses, or to a specific religious, he indicated his thoughts on this matter. In his letters, he does not only refer to those who should not be admitted to the Pious Schools; he also writes positively of those who have the qualities that make them suitable for the schools. All this is discussed in this chapter.

1. In the Constitutions

The constitutional impediments must be placed in the time of the saint, in the legislation that existed at the time and what was done in

the Council of Trent speaking of this topic. The saint introduces this aspect in the Constitutions and devotes no less than a whole chapter to it, though a brief one. Why this inclusion? Calasanz himself lets us know: "In order that the ministry of our Congregation may develop fruitfully within the Christian Society for the glory of God and the usefulness of our neighbour, we believe necessary that our candidates be studied and tested with skill and prudence" (CC 8).

The aim was that the Institute would be fruitful in the world and in the Church and that the proper ministry might produce the fruits that were desired. For this, suitable subjects were required. Each one possessed his charism and God bestowed them as he willed. It was therefore necessary to test the candidates to make sure they had received the charism of the ministry of the Pious Schools. If this was well done, one could expect a happy result from all the work that was being done.

That this thought came from Calasanz himself is clear from what follows. We know that when Cardinal Giustiniani ordered the saint to draw up the Constitutions, and for this he retired to Narni, Calasanz collected some Constitutions of other Institutes that could help him in writing his own. Basically, there were three of which he profited, those of the Society of Jesus, those of the Clerics Regular Minor and those of the Theatines. Well, the number cited above does not appear in any of these constitutions, it is proper to the saint. It reflects the thought of the Founder; in its drafting he did not rely on other Constitutions.

The impediments that he cites in his Constitutions, some totally exclude admission, and others make entry into the Religion difficult. The fact is that the Piarist vocation is demanding. Again this thought, which is found in n. 9 of the Constitutions, is entirely from the saint, and says: "Numerous are the conditions required for an efficacious accomplishment of our mission. It is fitting, therefore, that he who performs the service of studying the candidate should know the impediments that totally exclude him or make his admission difficult".

The first thing he does is to point out the serious impediments. This point is striking. Calasanz relies on the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and in part it is his own way of seeing things. Let us see the two aspects. N. 10 says: "The following are grave impediments: To have been apostate or gravely suspect in matters of faith; profession in another

institute; homicide, as long as a dispensation is not obtained; infamy by crime that disqualifies lawfully for Orders; marriage or formal promise of marriage that may provoke litigation; servitude according to the law. In all these cases the law must be observed". In order to make more visible what we have said, let us put in italics what is proper to the saint in the quoted number: *"The following are grave impediments: to have been an apostate or to be to be seriously suspected in matters of faith; Profession in another institute; homicide, as long as a dispensation has not been obtained; infamy for a crime that lawfully disqualifies one from Orders; marriage or a formal promise of the same that can provoke litigation; servitude according to law. In all these cases, one must abide by the law"*.

We see how the saint wanted to abide by the law of his time, how he was concerned about what concerns the faith, and he details some elements more rigorously.

The impediments that are less serious are listed in n. 12, and he takes from the constitutions of the Society of Jesus as well as in that of the Clerics Regular Minor; in number 13 he relies only on the Jesuits. We use italics again to indicate what is proper to Calasanz. *"Less serious impediments and which do not totally exclude the candidate are the following"* (CC 11). *"To have taken the habit in another Institute without being professed or remaining one year in it; to be encumbered with debts or subjected to civil obligations; in this regard, follow the directives of the Constitution of Pope Sixtus V"* (CC 12). Calasanz did not want anyone to enter the Religion who had outstanding debts or civil obligations, because he knew all the difficulties that such individuals could create in the Institute.

The impediments follow: *"To be excessively young; in this case, observe the provisions of the Council of Trent; defect in bodily integrity; physical weakness; notable external deformity, according to the law; birth of illegitimate marriage, provided that the candidate has obtained a dispensation for the Orders"* (CC 13).

Therefore, in this aspect of constitutional impediments, the saint relies on the law, gathers what seems best to him from the Constitutions cited above and introduces some elements that more precisely determine certain aspects, besides as being more open on some questions.

What was to be done with those who had such impediments? He tells us: "If it is discovered that the candidate suffers from some serious impediment, he is not to be kept any longer; let him be dismissed as soon as possible with kind words and with consolation. The less serious the impediment, the more accentuated it is, the less suitable it makes the candidate" (CC 14). Point taken from the Jesuits and the Clerics Regular Minor, but with an add-on that indicates how Calasanz was. He introduces this expression: "with words of affability and consolation". It is the humanity of a man who cares about the people; if he had to deny somebody the entry into the Religion, he does not want to hurt him.

The following point is practically all his own: "If a notable erudition, a rare ability or some other outstanding quality makes him extremely useful for our ministry, after consultation with Father Provincial and with his consent and opinion, he can be admitted to our ministry. In every candidate it is desirable fluency in speech so that he may have facility in teaching" (CC 15).

In the present Constitutions this chapter has completely disappeared. It is logical that in the vocational discernment it is necessary to pay attention to what prevents a candidate from entering the Order. What is asked of those who postulate entrance are found in numbers 44 and 45 of the FEDE, approved "ad experimentum" in the General Chapter of 2009. There is spoken of what is required of the candidate and also of the Order.

1. "To be accepted to the Novitiate, the following is required:
 - health and absence of canonical impediments;
 - decision for the vocation from a sufficient experience of faith;
 - capacity to opt for celibacy, obedience and poverty, with sufficient psychological and affective balance;
 - aptitudes for Piarist community life;
 - aptitudes for the exercise of our mission.
2. The Piarist community commits itself to:
 - to welcome the candidates with joy and cordiality;
 - to receive them as they are, with their initiatives and concerns, with their experiences, positive qualities and limitations
 - to place at their disposal, with full dedication, a suitable religious as Master of Novices;

- to place at their disposal a suitable Novitiate House and a team of religious with whom they form community;
- to help them respond, with free will, to the call of God within the Church.
- provide the means for them to have a meaningful experience of faith in the community;
- to be open to the acceptance of new members into the community
- discern the vocation of the candidates”.

2. The letters

The letters of Calasanz speak of all this in a different way. In them we cannot find the law, the but life. The daily life of each of the houses. The Founder received questions, requests, doubts, and he had to resolve everything immediately; he did not take long to respond to all that was written to him, because of his concern for his Institute and, above all, for matters that affected Religion so deeply.

The letters show the wishes of Calasanz in this matter, as well as his opposition when he saw that something was not convenient.

a) In the first place, let us mention some elements he required to enter the Pious Schools:

He considered the intellectual quality of the candidate as a fundamental element because he understood the importance it had for the ministry. Talents could not be wasted. Neither those within, nor those outside the Religion. Not those from within, and that is why when he met people with real talents who wanted to enter the Pious Schools, he favoured their entry as much as he could and asked his religious to let them in. Nor did he wanted talents to be wasted outside the Religion, and it was precisely this reason that he often used to defend the schools and the education; to take advantage of the talents of so many children who, if they were not educated, would waste the richness of their intelligence. Regarding the candidates, he wrote: “Being young and of good wit, being familiar with the Latin language and, above all, of good manners, send him to Rome with the required documents, even if he has no money to clothe him” (EP 2835). “Give our habit only to young men of the best of wit” (EP 2685). “As for dressing him, if there is an occasion to be suita-

ble... he can be accepted, but take care that he is appropriate and of good wit. Particular care should be taken to educate them well” (EP 3809).

As we have seen above, it was necessary to be cautious in the acceptance of the candidates, but it is striking how it seems that it is not so important if the one who asks is of good wit, unless having it already satisfies prudence itself: “Be very prudent in giving our habit, unless it is to young men of excellent wit” (Moncallero p. 221).

At times the same saint himself points out the qualities that the candidates must have, distinguishing whether they are going to be brothers or clerics: “It is convenient to see if the hermit is fit to be a cleric or a brother... If he wants to enter as a cleric, he needs to have a good knowledge of Latin. And in any case, whether for a cleric or for a brother, there is no difference between us, unless it is more work for the clerics” (EP 165). “As for the boy of the Lord Prince of St. Agatha, see if he has any imperfection by which he cannot be like the others, and communicate it to the Lord Prince, so that he may see the truth; but if he has no serious defect, give him the habit, but on condition that at this moment he is good. For it would be putting the Order to confusion, if one who does not know grammar receives the habit for cleric who will be ordained as priest, since there are very many brothers who have studied and know something of grammar and are content to be worker brothers. And as for the scrutiny, although I have said that they can give the habit to such and such, I presuppose, nevertheless, the observance of the Constitutions, which speaks of the scrutiny; and the superiors must know ‘to the letter’ (as it is said) the Constitutions, and see to it that they are observed. Because if they do not take it in account, observance is soon lost, and we live almost like laity” (EP 2177).

Precisely because of the Piarist ministry, he wanted the candidates to have qualities for the two aspects of it, that is to say, that they could serve as soon as possible in the schools and, on the other hand, that they were capable of being good religious, observant of the Constitutions. They were like the two arms that every Piarist had to have in order to fulfil his ministry well: “Give the habit to some who are capable of helping in the schools as soon as possible. But it is necessary that they learn to observe our Constitutions, because otherwise they will be religious in the habit and will serve only to disturb religion. Learn them, then, in this, which is very important” (EP 2194).

Something that the Founder cared for with special solicitude was related with the families of his religious. He would do this before a candidate entering the Religion, asking for their consent, as a means of discernment to see if it was the right place for him; as well as after his entry, helping as many of his religious' relatives of the religious needed it. He wrote from Naples to Fr Graziani, in Rome. It was 1626 and Calasanz had gone to found to the city of Vesuvius; he told him: "This morning, it is the 27th of the present, Brother John Antony left with four novices who have received the habit, and two who are about to receive it; among the latter two there is one called Simon, from Alvisi, who, after having left by ship for Rome in bright weather, a relative of his, and others, came to meet me, saying that the young man is leaving his mother widowed [and] poor, with a burden of three little daughters of 13, 8 and 6 years of age, and that they had their hope in this brother of theirs. The mother is young, which it may be that she will marry, they say, and leave the daughters without a guardian. The uncle who today gives them some protection, may also abandon them, or he may also marry; besides other difficulties to prevent him from becoming a religious. On the other hand, the young man has neither the art nor he is able to help them, if he does not first learn some trade or practice, which requires a lot of time. And other things that I have also been told by the Hieronymite Fathers, as the said young man will be able to tell you. Communicate this problem to Fr Glycerio, and see what spirit this young man has, and whether he is ready to return to Naples; his people say that a merchant will help him there to return to Naples, to whom they will send a letter with the present. I did not know any of these things until the ship left; before that, we had been assured about him by the said Hieronymite Fathers, that are like those of Chiesa Nuova. Had I known about it before, I do not know whether I had sent without having overcome the difficulties here" (EP 559). "As for giving the habit, if there is someone there who is suitable and has no poor mother or sisters, he can be accepted; but take good care that they be of good purpose and of good intelligence, and take special care to educate them well" (EP 3809).

b) But in the letters also appear all the refusals that the Founder gives to some candidates whom he believes it is not convenient for them to enter the Religion. The reasons for these refusals are very clear in the same letters.

He does not want to be small in stature, perhaps because he is also attentive to the external image of his teachers, an important element in

a classroom: "See to it that only persons of good wit and who are not too small in stature". (Moncallero p. 258). "I also send Br Francis of the Sacrament, so that he may be under the discipline of Fr Provincial, since he is so small that he cannot serve in any school" (EP 1113).

Nor did he want candidates who came from very poor families. He knew and had experienced that once they had reached the priesthood, they did nothing else but look for goods for their families. And often they forgot their obligations: "We have the faculty to admit novices, in order to replace with new religious those who have left, but they must be of good wit and manners, and not of a very poor family" (EP 4552). "As for the novitiate I want you to take great care of it, and if the occasion arises, you should admit to the habit individuals who are suitable, and not as in the past, when it seems to have sought out the poorest of the poor, and in order to help their parents, many of them gave the Order more trouble than good" (EP 3864).

He did not want the Institute to be filled with ordinary, uneducated, spoiled people. It was not good for the Religion and, consequently, neither for the students, and that is what he says to Fr. John García del Castillo who was in Frascati: "It is not good to fill the Religion with ordinary people" (EP 674).

If there was one thing he detested in his religious it was melancholy, and that is why he constantly insisted that candidates who were inclined to it not be accepted. He even asked his religious to reject any melancholic thoughts. It is worth remembering that in his time the expression "melancholy is what today we call "depression". Anyone who is involved in education can understand how negative a depressed educator is. One can only agree with Calasanz also on this point. Let us look at his insistence: "I would wish that never a melancholic person be admitted among us" (EP 1231). "See to it, before giving the habit, to find out if anyone suffers from melancholy. Because they tend to be stubborn and easily end up hectic" (EP 1461). "Y.R. should go on discovering among the novices who has this defect of melancholy and send him away as soon as possible" (EP 1452). "I wish to know the particular qualities of the young man, because if he is capricious or melancholic by no means be accepted" (EP 931). "Having come to the proof with Fr Bernard [two] novice[s], [one], for many reasons, is found that he is not fit for the Order; among these

is that he is too melancholic; therefore, when these great heats have passed, send him home” (EP 1452).

He did not want ordinary persons, “because we have more ordinary people than we should have” (EP 2685); nor people with a difficult character, especially if they failed in giving their judgment: “As for the individual proposed by Fr Garavita, do not take even one step forward, because men who by nature commit such faults, usually have greater faults in their judgment” (EP 552). He did not want subjects who did nothing else but create difficulties for the superiors in the houses: “To please the relatives we should not admit into the religion individuals who serve only to annoy the superiors” (EP 1502). He did not want sick people who could do little to help in the ministry of the Institute, a hard, vile and despicable ministry, as many judged it: “I have sent the novice for the clothes of Br Thomas, in the world called Masturzo, and at the first opportunity I will send him away. It is not convenient to have a continuous hell in the Order. Here he has been eight months among the convalescents, and I have not sent him before because it is summer” (EP 1237). “The novice John Baptist, who came here sick, I do not judge him fit for the Order. Therefore, once he recovers his health, we will resolve” (EP 1314). “I have returned the secular clothes to the novice Diego, who was always sick” (EP 1495). “I have sent there to the novitiate for the habit of Br Thomas, but they cannot find it; so, if in any way it can be resolved there, do so, and send him home, because of his continual illnesses” (EP 1242).

He did not want people with physical defects (this element was already among the impediments in the constitutional text), especially if these defects made it difficult for them to exercise the Piarist ministry. In this sense, he took care of the image of his teachers: “I told him that the blind priest is not suitable for us, and likewise the student who is blind in one eye” (EP 1827). He also took care of the moral aspect and he did not want in his schools teachers who could attract attention for this reason: “As for the young man who you brought along, he cannot be given the habit, because he is a bastard [son]; so we are sending him back” (EP 3194).

And giving a few more hints about how he did not want certain candidates in his Institute, we can add that he disliked and did not want the arrogant: “At present it is necessary to give good example to the laity

and to keep in mind that whoever among us seeks powers or offices of honour, gives signs of great pride and consequently of being in a bad state, the Holy Spirit saying 'pauperem superbum odivit anima mea'. I suspect that Fr. John Baptist suffers from this defect and it is necessary to help him by offering him humble offices; otherwise without medicine will the sore not cure but only will fester" (EP 2332). Nor did he want ignorant people: "I do not resolve to admit young men for priesthood who do not know grammar well. Many have asked me to enter among us and I have not been able to satisfy their desires, because they do not know how great our task is. That at the present time it is not convenient to admit young men to the priesthood to whom we have to teach grammar. We need men who, after a year, can serve us. But you can tell him that if at present it is not possible to admit him to our Congregation, in time it will be possible" (EP 20). He did not want unmortified people: "As for Br Diego, you may be sure that he is not fit to be a religious, especially among us, because he is always indisposed and is enemy of all mortification" (EP 1491).

He did not like whimsical people who also had other defects: "You never wrote to me if you persuaded those two novices that I sent there to pass to another Order; that this is not a matter, especially one, to keep them in the Order. I think I am going to send two others for the same thing, to take off the habit from them; one, because he is always half sick, and wants to live the life of a convalescent, for eight months now; and an individual who is not healthy is of no use to the Order; the other, it seems to me, has been in Nursia very capricious and disobedient" (EP 1209).

He discouraged the entrance of people of the high society as we see in the following texts: "He has come out of courtesy and devotion to hear and serve my Mass three or four times Mr. Ferdinand Leopold Bennone, son of Your Excellency, and in speaking to him I have discovered a great desire for Christian perfection, but, considering his qualities and Your Excellency's state, it seemed to me to give him the advice that he would do something very pleasing to God if he try to make himself so suitable in letters and virtue in his present state that he deserve to be elected to some bishopric where he can manifest by his exemplary life the spirit shown by St. Charles Archbishop of Milan and other holy Prelates have shown in their churches, in which state he would do greater service and

profit to the Church of God than by becoming a religious of a very observant Religion” (EP 3461). “Regarding John Mary, it is the opinion of Your Excellency that, if he wants to become a religious, he should enter the Religion of the Dominicans or another important one. I would not want in any way to displease Your Lordship or your wife by dressing him among us, who are religious of very little name and of very little virtue and of a thousand other faults. Nevertheless, such as we are, we will pray to the Lord for you and for all your house, whom His Divine Majesty bless you always “ (EP 3750).

When a candidate from one place had failed, he was sometimes wary of admitting others from the same place. It seems that he had already learn a lesson: “As for Santi, for the time being, I do not resolve to clothe him even if I had as much money, because there is no comfort in the Novitiate and because the people of that country do not succeed, as has been seen in many, especially in his brother who wore the habit of Carmel” (EP 220).

In spite of the fact that sometimes, as we have seen in the previous chapter, he accepted young men, we must think that they were rather exceptional cases. In fact, he wrote to Fr Cherubini: “It is very important not to receive young boys of poor judgment. Let the Provincial Father to be on the alert not to give the habit to such young boys” (EP 1129). But to Fr. Graziani, also in Naples, he tells him: “The young man proposed by Mr. Giovanni Battista Ottonelli, being only 16 years of age, is not yet fit for the weight of the charity collections, not having done any manual exercise. However, Y.R. will be able to see him, and to resolve as you think convenient “ (EP 565).

With all this, the saint wants to say that “it is better to be few and good than many messy and relaxed” (EP 4031). He tells “to receive young people who are very intelligent, rather than to admit easily people who are not good enough” (EP 4059); it means that we should not be hasty in accepting candidates (cf. EP 1708); vocation is so important that it is necessary to give the habit to persons who are suitable to be founders. It means, in short, what the Constitutions affirm and which we will emphasize in the following chapter: “Passions that are hidden in the interior of a man are difficult to diagnose and with greater difficulty are uprooted. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that, after a careful examination of the impediments, the candidate be subjected to a prolonged test.

Before being admitted or not to the common life of our Congregation, it is necessary to know him deeply by his own testimony and that of others: of his teacher, of his companions and friends, and of those with whom he has had some contact" (CC 16).

3. Conclusion

It was a matter of pointing out the impediments that prevented the entry into the Religion. To take care of this aspect is also to raise the vocational level of a group. If people are accepted with impediments, I do not say serious, those that exclude the belonging to an Institute, but even not serious, there will never be in the Order an increase of spirituality, passion for the ministry, deep love for the poor and commitment to give one's life for them. In this case we would find ourselves on a slippery slope that could lead the Institute to a fatal outcome. It is necessary to be careful, therefore, of to be or not to be of those who can enter or not enter the Order. It happens that in reviewing the letters of the saint, and see how he responds to the questions asked of him, to the difficulties presented to him and how he has to give his opinion on the situations in which some religious found themselves in this matter of the admission of candidates, it gives the impression of falling into case study. But let us not forget that case study can be elevated to a general norm when its meaning is grasped and then it can be applied to concrete situations in which formators also find themselves today.

If we want to translate what seems to be case study into a general norm, we would have to cite the following elements: First, the psychological knowledge of the candidate's unconscious. It is important to go down to the inner levels of knowledge, because it is there the root of the motivations of why one wants to enter the Institute.

Secondly, it is necessary to watch over the person's capacity to possess, at the same time, interiority and solitude. Interiority, which means the capacity to create one's own world and to discover the intimate richness of the person: affectivity, reflection, being at ease with oneself, intimate, non-verbal communion with the world around him. And if so, care must be taken not to make loneliness a problem, but rather a loneliness inhabited by the one to whom one is going to give the life. A solitude that does not isolate but enables the capacity for relationship.

Third, responsibility. One does not enter by taste, by simple desire, by voluntarism, by obscure feelings, even if they do not appear to the candidate, e.g., because one is looking for security and is afraid of life and is incapable of taking risks. That is why it will be good for the candidate if he learns to assume the reality, not to remain in idealisms, to take seriously the day and what it brings, to help those in need, to work for the community, to study in depth, to care about others...

Fourth, the quality of relationships with others, without avoiding their presence and without confronting them in order to defend one's own autonomy. To be able to express to others what he is, because it is the best way to a clarity of life, necessary to enter the Order.

THE TESTS

1. Without trials there is no way

To enter the Religion of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, a simple petition was not enough. We have already seen that many asked to belong to it, but they did not enter automatically. The saint had already warned: “I insist that you be prudent in admitting novices. For from good novices comes later good observance and the good of the neighbour” (EP 3156). The future of the Institute depended on the quality of those who entered. Calasanz wanted the vocational level to be high, that his sons would follow an ever more intense path of progress, that they would not falter in the following of Jesus, that they would be an example to the students, who had to see them happy, and for those who saw and observed them when they were outside the religious house. He wanted to constantly raise the vocational level of his sons, because it was the best way to respond to the desires of the Church and the Christian Society.

The important thing is not only that there be more vocations, but that the vocational level of all religious be more and more intimate, more consistent, and in this way can also attract vocations.

All this was a path of progress, of perfection, of effort, of commitment and of the Lord’s grace. We had to trust in God’s mercy, but, at the same time, we had to make every possible personal and institutional effort.

To be as certain as possible of the vocation of those who knocked at the doors of the Institute, it was necessary to test them. Testing was an essential element of the vocational journey. It was necessary to check all those who asked to enter the Religion. The test passed was one more aspect of the discernment of the candidate’s vocation. Those who did not pass it were politely dismissed, or, better, not admitted to the Religion. The test helped to follow the path, to correct defects, to straighten the trajec-

tory if it had deviated, to show what was in the heart of the petitioners, to clarify the motives for which they wanted to enter, to make sure that the candidates were on the right path, and to convince the companions of the candidates' good will and to see that the vocation was clearer and clearer.

That is why Calasanz insists on this element. So much, that the second chapter of his Constitutions is entitled: "Admission of the novices to the period of probation". Before profession, therefore, throughout the whole time of the novitiate, the novices had to be tested. It was an obligation of the Master to verify the vocational soundness of the novices. But the tests were not only required in the novitiate, but were also necessary to enter the novitiate. As if to say that there were two times of testing: the first one, to enter the novitiate, that is, to be admitted to the novitiate; and the other, during the novitiate, during the time when the novice was preparing for profession. At both times, the candidate had to pass the tests; and if he did not pass them, he had to be refused entry with good words or send him out of the novitiate, not allowing him to make the profession.

From the perspective in which we find ourselves, we can affirm that the tests could and should raise the vocational tone, the vocational level of the people. A crisis that is overcome matures the person, and hence crises are good; it is also true that one can fail to live through them. Trials mature the person, although it is true that one can fail. Nevertheless, they are equally positive because they indicate that this is not the way for a given person. In this sense, everything is positive, because the important thing is not what one wants or intends, but to fulfil God's desire, which has many ways of being fulfilled. One of them is precisely to overcome certain tests, because it can make clear the interior of the person and the motivations that have led him to ask to enter the Institute. Or to become a novice in it.

2. Before entering the novitiate

In the Founder's thinking and as it appears in the Constitutions, nobody should be admitted directly to the novitiate simply because he had asked to become a Piarist. There was no direct and immediate relationship between request and acceptance into the novitiate. There had to be a waiting period in which the candidate had also to be tested. We must admit that this wisdom of the saint was not carried out on many occasions. This sometimes led to disastrous results.

The reason for testing people, both before they were accepted into the Religion and during the novitiate, Calasanz tells us clearly: “The twisted tendencies that nest in the heart of man, with difficulty are diagnosed and with greater difficulty are uprooted. We have judged, therefore, to be of the utmost importance that, after careful examination of the impediments, the candidate should be subjected to a prolonged test. Before being incorporated into the common life of our Congregation, it is necessary that he be known profoundly through his own testimony and that of others: of his teacher, of his companions and friends, and of those with whom he has had some dealings “ (CC 16).

First he had to be known: “In the future, it is necessary to give the habit to few and well known” (EP 2739). When one arrived, the first thing was to know him well. To know him well meant not only to be clear about his character, his way of being, his reactions, his thoughts, but his vocation in a special way: “Be very cautious and considerate in admitting novices. For in knowing his vocation consists the profit and progress of religion” (EP 727a). “You have to observe carefully the qualities of the individuals whom you admit into the novitiate” (EP 3801).

In addition to know him, it was necessary to test him, since the test helped his knowledge. Often a person is not well known as long as he is not before the test and is seen how he reacts to it: “In the future be very cautious not to give the habit without trying them out very well first, and in particular be attentive to any indication from the General when they come to Rome, so that they may divest themselves of this very special affection for the fatherland and the parents, since our true homeland is paradise” (EP 1396).

It was a necessary proof because the idea repeated so many times by the Founder: “I judge it better not to clothe and to be few than to be many material religious and without spirit. And this can only be learned with much recollection” (EP 3384). He had to clothe as many as were necessary because of the many petitions received from numerous places: “As for giving the habit to brothers who have some office, not only to two, you can give to four, because they are necessary” (EP 3654). Many times the need was pressing and Joseph is seen urging them to take the habit, but only if it would be useful to the Institute.

It was also necessary to test these candidates at the first stage of their request to become religious. And this is how the Constitutions determine

it: "If, after prayer, the group of Fathers who have a voice in that house, consider it -guided by the Spirit of God- he may be admitted as a guest for a short period of time, which will be determined by the Superior. He will thus become aware of the way of life of the Institute and our Fathers will know him more intimately in the Lord... in an atmosphere of great tranquillity he will ponder his vocation with himself and with God" (CC 17). "In order that the ministry of our Congregation may develop fruitfully in the bosom of Christian society for the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbour, we believe it necessary that our candidates be examined and tested with prudence and skill" (CC 8).

Admission, as we can see, did not depend on one person alone, but rather on the group of Fathers who lived in the house, something like what a formative community is for us. They had to let themselves be guided by the Holy Spirit and discern whether the candidate was guided by God's spirit and whether there was no reason to doubt his will, desire for good, and willingness to work wholeheartedly in the Piarist ministry. If so, he was admitted, but only as a guest. All the time that he stayed in the house was to be used by the candidate to know the Piarist life more closely, and for the Fathers to know him more intimately. It is beautiful how ends this point 17 of the Constitutions, which points out the ultimate objective of this time: "... in an atmosphere of great peace and quiet, let him ponder his vocation with himself and with God".

At the end of this time of stay in the house, which should be brief and was to be determined by the superior, comes the discernment to enter. The Constitutions determine it in this way: "If, having undergone various trials he perseveres steadfastly in his resolution, after the prayer of the community, he may be admitted to take the habit" (CC 18). Writing to Fr Romani, in Florence, the saint told him: "As for the tertiary, try to find out who has received him and on what condition; and if he has been promised the habit, it is understood [to be] with the consent of the majority. Moreover, if he does not wish to continue there, let him be dismissed, giving him some help, even if it has not been promised" (EP 3317).

3. In the Novitiate

The candidate has spent some time in the religious house; he has been able to know the Piarist life more closely; he has had time and quiet to think about his vocation; he has been tested by various trials during

this time; the Fathers of the house have observed him and have discerned whether or not he is suitable for the Piarist vocation, all together and in prayer; they have wondered if he was led by the spirit of God, and concluded that the candidate could enter the novitiate. What does Calasanz think of this vocational period? The novitiate is a decisive time, because if a candidate does not do well in the novitiate, one can think that this is the way his life will be: “As for the sick brother in the wardrobe, who is also a novice, it is necessary to take into account the same thing I have written about Br Vito, because if they are like that in the novitiate, they will have similar problems all their lives. Give them some warning so that they will wake up and resolve themselves” (EP 562).

The novices should be tested well, as the Constitutions require: “They should be vigorously tested and trained in exercises of the spiritual life: prayer, reading and meditation, and also by various mortifications, such as putting on the most deteriorated clothes, exercising the lowest services, to keep, above all, silence and modesty of sight, and so on” (CC 21). Tests that should not only be of external elements, but also those that affect the interior of the person: “Let them also concern themselves with breaking their own desires and their own thinking and to carry out whatever results in self-denial; and learn to be extremely simple” (EP 22). “Try the novices” (EP 1452), he wrote to Fr Busdraghi, master of novices. In another letter to the same Father, he complains about the Provincial of Naples because he admits easily into the novitiate without first trying to inform himself about the subjects and to make “many tests” (EP 1392).

The same saint complains about the behaviour of a novice towards him, saying: “In no way can he remain in the Religion if he does not return to live in the novitiate in Rome this March. And I do not think, as the saying goes, to let myself be pulled by the nose by a novice, so I have to do what he wants me to do. Either he will return here to the novitiate, or he will go to another less austere religion” (EP 1325).

That is why he insists on the scrutinies of the novices: “As for the novices to whom you have given the habit, if they turn out to be well, you will have done a holy thing, but it is necessary that every four months a secret scrutiny be made, and those who do not behave well should be rejected, so that they do not give a bad example to others; if this is not observed, you will be mortified. Fr Steven writes to me from Chieti that as soon as he has settled things in that house, he will be there to arrange the

novitiate; regarding which, as I have told you several times, you should take special care to visit the individuals, and to know their inclination. You may leave the care of temporal things to Fr Mark. Regarding the admission of anyone to the habit for the novitiate, other than those whom I have commanded, you should try to consult all the vocals" (EP 3964).

It is very important the saint's call to visit the novices. A necessary aspect in all vocation ministry and in the first years after the novitiate is the need for young men to be cared for, to be visited, to be approached by the superiors and to dialogue with them. And if this is what the saint asked for in his time, it is even more necessary in ours. It is also important to know their "inner inclination".

And we continue with the need to do the scrutinies: "As for the Novitiate, whoever completes his probationary period on April 6, you can, on my behalf, extend his profession until Sunday in Albis; and in the meantime, make the scrutiny, to see if all agree in admitting him, consulting first of all with Father Assistant" (EP 2827). "As for the novice, I will send the formula of profession to be made by the brothers; and you may admit him, once you have had the scrutiny" (EP 3287). "Regarding the three young men who have finished the novitiate, the scrutiny should be made by those who are professed in the said novitiate, and if it seems good to those two or three professed, let them be admitted to profession" (EP 2792). "As for the scrutiny, although I have said that they can give the habit to such and such, I presuppose, however, the observance of the Constitutions, which speaks of scrutiny" (EP 2177).

For the vocational good of the novice, not only should he be tested and undergo the scrutinies, it is also fitting for their spiritual life that "at the beginning [of the novitiate] they should be given Spiritual Exercises for at least one month, or for a longer time, if the Master judges it convenient; at that time, they may make a general confession of their whole life" (CC 20). And, at the same time, they should show the sincerity of their desire to belong to the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools by doing the following: "The novices should freely distribute all their goods among the poor, relatives and friends; thus, as a total poor person, he will make himself worthy to be received into the Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God" (CC 29). All this because the innermost part of the person must be purified. Calasanz expressed it with great knowledge of the spiritual life with the words mentioned above. (Cf. CC 16).

In this way the novices had to be tested in order to raise their vocational level. The novice could not remain in the same situation in which he entered. The novitiate is a journey of effort, of commitment, of following the Lord more closely, and this will make his interior life grow and become richer every day.

But there were other elements that had to be taken care of as well, seeking precisely that same spiritual level that the Founder desired so much and for which he advised, prayed and gave instructions to the novices. Let us look at some aspects.

He did not want them to dedicate themselves to study during the first year of the novitiate, because in this way they could fail to achieve religious perfection during this period of formation: "It is not my intention that the young men in the first year of the novitiate dedicate themselves to study while they have not profited something in the spirit... Therefore, see to it that they attend first to what is most important, that is, to religious perfection" (EP 4120).

And in the Constitutions he said: "The Provincial can allow to study those who during the first year of the probationary period have made important improvement in the various mortifications and especially in the cultivation of prayer, lest they forget what they have learned" (CC 279). For this reason, they were not to go out the first year of the novitiate: "The removal from the novitiate the novices who have not finished already at least one year is not convenient neither for them nor for the Religion" (EP 585).

It was necessary to strive to acquire perfection, but for this, and before that, they had to be healthy: "As for the sick novice who came from Nursia, try to devote every care to him, so that he may recover his health; after we will see the result he gives in aspiring to religious perfection" (EP 1167). They should not have important obligations to take care of, otherwise they could cause trouble in the novitiate: "I am glad that they have begun the novitiate, having already given the habit to six, in the hope of giving it to others who are on purpose, and not to those who want an excuse to help the mother, the sisters and the father poor. Many of these have given us much unpleasantness in the Order. So go with great caution; and after you have given them the habit, take special care to educate them well, because on them rests the good progress of the Order" (EP

3905). If they wanted to walk as was due in the novitiate, they should observe the Constitutions: "As for giving the habit to the novices, and as for professing, in the future the order of the Constitutions will be observed, so that they will walk with more security, and especially with some from these lands, who badly want to be elsewhere but in Naples" (EP 1532).

They are to be of help to the Religion and not a nuisance: "As for the place of the Novitiate, I want it to be paid for as soon as possible, and to be arranged as well as possible, at least for six or eight novices for the time being. And see to it that they be such to give help to the Order, not displeasure, informing me of all the qualities they have" (EP 3605). The saint gave this advice because many times there were religious who acted badly in this vocational matter. This displeased him greatly: "While I am writing this letter, Br Peter of St. Paul has arrived. He was deprived of the habit for not being suitable, and there he has been given the habit again. He does not seem to me on purpose, neither now nor before. He has been in Chieti, and he speaks of Fr Caspar as badly as he can. I will write about this individual next week, with the Lord's help" (EP 2730).

In this regard, he wrote to Fr Cherubini in Naples about the behaviour of a Father, and even included an important warning to the Provincial: "God forgive Fr Peter Andrew who was so hasty in giving the habit to so many, that here it takes a lot of work to make them enter the way of mortification. Tell Fr Provincial to go slowly in dressing them, for I am afraid that he has gained a reputation there for dressing all kinds of people with ease, especially those who are recommended, which is not appropriate" (EP 808). "If you have not sent the clothes of the two novices who arrived lately, send them as soon as possible, since it seems that they can only live in Naples. Fr Provincial should take great care not to admit such subjects to the habit so easily and not to believe easily in particular information without first making many checks" (EP 1392). He was sure that "those who do not make the novitiate well, do not go well later on" (EP 2565).

That is why they had to take good care of the novices: "I have received your letter of the 27th of last month, and in it the news of five novices recently dressed as clerics, whom I wish to see attended with all diligence... Let the same diligence be applied in making them learn the letters and the holy fear of God, practising the virtue of humility, by which one discovers eternal riches and hates temporal greatness" (EP 3781). "As for the two young men he proposes to dress, it will be good to test them until

spring, because I want the first ones who are to take the habit not to be ordinary people, but good or nothing, because in Naples the fact that at the beginning ordinary young men were accepted has been the cause that no one of worth has asked for the habit; but keep those two you say until further orders, which will be the safest thing, and I will send people who can help you in everything” (EP 1937; cf. 952).

During the novitiate, “Y. R. will take care to visit the subjects and to know their inclination” (EP 3964). And more directly he says to the Master of Novices: “On one point we wish earnestly warn the Master: that he may discover in each novice the Inner Inclination or, in other words, the guidance of the Holy Spirit” who teaches the humble to pray with ineffable groanings; by this path he will strive to bring each one to the summit of perfection” (cf. 23).

At the end of the novitiate, “the novice can be admitted to profession; although the vow and consent of all the professed members of the house in which he takes vows is also required” (CC 30; cf. EP 1532).

3. Today

If we want this time of vocation ministry to be fruitful today and to raise the level of vocations, we must also test the candidates today. What happens is that the tests have to be adapted to our times and we cannot accept many tests of the Founder’s time, not even some that were done a few years ago. The principle remains: it is necessary to prove the vocation; the forms may change. And the skill of the teacher lies in finding these proofs, and above all in perceiving them when they are given without being sought. Perhaps this is the best way to know the candidates, to see their capacity for the Piarist life and their determination to follow the Lord.

We indicate some that can be given, pointing out at the same time, many others that can occur to the Master.

The fundamental test is life itself, day by day. It is necessary to see how the candidates react to the various circumstances of life. Sometimes they will be normal situations, sometimes special. Since they are not provoked purposely, but are given by life, there is no artificiality in them, and the mood, character and way of being of the candidate can be better ascertained.

Community relations are themselves an important element in the knowledge of the person: how he deals with others, what relationship he has with them, if he shuns them, if he seeks refuge in a companion, if he feels frightened or if he seeks his autonomy to prevail. Community life is not easy; it is true that one must learn to live in it, so it ends up being a very significant test of one's ability to live in religious life.

Acceptance of humiliations is not easy. And it is good that from time to time candidates be humiliated. The best humiliations are those that life itself brings. Making this reality artificial often ends up distorting it and causing the opposite of what was intended. In life, there are many circumstances in which a person can experience humiliation, and it is necessary to be attentive to the reaction to it.

Overcoming envy. It can and often does appear in life. It is not a problem; it is, instead, how the person deals with it. It is noticeable whether or not one rejoices in the triumphs of others; whether or not one praises the achievements of others; whether or not one seeks to make others look bad; whether or not one does not feel external and internal joy when the brothers are praised and applauded for whatever reason or motive.

See that a person is not constantly the center of the group or of the community. There are those who always want everything to pass through them, that everyone dances around them. They seek to be the center of conversations; they are always right; to whom nothing can be denied; or who do everything the best. To break this spiral, to leave aside someone who has such tendencies, can do them a lot of good, even if they have to go through moments of anguish and disgust.

It is necessary to examine each person's capacity to give in. There are some people who are very closed; it may be because of their character, but it could also be because no one can contradict them; they are always right and always right. This is not at all good for religious life, and for this very reason it is necessary to break such an attitude in these people. It does not do them any good.

The acceptance of the observations or reproaches that can be made to a candidate. It is necessary to act with prudence and tact, but one cannot overlook certain or many things to which the Master must draw attention. It is good, therefore, to make observations, reprimand if nec-

essary and watch the reactions that arise. Whoever does not learn this matter, could be in the future origin of great community difficulties.

There are people who are always justifying themselves. They are always justifying of everything that can be attributed to them. Simplicity of heart asks us not to act in this way. One must even know how to accept a reprimand even if he is not to blame for it, as long as it does not harm another. Perpetual self-justification is not evangelical.

Knowing how to devote one's time to the common or particular needs of someone to be helped. Not to be stingy with one's time; to make good use of it, yes, but also to know that time is given to us for others, and whoever does not learn this, he will not know how to behave properly in the future, in so many occasions as he will find in religious life.

More interiorly, to overcome temptations. It is easy to fall into temptation and for this reason it is necessary to learn to ask for forgiveness and to fight so as not to fall next time. The candidate must be transparent. There are many external temptations to which the master can see how the candidates react: gluttony, to become bourgeois, dumbing down, wasting time, wriggling out of the community needs....

It is necessary, little by little, to detach the heart from those ties that hinder the path leading to Jesus. This detachment is learned with time and exercise, and for this reason it is necessary to take steps in the vocational journey

Acceptance of reality as opposed to idealism. The moment arrives when a person's ideal that had sustained him can be broken, due to the force of the reality he is living. Important moment of life that must be taken care of, so that the candidates do not become discouraged and know how to interpret what is happening to them. It can be a fundamental moment of the vocational journey if one knows how to live well this kind of crisis.

Knowing how to combine autonomy with obedience. Here, too, it is necessary to learn and experience little by little that there is no greater autonomy than that which is lived in obedience. And in no way it destroys or hinders one from being oneself.

LIFE OF GOD

With the expression “life of God” we want to indicate that those who live the vocational stage of the novitiate have been called to experience such a reality. This is what they should do during this period of vocation ministry. Pastoral ministry is of great importance in the novitiate because it is a matter of preparing the novices for the future; to put the foundations of their present and, above all, future life; to make of them people who seek to conform their lives to that of Jesus. The progress of life depends on how one walks in the novitiate. This is what Calasanz said to Fr Busdraghi: “Let me know how the novices behave, because all the progress of their life will be known from the profit they make in the novitiate” (EP 1491).

For this reason, he insisted on the same thing when the Pious Schools were being opened in Central Europe. He wrote to Fr Novari: “The progress of our Institute in these parts depends on the profit that the novices make during the time of the novitiate” (EP 2420). The other way around was also true: “It is seen that he who does not well in the novitiate, does not well afterwards” (EP 2565).

That is why, in this chapter, we want to point out some elements, attitudes or virtues that the Founder wanted the novices to acquire and to practice throughout their novitiate. This is what would increase their vocational experience, their interior life. We will see just a few of them.

1. Religious perfection

Religious life is entered in order to attain religious perfection. For this very reason, in the novitiate, which is the stage in which preparation for this life begins, the first and foremost thing to be exercised is perfection. This is what the novices must work at and what they must strive for and, with God’s grace, begin to attain: “Strive, (unless these

Fathers give you orders to the contrary and to whom you can also inform of the state in which you have found these novices, if you have not written to them) to devote themselves first to what is most important, that is, to religious perfection, in which I trust in your prudence, trying with kindness to bring them back to observance and to make them understand that the principal end of the religious, after the glory of God, is one's own salvation and secondly the salvation of neighbour, and that it is necessary first of all to gather as a shell in order to pour out to others as channels" (EP 4120).

The saint repeats this constantly in his letters to various religious. Indeed, the first and most important thing is precisely religious perfection: "It is not my intention that as long as the young men in their first year of novitiate have not made some profit in the spirit, they should devote themselves to studies; and I am sorry that, because of the carelessness of someone who has governed them, they have occasion to regret after their profession that they have not made the novitiate and that they have not been taught the things of the spirit as they should have been, and that they have devoted themselves to the works from the beginning, as you say. See to it, then, Y.R...., that they devote themselves first to what is most important, that is, to religious perfection" (Ibid.).

That is why they cannot be taken out of the novitiate: "No one can be taken out of the Novitiate, because they are exercising themselves in perfection and they cannot be taken out unless they have made some progress" (EP 220). Precisely it is the novitiate where one must learn to enter the path of perfection: "Anyone who is seen to make little progress in the life of the spirit, will be sent to the novitiate house. There he is to be exercised with greater rigor, and he has to learn to enter the path of true perfection, to which every religious is obliged by his profession" (CC 93). And the professed who are in these houses are to teach perfection to the novices by their example: "You and the other professed who are in the novitiate must teach the way of religious perfection by the good example... You will undoubtedly do great benefit to the novices" (EP 3903). Perfection which in reality consists "in little things" (EP 2269).

In the background, in this search for religious perfection, it was Calasanz' desire his religious to be saints. And this they had to try already from the novitiate. We have to keep in mind that they were at

the beginning of a new religious Order, the Pious Schools, in which the Founder spurred all his religious to holiness. This is what he told Fr Ottonelli twice: "I intend to bring here the novices who study there so that they may attend the Holy Year in Rome and learn to be saints" (EP 243). And again: "I have written that these novices come to Rome, where we will see to it that during the Holy Year they may become saints" (EP 249).

2. The observance of the Constitutions

The observance of the Constitutions was the privileged way to attain religious perfection and to be a saint. A teaching that should be given more with deeds than with words: "Try, not only with words, but much more by deeds and good example, to attract the novices to the observance of our Constitutions. That if you have this excellent intention, you will undoubtedly be helped by God in all things" (EP 2792). If they are observed, God will do great things through them: "Try to form the novices there with fidelity to the observance of our Constitutions and with humility, if you want the Lord to do great things through them" (EP 3303).

To Fr Alacchi, who was in Palermo, in a beautiful letter, he asks him to observe the Constitutions, along with other virtues, at the same time that he complains of certain behaviours: "For the time being, it will not be little if they keep those schools in Palermo, begun with novices, who, as you tell me, often go around the city as if to be seen; but the important thing is that they please God by knowing how to pray well and having in order the common exercises of the Constitutions, of which, as you tell me, they have very little observance; because, you say, they all wear a cloth shirt against the Rule and other things which, if well observed, would please not only God, but also men. My will is that they observe the Constitutions, and to those who do not observe them, and to whom it seems that they do not oblige even under venial sin, I say that such will not be long in not observing some commandment of God, because the religious goes from that to this. To rule by shouting has never been praised by anyone; the Superior must be an example to the novices by his works" (EP 2229).

He asked the same of the novices of the new foundations in Central Europe (cf. EP 3303).

He insisted on the observance in general. As we have seen, sometimes he would add "the Constitutions", but at other times he would simply speak of observance, and that was what interested him. His novices, his religious in general, all the Piarists had to be observant, and for this reason he asked Fr Costantini: "I exhort you to be kind to everyone and try to encourage everyone to the holy observance with gentleness and paternal patience, so that they may forget that opinion and love you as a father and not as a severe judge" (EP 3660).

The superior had to ensure that his religious were observant and that they had a filial love for him and do not consider him simply as a severe judge. Two years earlier he had already told the same father, writing to the same house in Nursia: "Y. R. try to arrange the novitiate in Palermo in such a way that it may be lived with great observance" (EP 3046).

3. Humility

Perhaps this is one of the elements on which Calasanz insisted the most. The reason for this insistence is very simple: because he lived a profound experience of conversion to humility. And when someone had such an experience, he cannot forget it, and he wants others to have it too. Calasanz knew that he was someone else after that experience; his life had changed radically, and he owed it all to the grace of the Lord, who by sheer mercy, had converted him through the poor children. It was necessary for his religious to be simple, humble of heart, and this had to begin already in the novitiate. That is why he insists so much on the humility of the novices and, in general, of all religious.

That is why he constantly asked the Fathers to train the novices in humility: "Go forward in your office as master of novices, and try with all diligence to educate with holy observance and especially with great humility" (EP 2895). "Tell me how the novices conduct themselves, because the whole progress of their life will be known from the good they do in the novitiate. Exercise them very much in humility, which they must learn as in a contest and with holy emulation" (EP 1491).

And when he wrote to the founders of the houses of Central Europe, he returned to the same subject: "I was greatly consoled by the letter of Your Reverence of last August 21, with the good news of the novitiate in Lipnik. May the Lord grant that it may always go from good to better

with a constant increase of spirit and devotion, for the foundation of Religion consists in the good progress of the novitiate. And since the Lord has chosen Your Reverence for this exercise, put all diligence into educating the novices in that holy humility which our Institute seeks” (EP 2947). “May the Lord grant you the strength and the spirit to make all the novices humble and detached from the things of this world so that they may be good to do great things where the Lord would like to be served” (EP 1408).

Humility is required in the Pious Schools in order to be able to teach poor and abandoned children, to exercise one’s own ministry: “You have done well to change some novices... Visit them often and encourage them. Let them learn to humble themselves interiorly as much as they can, so that they may be worthy of such a suitable exercise as that of teaching the children, which to the world, our enemy, seems so low and vile. With practice they will attain their worth” (EP 1160). With humility they imitate Christ, who was its teacher, and in this way they follow him, love him and identify with him: “Just as blessed Christ made himself the teacher of holy humility, wishing us to learn from him, so you must see to it that these young people learn this virtue, having Christ Blessed as their teacher, and you as his continuator. I ask the Lord to give you a great spirit to teach it, and to our young people a great desire to learn it” (EP 3888).

Moreover, the Lord speaks to the simple of heart, and he manifests himself to them: “The holy simplicity is very dear to the Lord, and with those who are truly simple he is happy to deal” (EP 862). “I have received the list of novices. And if they are good, they are many. For it is often said that it is better to be few and good. Try to make them love the virtue of humility, by which they will acquire the knowledge of the way in which they should act in all their actions” (EP 1325).

Humility makes the novices brave soldiers in the spiritual life: “It is of the greatest importance that the novitiate should walk in its beginnings with that virtue and good example which are due. Go and visit it at least once or twice a week, and look frequently to find out if they are lacking in anything, exhorting the novices to forget the things of the world and to become brave soldiers in the spiritual life. They will achieve this if they learn the virtue of humility with particular study” (EP 3011). Without it, the novice will never be of any use in the reli-

gious life: "I will ask the Lord to give the students the spirit to know how to learn both letters and humility. For without this virtue they are rather a hindrance than a help. Exhort them, therefore, to embrace it with great fervour, that they may be able to be of benefit and honour to the Religion" (EP 708).

4. Prayer

Prayer is a fundamental element in religious life. Novices should be taught to pray: "Teach [the novices] to pray alone in the room, apart from prayer in common" (EP 3853). "Take care of the novices as much as you can, so that they may learn how to pray" (EP 3928).

But to know how to pray from the heart, in truth, prayer must be supported by some virtues: "Make every effort to introduce the novices to religious modesty and to the holy virtue of humility. Thus, they will become more apt to know how to pray mentally, which is the life of the soul" (EP 1386). Without prayer, the novices, instead of being a help to the Religion, will be a hindrance to it: "If the novices are not formed with spirit and prayer, they will be a hindrance and not a help to the Religion" (EP 2588).

Prayer must lead the novices to live in the hands of Providence: "I desire that our novices generously despise the world and all that is in it. Even more, that they may throw themselves confidently into the arms and providence of God. That as soon as they have acquired a little of this state, they will be able to deal safely with all kinds of people" (EP 371). He must also lead them to become children, in order to be able to enter into the ways of the spirit: "Use all diligence and see to it that they are observant of the smallest things, so that they will become good pupils. The novices should not take it amiss to ask permission for the least things. For they must become like children if they want to enter the true way of the spirit" (EP 1472).

In this way they will learn a very important thing, which is the true spirit: "I have seen what you wrote to me in your letter of the 22nd of this month, and it seems to me that you are quite right about the education of the novices, who, if they do not learn the true spirit at the beginning, I do not believe that they learn it later; they come out materialistic as laymen or a little less, and this defect has almost always existed in our novices.

But if our things would take a different course, it could be remedied. In the meantime, it is necessary to do the best we can for the benefit of these novices” (EP 4126).

But this true spirit does not come naturally; it has to be learned and that is what the Fathers and, above all, the Master of novices are there for: “I want our young men to dedicate themselves to the development, first of all, of their own spirit, and then of the letters. I never cease to ask the Lord to give him spirit, for the benefit of the Order” (EP 4240).

Calasanz rejoices that those who have passed through the novitiate possess it: “It would please the Lord that the said Father had a tenth part of the spirit that his nephew has obtained in the novitiate, or that which Fr. Sebastian has acquired in the short time he has lived in the novitiate” (EP 237). “Whenever I hear that the novices walk the spiritual way with fervour and joy, it will be of great consolation to me. For starting the purgative way, they must all compete with one another as to who will be the humblest. For the banner or cup of the race will be given only to the humble, who will then be exalted according to what they have humbled themselves in this life. This way is very repugnant to our senses, and so it is said that the way is narrow and few are those who find it. Insist much on this matter, which will be of great use to our novices and, consequently, to the Religion, depending upon how well the novitiate is used for the rest of the religious life; for it is true that he who begins well has walked half the way” (EP 1360).

5. Modesty and silence

Modesty and silence were required elements in the novitiate. By means of these two virtues Calasanz wanted to educate the novices well. Silence, in order to be able to speak with God and live in his presence; modesty, so as not to become engrossed in things foreign to the novitiate. We must keep in mind the time in which Calasanz lived. It is not that in our time these both virtues are not necessary, but rather that the importance given to them is subject to another set of values that were not so important in those days or had not been discovered. We always find the same principle, that the virtues that are cited must be maintained and lived at their rightful value, but the way of practice them has changed. The discernment of these aspects is up to the Master and he has to take it into account in their behaviour.

Calasanz asked the novices to be modest: "Let the novices be more modest than the previous ones, because I will inform myself about it" (EP 958). "I recommend modesty to these students of ours. I have been told they give too much free rein to their senses, and they should think that Fr. Campanella and his followers see their vaunts, and although they conceal them, they note them well. It would be much better to give them the example of a selfless religious" (EP 1697). Otherwise, if they did not meet this requirement, it was better to send them out of the Institute: "See to it that the young students and the rest of the house, especially the professed, be very modest and mortified by every slightest scandal. And the novices, if they do not mend their ways once they have been warned, then tell me, for if they are immodest during the time of the novitiate, it is better to send them away than to keep them" (EP 999).

In the same way, silence had to be introduced in the novitiate: "Ensure, Your Reverence, that silence is introduced into this novitiate" (EP 3286; cf. EP 60). It is the only way to learn mental prayer: "See that the novices learn silence in this novitiate. Otherwise, they will never learn mental prayer" (EP 1392).

The saint indicates the reasons why this practice was important to him; a practice that today may seem rather useless, since there is so much talk about community relations. And yet all the saints have practiced and recommended it: "I recommend that you make the novices observe silence, because in this way they learn to speak to God, and the virtue of silence manifests to be a man disposed and reformed from within. Consider Y.R. this particularly recommended, since, along with the modesty of the eyes, leads a novice to religious perfection, which is the hidden treasure of the gospel, which, when found (though few find it because they do not do violence to themselves), they leave all earthly things and seek to possess it as something that surpasses all things of earth. May the Lord grant you his grace and bless us always" (EP. 1367).

6. Mortification and the world

Mortification could not be absent in the novitiate, a requisite also to know how to pray: "Warn the novice you say that he behaves in a relaxed manner, that If he does not succeed in being mortified, he will not succeed in praying either" (EP 1874). When he speaks of mortification, he does not refer only to the mortification that the novice seeks on his own

initiative, but also to those that come from outside and which he must know how to receive and assimilate: “Tell Br Venance to see to it that he receives mortifications properly” (EP 33).

This mortification must lead him to know how to forget the world. He has left it, he has entered religious life and must turn his back to the world. We must understand well this expression of the saint addressed precisely to novices who, having finished their probation, were going to dedicate their lives to be among children and to be in contact with their families. They were not going to be hermits. The meaning of this element is found in numbers 33, 34 and 35 of the Constitutions, which belong to chapter IV, entitled “Separation from the World”, and which say: “Let the religious who desires to obtain from our Institute the most abundant fruit, consider addressed to him the exhortation of the Prophet: ‘Hear, daughter, look: give ear, forget your people and your father’s house; the King is captivated by your beauty’” (CC 33). “Ensure, therefore, to divest yourself of all affection for relatives and friends and make it your own of the Spirit. Love them with well-ordered love; and keep yourself united to Christ the Lord, desiring to live for him alone and to please him alone” (CC 34). “See to it that you do not look back after you have put your hand to the plow! Put aside the business of this world and merely secular concerns” (CC 35).

And writing to Fr Romani, he said: “Exhort the novices to forget the things of the world and concentrate their attention on becoming valiant soldiers in the spiritual life. This will be achieved, if with particular interest they learn the virtue of the holy humility, which our professed members of that house have not been able to find, but they have found instead the accursed pride” (EP 3011). To Fr. Castilla he wrote: “Try to help him to forget the things of the world. You will do him and all the members of the house a great favour, because if he returns to the world ‘actum est de illo’” (EP 789).

This mortification and forgetfulness of the world should lead the novices to “learn to be simple in bearing all that results in self-contempt” (CC 22).

By this “detachment from the world” is meant above all a spiritual attitude. The son of Calasanz was to live daily among the children, attending to their problems, trying to educate them, putting all his efforts to solve their difficulties. In this sense, they should be in their students’

chores. But, at the same time, their heart had to belong to the Lord; they had to be united to him and, as the Constitutions point out, “desirous to live for Him and to please Him alone”. This is the attitude in which they had to live their detachment from the world, but not from the problems of the students and their situations.

7. Obedience

Another virtue that had to be inculcated in the novices was obedience. The novices had to be educated well, and if the sense of obedience was lacking, such an education would fail: “These student novices seem to me to have learned little obedience. It is necessary that they come here to learn it, since the good of the Religion lies in the good formation of the novices” (EP 246).

8. To sum up

If the Institute wanted to advance, to grow, to have enough subjects for all the requests that were being received, it was necessary to educate the novices well, because the future of the Institute itself depended on it: “It is not profitable to have the novices in this way, so either do not give the habit to anyone else, or, once they have been given the habit, send them immediately to Rome with the clothes they have brought from the world, because the novitiate must be done as it should be done or not at all” (EP 2616). We can see that the saint wanted to have the necessary structures for those who were going to enter the novitiate. We can translate this by saying that he did not want vocations that he could not take good care of; he wished and intended that they could fully live a process in accordance with the desires that had led them to ask for the habit.

If they are to be well educated they must have a house of their own, so that more freely devote themselves to the practices proper to the novitiate: “In a letter of the four of this month, you write to me about several novices who are in different houses. As long as there is no place in the Novitiate, they can be kept where they are, with the greatest possible care” (EP 2797).

And if they do not have their own house and live with the professed, they should be separated from them, because it is more convenient for their formation, lest they receive bad examples: “I want to build in this

house whatever is necessary, so that the novices may be completely separated from the professed” (EP 1378). “I hope that the Lord will grant us a separate place for the novices; they will profit more, because they will not have occasion for distractions, as they have now because of the schools. I would like to hear of some good success in this regard” (EP 1472). “As for the question of the site in Posilippo, it was from the beginning badly oriented. Seek now to remedy it in any way possible; that, although it is a solitary and distant place, it is also convenient for the novices, who will have to be educated in spirit. And since they will be few in number, it will not be very difficult to care it” (EP 1495). “I will first try to send a brother novice mason, who first worked as a stonemason in the house of the Duchesca, and who can arrange the most necessary things in that house, so that the novices can be completely separated from the professed” (EP 1373). “The novices should be separated from the living quarters of the professed” (EP 3670). “Y. R. see to it that the novitiate in Palermo be arranged in such a way that they could live with great observance and to deal with the professed as little as possible” (EP 3046).

During the whole Piarist life and, therefore, also in the novitiate, the book from which the novices had to learn all that was necessary for their spiritual life was the Passion of the Lord, which contains all kinds of good things: “The true book in which we all must study is the Passion of Christ, who bestows the knowledge proper to each one’s state (EP 1563).

When the novices behaved in the way we have explained, they gave the saint an immense joy: “It always gives me great consolation to know that the novices walk the spiritual life with fervour and joy” (EP 1360).

9. What about today?

We have seen the importance of the life of God in the ministry of vocations, at this stage of its development. The elements we have mentioned should also be present today in those who live the passion of being Piarists, of following Jesus as Calasanz did, and to live for the children to whom they are going to give their lives. But for this life of God, or experience of God, some presuppositions are required. They have to be examined in the vocational pastoral.

It is necessary to examine that the image of God brought by those who enter is not linked to a magical world, of a childish type. That the

God they live, interiorized in their lives, be something that stirs the depths of the person, to the point of reaching the psycho-affective. That they do not live in an infantile or adolescent world. That the God of their lives brings polyvalent feelings, both of dependence and of freedom, and, therefore, their God does not appear as a super protective power, nor as a rival. That they live in responsibility, that is, that they have discovered transcendent, unconditional values, ideals of life. That each one can express, write down, the relationship he has had with God from the childhood until now, and be able to name all the experiences he has lived. That they learn not to separate life from prayer, as if they were two separate and even opposite realities.

Prayer is important, but it is more important that they examine why they pray, and to whom they pray. Because there can be many reasons why we pray, and not all of them are praiseworthy. Unconsciously we can seek ourselves when praying, we can seek to have a positive self-image, or to want God to have a positive image of ours, and for this we pray. Or simply, to accomplish the Constitutions. The why of the prayer is more important than whether or not we pray. And in the same way, we should examine to which God we pray, because one can have different images of God, and according to the image one has, we will pray to a different God.

It is important to live the prayer from the Word. It is important to discover that prayer is also grace, even if we have to put all our effort and commitment into it. If the Lord does not grant it, nothing can be done. Prayer must accompany the whole vocational process, even if it is adapted to the moment of each one and to his strategy. Prayer allows us to live the crises through which the person passes and allows an autonomy liberated from self-possession.

Some of the above-mentioned elements can be translated into living a poverty of spirit. The poor in spirit believes he has not right to anything, and his impotence for good seems normal to him. But, at the same time, he does not measure his life by the realism of his possibilities, but by the greatness of God's heart.

Deep down, and this is how we have begun this chapter, he seeks perfection, which must be translated today into an intense following of the Lord Jesus. It must be understood that adherence to the person of the Master does not consist in internalizing him as a model of identification,

but in that bond of faith by which the person of Jesus becomes the source of one's own being.

Everything consists in being a disciple of Jesus so He is our whole life. And then one must personalize the faith. This is closely related to being grounded as a person. That is why we must not separate these two aspects of life. And that is where grace comes in. Because one cannot personalize what responds to the structure of our opening to transcendence. But how can be done for God's own gratuitous intervention in life, and when it is He who establishes the lordship of His love in a person? It is then when a person rather than doing, trying, or seeking, he feels that he is attracted by the love of a God who wants to do his work in him.

THE MASTER OF NOVICES

In Calasanz' time, and dealing with vocation ministry in a broad sense, as the period of formation to become a good religious of the Pious Schools, there was no such thing as a formative community. The saint was inaugurating novitiates according to the needs, and in these houses there was a group of fathers and brothers who dedicated themselves to various occupations. In addition to the Superior, there was usually the Master of Novices. The other fathers and brothers were dedicated to the schools or to the different domestic tasks. In some cases, there could be some fathers who helped the Master of Novices. It is true that the Founder wanted houses that were only novitiates, and sometimes he succeeded; but more often the novices lived together with the other religious in the houses that were schools for the children. For this reason, in the previous chapter we have noted Calasanz' insistence that in those places, the novices should not mix with the professed. It was difficult to do.

The serious problem that was constantly posed to the saint was the repeated and insistent request for schools; a request that came to him from everywhere, small places to large cities. And the heart of Calasanz could not refuse such requests. On one occasion he went so far as to say: "Have I had ten thousand religious now, I could within a month distribute them all in those places that have asked me with great insistence. So our Religion is not like many others, which by various means try to penetrate the cities. Because ours is sought and procured by many cardinals, bishops, prelates, great lords and principal cities, as I can prove by many letters" (EP 2027).

Faced with so many requests, he needed religious, but they had to be formed beforehand. And therein laid his struggle, between heart and mind. The latter told him that the novices had to be well formed and for this he had established two years of novitiate. The need of teachers for the schools, where his heart was, led him to betray what his mind was telling

him, and many times, at the end of the first year of the novitiate, he sent novices to teach. This behaviour had serious consequences. He also encountered the problem of the Novice Masters. He had a clear idea of how they should be, but in practice it was difficult to find them as he wanted. As a result, the Novice Masters were not always suitable; on occasions, there were novices entrusted to a random priest for lack of real Novice Masters. All this had an influence on the issue of formation, which was one of the weaknesses of the Institute in its beginnings, and which was dragging on over time, in spite of interesting interventions by different Fathers General. But now we are with the Master of Novices.

1. The Need for Masters of Novices

He states the principle in a letter to Fr Cherubini, who was in Naples: "Without a Master [of novices] and a good one, the novitiate is no novitiate" (EP 1007). It was clear to him and in fact he will fight to make this principle a reality in all places. He wanted Masters of Novices and he wanted good ones. And he looked for them; to find them, that was another matter.

Sometimes in the houses, novices were admitted without a Master; something that displeased the Founder. That is why he went so far as to ask that the number of novices not be increased if there was no master who could help them. For what can be done if there are many novices if there is no formator to take care of them? He found this precariousness: "It is not good to increase the number of novices if there is no suitable Master" (EP 3270).

He was especially concerned about the foundations of Central Europe so that they would have suitable Masters of Novices and the Institute could progress more easily in those lands: "Towards the end of September six of our Fathers left Rome for Nikolsburg, and not before because of the excessive heat we have had up to now. Among them one is for Master of Novices. With them it will be possible to spread the Institute more easily in those places" (EP 1885). He also wanted to have, in each house, a spiritual father who, among other things, would also take care of the novices: "In each house it should be a prefect of spiritual things who would take care not only of the novices, if there are any, according to the customary Rule of the novitiate, but also ..." (EP 1385).

We can see from these texts, which could be multiplied, the need the Founder had for Masters of Novices, and how he judged that a novitiate was good when it had a good Master of Novices. That is why he cared very much about the new foundations and in a special way those outside Italy, when the Piarists began to found in Central Europe. The Institute would be well established in those lands if the novitiates were good, and these would be good if they had a good Master of Novices. It was the way to take care of vocation ministry in the novitiate period.

2. Qualities and teaching

The Founder tells us in his Constitutions what he wants the Master of Novices to be like. It is a description of the qualities he wanted to find in him: “After the novice has been dressed, he [the novice] is entrusted to a formator, the Master of Novices. Father General should choose for this important service a religious who knows how to guide the novices towards the fullness of virtue by his prudence, wisdom, experience and, above all, by his life. He should be able to carry out community tasks in a good spirit and with constancy; he should have a deep knowledge of the things of God and of the rites of the Church, and to teach by his word and witness the commandments of God, the evangelical counsels and the way of perfection” (CC 19).

His mission in the novitiate was very important because he had to prepare the novices for religious life. He had to teach them the way to holiness and he had to foster in them the Christian attitudes and practices of which we have spoken in the previous chapter. Now we will cite some of them, showing how the saint asked the Master to instil them in the novices for their good and that of the Religion. He had to speak to them as father of their spirits, and to do this with gentleness. The personality of the saint is manifested here: “The Master should often and prudently seek to converse with the novices about the temptations that most afflict them. Thus he will be able to provide the necessary remedy. Be attentive to those who are unreliable in this matter, for they deceive themselves most of the time” (CC 26).

He asked that they be taught something as important as prayer so that they would be of help and not of hindrance in the Religion: “Teach [the novices] to pray, alone in the room, in addition to the prayer in common” (EP 3853). “...and to know if Fr. John Dominic of the Cross takes care of

the novices; because if the novices are not educated in prayer and spirit, they will serve as a hindrance and not as a help to the Order" (EP 2588).

They had to see that they advanced in simplicity of heart, which is so pleasing to God, and which does so much good to those who possess it, even though it cannot be attained by one's own strength or on the basis of voluntarism, but is an undeserved grace of the Lord: "Be very diligent to introduce the novices to the holy virtue of humility, so that they will become more apt to know how to make mental prayer, which is the life of the soul" (EP 1386). "Since the Lord has chosen you for this exercise, take care to educate the novices in that holy humility which our Institute seeks" (EP 2947). "I have great confidence in the diligence that you will use with the novices, on which the good results of the religious depend; make them love deeply the holy humility, so that they may walk in security" (EP 1541). That is why he asked that they be occupied in lowly offices; it was a very appropriate way to exercise them in the humility: "In the time of the novitiate, the Master of Novices will employ the candidates who possess talent or aptitude in some trade such as barber, pharmacist, cook, carpenter, tailor, shoemaker, or other similar trade, so that at the end of the novitiate, they can go and work in the professed houses. By this the Master will show that he wants the good of the Institute" (Declaration to the Constitutions).

Other virtues that the novices had to practice to acquire them were silence and modesty (Cf. EP 1367).

The Master of Novices had to care that the novices accept mortification; sometimes by mortifying them himself, or by seeing that they could find in mortifying situations: "I recommend Your Reverence the care of these novices, from whom you know how much good can come to Religion if they are introduced well. And on the other hand, how much harm has been done to us by all those who have been in the Religion only with the body, having their soul occupied elsewhere. Teach them frequently how to pray, to mortify themselves and to submit their own will to the will of others; and to forget the comforts of their father's house and to attend only to the seclusion of themselves and the mortification of their self-love, assuring them that in this way they will be able to attain their own salvation, since it is true that 'there are few who find it'" (EP 4121).

The Master could do all these things if, not being self-confident, he placed all his trust in God, who helps those who place themselves in his

hands, and who recognize themselves poor and small: “Tell Fr Ignatius on my behalf to ask God for the grace to help the novices. Not trusting in himself and trusting in God he will be of great help to the novices” (EP 3692).

The Master of Novices had some means that could help him in his task, such as the conferences he had to give to the novices and also the chapters of faults. In both cases he had to address the novices and tell them how to behave, and to use these means to command them to make some acts of humility to test them, because humility without humiliation it is difficult to achieve: “Your Reverence, do not ever leave your conferences, the chapters of faults and the ordinary exercises with the novices, having for this purpose the hours designated more suitable; and try to uproot from the hearts of the Neapolitan novices the love for the country, because otherwise they will never attain the religious perfection by which we get the Paradise, which is something different from Naples” (EP 1530).

To attain these and other virtues, the Master of Novices should direct those in formation to the person of Christ the Lord who is the true Master who can teach all Christians the authentic attitudes of the spiritual life. Jesus must always be the one who guides, leads and teaches the way; one must go to him, for without him nothing can be achieved; while being united to him, one is united to the sap that strengthens and gives life; but if we are separated from him, the branch withers and is good for nothing; it bears no fruit. The novices, therefore, had to constantly look to and follow Christ the Lord, while the master was only the one who continued the work of the Lord, the one who helped the novices to follow Him and not to lose or stray from the way: “Just as the blessed Christ made himself Master of the holy humility, wanting us to learn from him, so you must see to it that these young men learn this virtue, having Christ Blessed as their Teacher, and you as his continuator. I ask the Lord to give you a great spirit to teach it, and those young people of ours a great desire to learn it” (EP 3888).

In a broader and more general way, Calasanz writes to Fr Vincent Berro and insists on elements that he wants the novices to have (cf. EP 4121).

If the master had to dedicate himself to all that we have seen, “the novitiate requires a master who has no other occupations” (EP 952).

3. The problem of the Master of Novices

We have seen the importance of the Master of Novices. How Calasanz did not conceive of a novitiate without a master. We have reviewed some of the qualities that he should have, and we have drawn him with what the Constitutions of the saint say about him. We have also briefly and simply reviewed some features of what they were to teach. All this was clear to the Founder. His great problem came from the difficulty of finding religious who responded to his wishes and to what he thought and wanted. The result was that, sometimes, he could not find any; other times they were not appropriated for the task they were to exercise. Hence the difficulties he encountered in this matter.

He confessed in his letters the difficulty of finding religious with these qualities in the Religion,: "I am glad that they have accommodated the house of Cardino, but we have difficult to find individuals suitable for the formation of novices" (EP 1557). "As for the novitiate in the house adjoining the classes at Porta Reale, it seems to me very good, but who is there suitable for such an office, to educate the novices? If they are not well educated, they become rebellious" (EP 2197). "Where to find there a Master of Novices, lover of the Order and prudent in government, knowing how to guide the novices of different characters to holy religious perfection? Because to educate the novices materially is the cause of the relaxation of the Order" (EP 2971).

For this reason, finding himself in such a precarious situation, he asks if there is any religious capable of doing such a service. We see, then, that from the very beginning of the Institute, the subject of formation was one of the most difficult and delicate that the Founder had to face; and it continued to be so throughout the years. He wrote to Fr Fedele, in his old age, in 1641: "Write to me if in that province there is a person capable of educating the novices" (EP 3550). Sometimes, when he did not find the person he was looking for, he would ask the superior himself to exercise this ministry, if he had confidence in him. This was the case in Nikolsburg with Fr Conti. Let us remember the care the saint took in Central Europe foundations. In 1640, which is when he wrote the letter to Fr Conti, he had already a lot of experience and had suffered a lot in this matter: "God knows how sorry I am that in those lands they be in need of a Master of Novices, and there is none. It seems to me that the right remedy is the one you say, that you should do it yourself. In the meantime, God will inspire us with some remedy" (EP 3342).

Precisely because of all the difficulties he encountered in this matter, he encouraged those who were Masters of Novices. He did not want them to leave their office. He pointed out to them certain elements that they should insist on. But above all, he wanted them to continue in the service they were doing for Religion: “The foundation of the Religion consists in the good progress of the novitiate. And because the Lord has chosen you to this office, use all diligence to educate the novices with that humility that our Institute seeks” (EP 2947). “Go forward in your office of master of novices, and try with all diligence to educate the novices with holy observance and especially with great humility” (EP 2895). “Regarding the difficulty that you write to me about the age of the Master of Novices, let him be reassured, for if there is need of subjects, the General, as Founder, can dispense in such necessary things. Therefore, Y.R. let him continue in the office and help him in whatever way you can so that he will behave well, because in the good education of the novices consists, in great part, the profit of the professed. May the Lord give you and all those who are in that Province a great spirit so that they may be of great usefulness to their neighbour” (EP 2914). “I have received your letter of the 3rd of the present month, and, although you have many difficulties in directing the novitiate with the devotion that you want, I beg, nevertheless, Your Reverence, to find a way to patiently overcome all adversity, and to maintain it in the observance and devotion expected from your kind zeal” (EP 4137). “May Y.R. devote the necessary diligence on the oratory of the Novitiate, seeing to it that the Novices with habit, and the others who will receive it, are cared for and formed with all charity. Since the Novitiate is to be the foundation of that Province, if it goes well, as I hope, individuals much better than in the past will come forth from it. For this reason, I recommend it to Your Reverence with all possible affection” (EP 3854).

This was a great difficulty during the life of the saint. Many of the problems that the Institute had, would not have happened if he had had good formators as he wanted them to be. The truth is that this struggle between mind and heart to which we referred earlier, is also present in the solution he gave to the problem of the Novice Masters. He should have chosen the best religious and prepared them for this position. But it happened that the best for this service were also the best for the schools, and this is where the internal struggle of Calasanz arose with force. As we have already pointed out, the mind was clear, but the heart was too big; and often the heart won out over the mind.

What we say it is very clear in a letter of the saint to Fr Alacchi: "On the dressing of young men of little age and of good wit, the opportune time has not yet arrived, because we do not have neither spiritual formators nor teachers such as are required for them, and we have to make use of the candidates quickly because there are so many who ask for our work" (EP 1849).

Calasanz was explaining all this to Fr Casani, in Naples, as early as in 1628: "If the novitiate is not opened in Naples, things will not go well, because we cannot provide for these two houses and many others with the novitiate in Rome alone. Even if the novitiate is opened there, there will be no one who can take care of it, because Y.R. has many external concerns and the novitiate requires one who is not occupied with anything else, and there is none. However, by introducing some changes in those schools of Porta Reale, I will try to remedy the matter of the novitiate. But as long as there is no novitiate, it is not opportune to clothe subjects and then not attend to them properly. Because those who came here, after having been there for some time without novitiate, caused great inconvenience when it was necessary to reduce them to the simplicity that should be. Our whole Institute depends on good novitiates" (EP 952).

4. Some requests

To the Masters of Novices, he made some requests. One, that they take good care of the novices. This was fundamental, because he knew very well, and he had repeated it on several occasions, that the good of the Religion depended on good novitiates, and that good novitiates depended on good Novice Masters. Therefore, it was necessary to take care of the novices, to attend to them, to take care of them, to help them in their difficulties, to encourage them in the trials they underwent, to teach them as much as we have already pointed out above: "If you form suitable novices, you will be able to raise up all those houses that now are faltering" (EP 4502).

If the novices were well cared for, it would be possible to help the houses that were in difficulty. Always the same. The future of the Institute depends on good novitiates.

He wanted a report to be sent to him on the behaviour of the novices. When it was positive, caused him immense joy: "I received with great consolation the report of the novices that you sent me; I hope that, if they

go forward and do not turn back, they will be of great benefit to themselves and to the Order” (EP 1373). He wanted to have such a report every fortnight. This frequency indicates the concern he had for what was happening to the novices and how closely he followed them: “I would like you inform me at least once a fortnight how well each of the novices is doing, as well as of the faults they commit, even if they are small” (EP. 1351).

5. Periodical meeting with the formator

It is normal that in the first phase of formation, there has been a first meeting with the formator. It can be considered a phase of “cleaning”. Because it is not easy, among the tangle of elements with which the candidate may come, to discern the keys and to guide the process. If this has not been done, it is up to the Master of Novices to begin to do such a work. Here we unite the figure of the first vocational companion and that of the Novice Master. What has not been done at one time, must be done at another.

First of all, we must assume that it is being carried out a kind of spiritual magisterium. In the sense of entrusting one’s own life to the wisdom of another person, perhaps unknown at the beginning. For which the formator must instil confidence in the candidate. We can point out some elements in the relationship that is established between formator and novice.

In the first place, he must instil confidence. A trust that respects the other person, his life, history, problems, situation, struggles, victories and failures. All this will come out in the conversations, but in this “coming out” it is not convenient that the formator enters directly, so that the novice does not experience a kind of invasion of his intimacy. Interiority is opened voluntarily to whoever one wants. If an attempt is made to open it from the outside, the person will experience a kind of violation of his intimacy; it will hurt him; he will feel wounded and then his trust will fail, a fundamental element for this special relationship.

The Master’s mission is to discern what is happening in the novice. He must have the perspicacity to be aware of this, which does not mean that he will indicate it immediately. The other person has to discover it little by little, through the experiences he goes through, which he will then put in the hands of the formator, and then, he will ask for light to know how to read and understand them.

The Master of Novices is, therefore, a companion; not someone who substitutes the one being formed, who commands and orders. He is like the light that illuminates, but does not flash. The light serves so that the one who struggles in the dark can see. Therefore, it should not make the candidate dependent on his person, although in the first stages it is normal to have a certain dependence that, little by little, has to gradually disappear.

The Master should not impose any particular path, and even less because he likes it or because it is the path he is following. He has to discover the more personal truth of the one being formed and the work that the Spirit is doing with him. Therefore, the greater the trust-dependence, the greater the concern for the autonomy of the novice at the level of attitudes and praxis.

One of the important things that the Master must do, is to teach the novice how he himself must realize what is happening to him, what is important and what is not. And, above all, why is happening what is happening.

In such a way that the novice will acquire sensitivity to the processes that take place inside him, and when something escapes him, then he turns to the Master to accompany him in the knowledge of what he, by himself, was unable to grasp.

The attitude of the formator must always be one of love. When he accompanies and the candidate sees the positive in him, and when he discovers the negative in him as well. He does not see him as a judge, but as someone who is walking with him. However, something that is perhaps often not understood in this formator-formee relationship is the difference in the levels at which the two meet in the act of formation. The levels should not be confused or equalized as camaraderie, believing that this is good for the novice. It is possible to love, to be close, to help from the heart, but the roles of each one must be respected.

Many times the Master will have to use the tactic of insinuation to make the novice see many things, for example, the contradictions in him. Insinuation is a suggestion, not a command, not a precise will. The formee has to notice and understand that he is the one who he leads his life. He leads it because it is his own, and the formator is a companion who enlightens, suggests, encourages and strengthens him. But he leads his life because it is his life, the best he has; and because in this matter no one can or should replace him.

Another important aspect is to de-dramatize situations of incapacity. The person in formation has failed in an attempt, has suffered a defeat, whatever. May these situations do not leave him helpless, may he not feel useless, may he not fall into the temptation to throw it all away. He has to understand that what has happened to him is natural on any path and that the important thing is to move forward, that life is learnt by stumbling.

It is necessary to teach him that what is important are the lines of force of life and not the results that are obtained. That the first ones are going to be the ones that will guide his life, and that the second ones will sometimes happen and sometimes not. It is necessary to be patient and not to despair. With God and the process that each person makes, it is necessary to have patience. When He desires it, in a moment it is achieved what a person has been trying to attain for a long time, without achieving it. Yes, with God we cannot be in a hurry and we must be very patient.

It is necessary to help him in the crises, although it is good that he experiences them and that he learns to live them. The novice does not have to turn immediately to the Master as a salvation plank.

Finally, external elements of help must be offered to him, such as: a short course that helps him to understand what we have been saying; to provide experiences of solitude, retreat and prayer; to offer group dynamics with experts; giving him ample time to meet with the world of marginalization and suffering; bring him closer to experiences of un-lived realities, such as a group of lay people, affective heterosexual relationships, labour camps, etc.

IMPORTANCE OF THE NOVITIATE AND GOING OUT

1. Importance of the novitiate

Within vocation ministry (we use this expression unknown in Calasanz for the whole period of formation), the Founder gave great importance to the novitiate. We have already mentioned the struggle that so often took place inside between what his mind dictated and what his heart demanded. The novitiate was very important and it was necessary to take good care of it. The personal and institutional good would depend on how the novitiate was lived.

On one hand, the personal one: “Tell me how the novices behave, because all the progress of their life will be known from the use they make of the novitiate. Exercise them much in humility, which they must learn as in a contest and with holy emulation” (EP 1491).

But the Founder insists more on the institutional profit. The good of the Institute would depend on how the novitiates were run. In fact, their future life as religious depended on their behaviour as novices: “I am very confident in the diligence that you will use with the novices, on which depends the success of the religious. See to it that they love humility, for in this way they will surely walk” (EP 1541).

The whole Institute, the present and the future, depended on how the novitiates would be: “The whole Institute depends on good novitiates” (EP 952). “Since the novitiate of this Province is the foundation on which our Institute must rest and grow, it is necessary that everything possible be done to nourish it with good novices. All the other houses of the Province should help it as much as possible, not only with the Masses, but also with something else, if there is any left, such as wheat, nuts, and the like. I hope that blessed God will send sufficient help for the said novitiate” (EP 3862).

For this reason, he took care of the novitiates that were in the different cities: "There is no doubt that, in view of the growth of the Order, a novitiate is necessary in that town, as some have requested; therefore, it is good to see where is a suitable place, and discuss it; but do not conclude the contract, because if you advise me that you have seen it, and have had a knowledgeable person to see it, and he likes the place, I will send an Assistant with someone else, exclusively for this; so go and study this in particular" (EP 2526).

The good of the provinces also depended on him: "As for the dressing of the novices, I am certain that Your Reverence and the other Fathers will have the prudence that is due in the choice, and also to educate them in the novitiate as it should be done, since the novitiate is usually the foundation of the province" (EP. 4035). "I recommend to Y. R. the care of these novices, from whom you know how much good can come to the Religion, if they are introduced well; and on the contrary, how much harm has been done to us by all those who have been in the Religion only with the body, having their soul occupied elsewhere" (EP 4121).

For this reason, he took special care of the novitiates in the places of new foundations: "The progress of our Institute in these regions depends on the profit made by the novices during the time of the novitiate" (EP 2420).

Then, the novitiate will be good when it gives formation in a religious spirit, because "to educate the novices materially is the cause of the relaxation of Religions" (EP 2972).

If what has been said is true, then all the houses of the province have the obligation to help the novitiates; a help that later will result in the good of the houses themselves, since they will be able to receive professed members who truly live the religious life and love the ministry of the schools: "The Novitiate must be helped by all the houses of the Province. So, when you can, help it with wheat, money, or something else" (EP 3782). "Neither those of Savona nor those of Carcare have made a request to me to release them from the obligation of the masses for the novitiate, which must be helped by all, because after, the said novitiate will help all the houses. Your Reverence must appoint two mendicants to go not only in the city but also outside, so that the novitiate may be maintained as it should be" (EP 3854). "I desire that you take special care of the novitiate; and if in the future I can help you with some Masses, I will gladly do so;

for now, I have applied 200 for that novitiate, which is to be like the foundation and support of that province” (EP 3914).

This concern for the novices led him at times to ask about the reason why a novice had left, not wanting there to be any confusion in certain decisions he made: “Regarding the novice who was deprived of the habit there, he will not be the only one, since I have given orders to send me his companions; that the lack of care of the superiors causes some disorders” (EP 1115).

With regard to exits from the novitiate and in that sense from religious life, he had the mentality of his time expressed in this way: “I am sure that, in the moment of death, God will say to them: *you received your goods during your life* (Lk 16:25), *your temporal reward* (cf. Mt 6:2), for which you have forsaken my service. For it is written: “*As much as you have done to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me* (Mt 25:40)” (EP 4422).

2. Departures and motives

Here, then, is the issue of departures. It was clear that if a novice wanted to leave the novitiate, he could do so with complete peace of mind and no one could stop him: “Can’t a novice leave if he wants to while he is a novice, if he does not like Religion? So the Superior cannot keep him by force. In the same way, if the Superior does not like the qualities of the novice, he can send him away whenever he wishes” (EP 207). When he left, he had to be given some clothes and some money for the trip, and he had to leave in peace with God: “According to what he writes, it seems to me that he is so determined to leave that you do not need to waste time in persuading him any further... Let him be given some clothes from the wardrobe, e.g., cassock, cloak or mantle, other undergarments and a good hat, so that he can present himself decently. Give him also some money for the journey, if he wants it, because he writes to me that he does not. Thus he will understand that he has found Christian charity in this congregation” (EP 64).

Calasanz was sure that it was better for certain people to stay out of the novitiate and not to enter the Religion: “I will help him with all my strength to go out of the Religion. Because it is much better that such persons be outside, since inside they are of no use except for scandal” (EP 2663). But the mentality of his time, different from ours, is seen also: “If some want to litigate and leave religion, I will show them the way... If others want to leave, they can. But beware not to be the way of hell for them” (EP 2238).

Some could leave, others had to be sent away. The saint gives many reasons for sending a novice or a student out of the Religion. We can list some of these reasons.

If he was disobedient, he was not to be left in the novitiate; if the disobedience was not corrected, it was a bad attitude for living the religious life: "If by chance a [novice] shows to be disobedient, send him away. For disobedience is born of pride, which is a very harmful sign, especially in a religious" (EP 1360). "Tell the novice for my part, that if he does not show himself more obedient, it seems that he wants to return to the world. I will be there with the help of the Lord and I will remedy many things." (EP 1895).

It was also necessary to send away the non-observant ones, because they could do great harm to the Institute in the future: "It seems to me necessary to send out, not only the two novices you say, but also any others who do not try to be very observant. For it is better to form few and good than many without mercy or spirit" (EP 4127).

The insincere ones to the superior had to be sent off, because transparency was a requisite of formation, and the insincere could deceive the Masters and superiors at any time, causing serious damage to the Religion: "Test the novices very well. And those who are not very sincere with the superior, send them away... Let us ask the Blessed Virgin, in this matter, she may take particular care of the Religion of her poor" (EP 1452).

It was also necessary to send away those who were not simple of heart, since many times the lack of simplicity concealed duplicity and dissimulation, which is incompatible with a life of spirit: "Do not admit them to the profession, but with all gentleness, send them away; because they do not walk with nobility or simplicity with the Superior, but with duplicity and falsehood" (EP 1567). They lacked humility and acted against any humiliation: "Cassius writes to me and it seems that he is very anxious; that is a bad disposition to make the vows and a good one to send him home; instead of being humble and behaving well, he does the opposite" (EP 215). For this reason, one should not allow arrogant words in them: "Do not allow in any of them, works or words that may be arrogant, but remedy it at once, and if they do not mend their ways, send them away" (EP 1461).

He does not want discontented people: "I would not want to have anyone among us if he is not more than happy. For otherwise they do more

harm than good” (EP 2157); nor those who are fickle and who constantly change their opinion and behaviour, which prevents them from having a serene judgment, necessary for the ministry of the schools and for life in the Institute: “On the first occasion send here the clothing of the novice Barone, because he does not seem to me constant but very fickle” (EP 984).

Those who, on examination, seem unsuitable for the Pious Schools are to be sent away from the Religion: “Let us try to instil this good feeling in the hearts of the other Religious, particularly of the novices, among whom, if you find any who is not suitable for our Institute, you can dismiss him and dress others who are suitable, without trying to admit them to profession, in the hope that during the time of novitiate the Lord will discover for us some remedy according to his most holy will” (EP 4453). And to those who do not mend their ways, despite the corrections made to them: “Put your utmost diligence in introducing the novices to the religious modesty and in the holy virtue of humility. Thus they will become more apt to know how to make mental prayer, which is the life of the soul, and when you find voluntary faults in them and see that they do not take care to mend their ways, send them home. It is better to be few and good than many imperfect ones” (EP 1386). “If they were novices, and after being warned they do not mend their ways, let them be sent home” (EP 2577).

He did not want the immodest ones: “See to it that the young students and the rest of the house, especially the professed, be very modest and mortified for every slightest scandal. And the novices, if they do not mend their ways once they have been warned, let them be sent away, because if they are immodest during the time of the novitiate, it is better to send them away than to keep them” (EP 999). He did not like to have whom, by any reason, could give scandal, which discredited the Institute in the eyes of the people: “With regard to Fr Biaso, I wrote last time that if he returned there with his companion, to send him to Rome dressed as a lay person, that I would have tested him here in the novitiate; but now that I hear how he behaves, he must absolutely be deprived of his habit so that with that habit he will not give any more scandal in that city” (Moncallero p 147); nor to those who were not useful for the religious life: “As for the one who works in stucco, if he does not pray or persevere in his vocation, let him go, that we have more need of individuals who are good in the humanities than of artists” (EP 2218). All of them would

be more of a nuisance than a help to the Institute. His constant idea that it is better to be few and good than many but unfit, lies beneath all these particular motivations that the Founder has been pointing out.

He did not want the frequently ill, because it would be difficult for them to exercise the specific ministry of the Religion, since they would always use the excuse of their illness to avoid going to the schools: "I have sent the novice for the clothes of Br Thomas, called in the world Masturzo, and I will send him out at the first opportunity, because it is not worthwhile to have a chronically ill person in the Religion" (EP 1237). Nor did he want those who had already passed through other Institutes, since if they had left (and it was not known if they had left of their own free will or if they had been dismissed), there would always remain a shadow over their suitability for the Piarist ministry: "He who has been three years with the Theatines, send him away in peace" (EP 573).

He wants to send out of the novitiate a novice who run-away, a sufficient reason for him not to continue in the Institute: "As for the novice, it seems to me that his action of running away from home is something serious, and he should be sent away; therefore, if he has his clothes, he can send him back to his own town" (EP 2893).

He writes Cherubini that he should send away two novices who are not suitable for the Religion, and he should direct them to another one: "Four or five days ago I sent two novices who are not suitable for our Institute; I would like them to be persuaded to pass to another Religion by themselves, without waiting for another resolution. Their clothing will be sent at the first opportunity" (EP 1142). "Having made his profession, I send Br Bonaventure again; I would have gladly sent him a little to the works in Moricone, to take away his laziness, but, seeing that this novice who was sent lately is not too well, I am sending him back there again. I think he should be sent home, for, although he can sew, he does not correspond to what I expected from him" (EP 494).

He asks Fr Graziani and Fr Peri to send away from the novitiate some of the subjects that the saint believes are not suitable for the Order: "As for Br. Francesco Maria of Cremona and Br. Carlo of Acqui and Br. Joseph of Messina, it will give me great satisfaction if, in the event that Your Reverence does not judge them fit for our Order, you will return their robes, because none of them has given anything for their clothing, and being

novices the scandal should not be concealed. Therefore, use your authority not to tolerate anything unworthy “ (EP 584). “As for Br Peter of S. Paul, a Spanish hermit, whose habit was taken from him before, even though he is very useful to that house, as soon as he arrives, give him the hermit’s habit, and send him to God without further reply” (EP 2739).

3. Advice and wishes

The saint wishes that all the lax, novices or not, would leave the Religion. He says it with impetus, as something that comes from the depths of his heart: “Would God that all these lax people would leave the Religion!” (EP 2230). It does not matter to be less, as long as they are outside: “I wish that all the lax would follow him (in the departure of a religious); it would be much better if we were a third or a half less” (EP 1258).

These sentences indicate how the Founder saw religion at that time. He was mortified by the lack of observance he was aware in the Institute; and he blamed it, both on the lack of a careful selection of candidates and on the lack of a demanding formation of them. Therefore, for him, the pastoral ministry of vocations took up all the time of formation. Later on, we will see how he spoke to the religious already professed.

He fervently asked that those who had left not return to religion: “I have always been of the opinion that once they have left home, they should not return again...” (EP 55). Their return could be a bad example for those who remained: “By no means let those who hung up their habits to come to our houses, for they can only be a bad example to ours. They have not left religion because they were spiritual men, as they show in the world” (EP 3801).

At times he advises some religious to go to another Religion. Either because as the time of profession comes, they will not be admitted: “Advise him on my behalf to change Religion, not having made the vows in this one. That I, when the moment of solemn vows arrives, that will be soon, in no way I will admit him to them. But, in order that he may leave with reputation, it would be better for him to go to another Religion. Therefore, I am writing to you, in conformity with what I say, so that he may see that account is taken of his honour, not by expelling him, but by changing” (EP 170). Or because is better for themselves: “For the good of your soul, and even for the peace of mind of all, I am of the opinion that

you should go to another less strict Religion, or that you should go back to the world... for that I will give you back your clothes, and possibly some better ones; I will give you back the ten scudi that you brought, which it is not customary to do with others, and furthermore I will gladly help you in all I can. For I never cease to love people well, even if their condition is not suitable for the Religion” (EP 201).

To Fr. Melchior, who seems to want to behave very harshly, the saint reminds him of something obvious: “As for the authority of Sacred Scripture, of which you speak to me, it cannot be applied to our case, because the novice, if he does not behave well, should not be treated badly or even put in prison, but to send him away. For the novice who does not take care of the virtue should be sent away” (EP 1612).

At the end, it remains the Founder's kindness and desire for good, because he asks his religious to pray for those who have left the Institute: “Try to keep the observance at home, and pray for those who have left the way of the Religion to follow the broad way of the world” (EP 4534).

4. Our present

Departures from religious life are normal. No one should be frightened by that. The reasons can be many. It is true that after the Second Vatican Council, many religious left religious life and many priests left the priestly ministry. Whoever, in the face of these facts speak simply of relaxation would be wrong. Perhaps, as St John XXIII wanted, the Council helped to open the windows of the Church to the world and to let in fresh air, and also to open the windows of religious and priestly life. Perhaps there were inside many who should not have been. With this we do not want to deny that a freedom, not experienced before, could also accelerate hidden processes that people were living; or that freedom could break ties that constrained them, because what was lived was not born from the deepest or from the intimate life of each one.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that, at the same time, that freedom that had been regained and experienced with great joy and pleasure was not always lived well.

But what I want to emphasize now is that such departures must be de-dramatized. In the pre-conciliar years, in my opinion, there was language that was not very appropriate, such as “losing one's vocation”; and all that was a consequence of this “loss of vocation”. Language that came

from afar, and that we have pointed out in Calasanz, indicating that we do not agree with it.

Personally, I have seen people for whom, leaving the religious life was a necessary liberation. People who, once they were out, they have been happier than in religious life or in the priesthood. Many of them, upon examining their vocation in a new light, have realized that “they did not have vocation”, and have undergone a just critique of their entry and stay in the religious life.

All of this is said in order to de-dramatize many departures and to avoid certain misplaced regrets. In any case, each one knows his life and the reason for his actions. This does not imply that there could be also, many times, laziness, desire to try new realities, and forgetfulness of important aspects that should be lived in the consecrated life or in the priesthood.

All that has been said does not diminish the importance of vocational fidelity. And now we ask ourselves, what elements of religious life should we insist in vocation ministry, in all its phases, in the time of formation?

We can see this by underlining some elements in each one of the chapters of the Constitutions.

The first element of vocational fidelity comes from the following of Jesus. The one who follows him with all his heart, with all his life, with all his being, must be sure that if he calls him, he will remain faithful. He must discern what his call is, what the Lord wants him for. If he calls him to the Pious Schools, he must not fear, but rather have confidence, because the Lord never regrets having called him or turns back his call. “We too, called by Baptism to the fullness of charity, leave all for Christ and, in the community environment of consecrated life, we follow him as the only necessary thing “ (C 16).

Once in the Pious Schools, nobody is alone. He has a group of brothers who will help him at all times, just as he must help them. And this is the second element of fidelity. There will come moments of hardship, storms, crises, but he must always remember that he is not alone. The brothers will help him. Community life is a fundamental element to be happy, to solve problems, to overcome difficulties. He will experience all this often in his life. But he has to live together with others, and this will give him greater strength: “Our religious community is centred on the Eucharist, founded on faith and strengthened by interpersonal relationships. We wholeheartedly accept others as they are, and we actively help them to mature in their

abilities and grow in love, seeing to it that the community environment helps each one to respond faithfully to his own vocation" (C 28).

Yes, community life is an element that helps fidelity, but it is not enough. It is not enough because religious life is grace and gift. That is why we must insistently ask for fidelity. And how can we do this if it is not through prayer? This is how Calasanz wanted it. And the words that follow, from the new Constitutions, take up the Founder's words: "Following the advice of Our Holy Father, as often as we are allowed to remain in solitude, we should strive to practice external, and above all internal acts of humility, contrition, thanksgiving, and other similar acts suggested by the Spirit. The Father, who sees the hidden, will reward us and lead us to the solidity and perfection of the virtues" (C 43).

But religious life involves realities that are not easy. The religious wants to live in the likeness of Jesus in this world, and that includes celibacy. Is there anything greater and more important than love? No. That is why, in religious life, one does not renounce love, only to live it in a certain way. But the person is constantly asked to break the patterns of religious life and to do what nature demands. For the Lord can be loved and must be loved with all one's heart, with or without a spouse. How can we remain faithful to consecrated chastity? It is a gift of the Lord. But when one receives it, takes care of it, caresses it, asks for its consistency from Jesus, the only person who can give it to us; and we feel blessed. Then the Lord helps to maintain the fidelity: "The special gift of consecrated chastity must be discovered, acquire and preserve it with daily effort. And this is achieved, above all, by those who, distrustful of their own strength, enter into a familiar relationship with God and in a humble attitude await the necessary strength from him" (C 57).

As we follow the Lord Jesus, we realize that he has nowhere to rest his head. He lives leaning on the Providence of the Father, who clothes the lilies of the field and cares for the birds of the sky. And he understands that he must be poor. But in this sense he also feels the sting of having, of being more, in his flesh. And yet, in the depths of the heart is the desire to be like the Lord, to live in his likeness. Is it possible to be faithful, not to abandon religious life because it is the treasure we have found, more important than any other human wealth? Yes, it is possible, because the Lord is there to help those who ask him for help when the feet are slipping: "Having freely and resolutely undertaken our choice, we oblige ourselves to leave everything for the sake of the Kingdom of God

and to live the mystery of Christ who was poor; this is a necessary sign and a pre-requisite of our love for Christ and all people. We show this when we willingly share our goods with the needy” (C 65).

After all, we have chosen a certain life because we believe that we have been called to it. The first thing is that I have been chosen to live in that life. A choice that does not depend on myself; a choice that is purely God’s loving grace. And that leads me to be obedient to the Father in all that he asks me. It is also grace to be obedient at this point. But the Lord has mercy on those who come to him. And the religious experiences that obedience does not break his autonomy, and he perceives that there is no better way to live than in loving obedience to the Father in all that he commands: “All religious, in order to carry out faithfully that which pleases the Father, try to discover his will in an exchange of opinions and a communion of prayers. This will, is made known to us in the promptings of the Spirit, in the desires of the community and in all kinds of signs, through the mediation of the superiors, confreres and events” (C 77).

And then, living what we have said up to this point, he knows he is destined for others, he feels a passion for children, especially the abandoned, for those who suffer so many injustices, for those who bear the marks of Jesus on their bodies, for those whom no one loves, for the abandoned and the ignorant, for those who know nothing about God and love to others, for those who need to be helped intellectually, morally and spiritually. And he wants to be faithful to this vocation, which he feels is his own. That is why he asks the Lord for fidelity, and wishes that death would come to him in this marvellous ministry of educating and teaching, like Jesus embracing the children: “This educational mission tends to the integral formation of the person so that our students love and always seek the truth, and work hard as authentic collaborators of the Kingdom of God in the construction of a more humane world, and maintain a lifestyle that is consistent with their faith. In this way, progressing daily in freedom, they will achieve a happy life and attain eternal salvation” (C 92).

The Lord, let us not doubt it, will be trustworthy and will support the candidate to be able to live the religious life for him and the children, and to die for him and the children as well. And all this will undoubtedly raise the vocational level of the Institute.

COMMITMENT TO GOD AND CHILDREN

At the end of the novitiate period, the candidate “with the vote and consent of all the professed” (CC 30), makes profession. It is the step that gives him the entrance to be a religious of the Pious Schools. It is an important moment for the novice, because he is going to give his life completely to the Lord, he decides on his existence, and the religious who have lived with him and observed him, conclude that he seems to be suitable for the Institute. It is the moment of the “yes” to God, to his call, to his following, to his desire to live in community with the brothers who have already taken this step. He takes the decision, supported by grace, to live entirely for the ministry of the education of poor and abandoned children.

1. Preparation

In order to take vows, the novice must prepare himself “by making spiritual exercises” (EP 1471), going to confession for the whole of his life or for the two years of his novitiate and leaving to whomever he wishes all that he possesses: “Once the period of probation has been satisfactorily completed, the novice should make confession of his whole life, or of the two years of novitiate if he prefers, and decide with full equanimity about the goods he possesses” (CC 28). The manner of disposing of what is his, the Founder indicated to Father Cherubini following the profession of a Brother. He wrote to him: “As for the disposition that Br Peter Mary, after he has gone to confession and received communion, he will call a notary confident of the house, to give him a copy of the testament or donation, and he will leave his things to the one who thinks to be more obligated before God. He must not leave anything to the Religion, because that is what our Rules command. And if he wants to ask the opinion of any doctor there, he can do so as well” (ET 678).

He determines it in the Constitutions in the following way: “He should be warned that nothing should be reserved or bequeathed to the

Congregation. According to the Council of Trent, and by means of a will or otherwise, he should freely distribute all his goods to the poor, relatives, friends...; in this way, as a total poor person, he will make himself worthy to be received in the Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God (CC 29).

Moreover, he must observe all the norms of the Religion so that later it cannot be alleged that the profession was not valid: "As for the admission of a person to the profession, let us observe the norms given for all those who profess in the future: every four months the scrutiny of the novices is to be done and if you find that someone is not walking well, send him away, so that he does not give bad example to the others" (EP 1540). "Regarding the profession of Br John Paul, if you had obeyed when I sent him to be given the habit, there would not be these difficulties now. Therefore, with him as well as with the others who are to profess, observe the order of the scrutiny, at least twice a year. Also with the novices, so that they may live with greater observance" (ET 1542).

Finally, he needs the permission of the Provincial. In addition to the Provincial, the professed members of the house must intervene with his consent, and before the act of profession he should be asked about the interior disposition he has in becoming a religious and what his behaviour will be: "The Master should report all this to the Provincial, with whose permission the novice can be admitted to the profession; although it is needed the vow and consent of all the professed members of the house in which he takes vows. Before receiving him, ask him clearly if he will be happy not to enjoy any prerogative in the Congregation, nor will he want to precede the least important one, and if he will accept to remain all his life in the place and service that the Superior will designate for the glory of God" (CC 30).

As for the opinion of the professed members of the house, he must obtain, according to what we have seen in the Constitutions, that of all, but in one letter he says that only two-thirds are sufficient: "At the time of profession, let there be a scrutiny of all the professed members of the house where the one to be professed lives, and if he has two-thirds of the votes in his favour, let him be admitted; if not, let him be excluded. And also among the novices, at least every six months, so that each one may be more attentive to the observance'" (EP 1542*).

2. What is profession

According to traditional theology, profession is like a new baptism the professed receives and which leaves him as a new creature: “As for Fr Thomas, if he knows how to prepare himself to receive the Holy Spirit, the act of profession will be for him like a new baptism” (EP 1360). It is, therefore, “an action pleasing to God” (EP 4024). In a very beautiful letter he wrote to Fr John Francis Apa in Florence, he tells him what profession entails, and equates it with the fact of the renewal of vows, which had to be made publicly twice a year. He writes: “The renewal of solemn vows or profession made out of pure love of God is an action so pleasing to God that it surpasses in merit all the actions that a man can do, except martyrdom, and whoever loves God as he ought, should renew many times an act which is so pleasing to God, and even more so, if it is with the good example of his neighbour. I value it very highly and I pray the Lord to give to all new fervour to become heroic in the pure love of God, which is the first and principal precept of the most holy law of the Lord” (EP 4024).

Since the renewal of the vows is also so important, the Constitutions prescribe that this renewal be made twice a year: “Each and every one of us, on the feast of the Resurrection of the Lord and of All Saints, will renew and ratify the vows, preceded by the general confession from the last one, the spiritual exercises - as specified below - and the reception of the Eucharist” (CC 32).

Profession was made with the following formula: “I of St., in the world, make my profession in the Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools. And before you, Rev. Fr., who represent God, and before all your legitimate successors, to Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, I vow supreme Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, and, according to the latter, a special dedication to the education of children, according to the Brief of Paul V, substantially embodied in these Constitutions. This profession and these vows, and totally renouncing any possible obstacles that might exist, I consider them to be firm, valid and lawful, and I want them to be so forever. In witness whereof I sign the foregoing, written with my own handwriting. Rome (or), this ... day of month of the year

I promise, moreover, that I will never attempt, nor for any reason whatsoever I will consent, to modify the legislation of our Constitutions in matter of poverty, unless for a just cause a stricter observance seems desirable. I also promise that I will never pursue or seek - not even indirectly - my election or promotion to any office or dignity within the Congregation. Nor will I accept them except in obedience to those who may order me to do so, under pain of sin. Finally, if I know of anyone who seeks or intends to seek any of these offices, I promise to inform the Congregation promptly in the person of Father General. I will fulfil my vows to the Lord in the presence of all the people; in the atrium of the house of the Lord, in the midst of you Jerusalem. I, of St, sign the foregoing with my own handwriting" (CC 31).

The renewal of vows is to be made with a great love for God: "Concerning the renewal of vows, I, as a spiritual Father who desires the perfection of all the sons of the Religion, I would like in all a great spirit to serve God and to unite themselves through charity and love, for when there is true love, there are no particular ways but a great sincerity in the service of H.D.M. I consider all the professions made in the past as good, valid and holy and I would like everyone to consider them as such" (EP 4028). I always rejoiced to hear when they have renewed their vows: "I will have great consolation in hearing that you have renewed their vows there, and you will tell me who has not renewed and why, so that we can put the necessary remedy" (EP 3226). He wishes to know if anyone has even opposed renewing them: "As for the renewal of the vows, Y.R. will have them renewed, and if anyone excuses himself from renewing, it is the His Eminence's order that he be strongly punished" (EP 3837).

The day of profession was a feast day in the house where a novice had professed and as such it had to be celebrated. The Saint wanted not to be excesses with the occasion of professions, and indicates to Fr Casani, in 1629, how even the meal should be: "Now let these two make profession either at Porta Real or at the Duchesca, where it seems to be better, but it will be like this: let there be no extraordinary food but only the starter, the soup, the main course and a dessert according to our custom, and this to be observed not only at the solemn profession of someone, but on every other occasion where there are lay people, so that they may not be scandalized" (EP 1243).

3. Who should not be admitted to the profession

Since the profession was so important, -it was through profession that one entered the Pious Schools -, it was necessary to be very careful about who could be admitted and who could not. Here are some exclusions that the saint points out in his letters:

Those who were not simple, should not be admitted, for the Lord loves the simple. Those who are not simple can create difficulties in the future and be a hindrance in Religion: “Do not admit them in any way to the profession, but in all gentleness, send them away; for they do not walk with nobility and simplicity with the Superior, but rather with duplicity and fidgeting” (EP 1567).

Nor those who did not possess a true spirit and, consequently, lacked a true spiritual life: “As for admitting to the profession some who have not learned the true spirit, do not do so, for God knows how much I am particularly annoyed by those of the Neapolitan Kingdom, eager to go all to Naples as if it were the paradise. If they do not lose that affection for their homeland, they will never be good religious. Y.R. insist much on this matter, because it is necessary that the religious consider himself a pilgrim in this life and that there is no other homeland for him but heaven, where is his Father, blessed Christ, who has begotten him by the shedding of his blood and where is his Blessed Mother, the most pure Virgin, who took us as her children at the foot of the Cross. Religious who are similar to this model are those who achieve great profit with their neighbour and very great honour to Religion” (EP 1510).

We can see how he wished to remove all inordinate affection for places; much more if it was their own homeland; and this in a special way for the Neapolitans. “I have not yet granted the Brief for the ordination of Br Blaise. It is on the process. But I will not easily admit him to profession for the reasons given in the preceding letters; he gives me little confidence because both the one and the other were subjects lost to the world; and not being in the novitiate, but wandering freely in the city, they have learned little in the spiritual life. One writes to me that every day they were sent for alms and that they often brought good alms, and a thousand other similar things to which I give very little credibility. Anyway, I do not think it is right that they should go from mouth to mouth among the laity. I am very sorry that in this situation I cannot send you

companions on purpose. In such circumstances a great deal of prudence is required and not to make a scandal in anything" (EP 1604).

He rejects a candidate who had had something to do with the Inquisition and, logically, could not be admitted to the Institute: "I am awaiting the outcome of the case of Fr Macario, because, being a case of ubiquity, it is a dangerous matter, and it is considered manifest heresy. So, when the case is finished [by] the Lords Inquisitors, he should not be admitted to the Profession, but sent him away." (EP 2579).

The unmortified and those who are not humble should not be admitted to profession, because they cannot be of benefit to Religion: "Warn Fr. Provincial about the profession of that one who is said to be finishing the two years, lest it happen like this one; and if he is not very mortified and humble, do not admit him, because, once he has made profession, such persons are losing their spirit more and more instead of increasing it" (EP 1491). Nor those who misbehave: "They write to me that Brother Anthony is behaving very badly. For that, do not admit him to the profession until my return" (EP 577).

It is the same with those who are always sick: "To the novice Thomas, whom I sent alone with Aniello, a Longobard, is not to be professed, because for about eight months he has been saying that he is always in pain; when his stomach hurts, when his head hurts, and he wants to live as a convalescent. It is not convenient to the Order to have individuals who are continually indisposed. I will send him his clothes by the first ship. For the rest, he is not a bad individual" (EP 1224). "As for Aniello Longobardo, I believe that he will be already there with a novice named Thomas who will not be made his profession, since he has been sick for eight months after working in the schools and it is not convenient to have subjects perpetually sick in the Religion; he always says that his chest or his stomach or his head hurts. Try to help that Aniello to enter another Religion because, if he remains in the world, he is dangerous and may end up badly" (EP 1226).

This was the care the saint took when it was time for profession. He wanted his Institute to be made up of people who did not leave anything to be desired, but who, if they were well trained, could exercise with care, attention, and commitment the ministry that he was so passionate about.

To all those we have mentioned must be added all those who, in a previous chapter, we have seen that they should be dismissed from the

novitiate because they were not worthy to be in it and to go forward. All together, we can get an idea of the saint's mind.

4. Who should be admitted

Logically, all those who lived in the novitiate and were not in either of the two groups mentioned above, were supposed to be suitable for Religion, therefore they had to be admitted to it. Sometimes in his letters he mentions in particular some of those who were to be admitted.

He wanted the religious of the novitiate house to be in agreement about the admission. It is true that we have seen a text in which he says that it is enough simply that two-thirds of the fathers agree; but normally he does not speak of two-thirds, but says "all those of the house". Logically, the saint was following the Constitutions which, in n° 30, affirms "with the vote and the consent of all the Fathers of the house". Let us hear him in other letters: "As for Br John Mary of St. Joseph, I have written that all the priests being in agreement, they can admit him to profession, and I do not answer because I do not have time to answer all those who write to me" (EP 1331). "Regarding Br Joseph of the Purification, consult with the other priests of the house, and if all are of the opinion that he should be admitted, admit him to solemn profession" (EP 572). "A Br Thomas of St. Dominic, who says that he has finished his time of novitiate, has written to me; if it seems to all of you that he is worthy of being admitted to solemn profession, you can do so at the Duchesca" (EP 1367).

However, in one case, writing to Fr. Graziani, he follows the majority of the fathers who are in favour of allowing a brother to make profession: "Have Br John Antony make his profession as soon as possible, even though two say the contrary, there being five who admit him. God would like the others to be accommodated to the exercise of our Institute as the said Brother!" (EP 2267).

He also wants to admit a brother who manifests his desire to persevere in the Institute: "If, after the exercises, Br Alexander really desires to persevere in the Institute, he can be admitted to solemn profession and employ him in these schools. I hope he will be suitable, provided he is humble" (EP 1915). The same, he allows the profession to those who are healthy or are already cured, as contrary to those who are sick. Let us see how he speaks: "As for the profession of Vincent Mary of the Passion, he can be admitted as

long as he is in good health” (EP 584). “As for the novitiate of Oria, we have here considered his illness, and we believe that it is necessary, in order to recover his health, to go to the native airs. He has been sent to Naples, so that, on an opportune occasion, he may go to Campi, where, if he recovers his health, could be admitted to the profession; but, if in Naples he is well, and if, according to the advice of the doctors, it appears that native airs are not necessary, this spring, by the time I hope he will have entirely recovered his health, he may be admitted to the profession.” (EP 3934).

5. The future of life

Those who profess in our time will begin a religious life that will not be like that of Calasanz' time. This is clear and formators take it into account. The fundamental nuclei remain; the forms vary, and a lot. But today we are facing a religious life that is going to be more and more different. Let us indicate some characteristics of the religious life of the future - or present - which will be lived by the newly professed and for which they must be prepared.

a) Regarding their deepest identity: they will need persons in whom human maturity and spiritual maturity are correlative.

The newly professed must have a sense of their own identity in the Church, but avoiding the danger of self-conceit of greater perfection. The religious is just one more Christian, and his great riches is that of baptism; but a Christian with his own vocation, in communion with the whole Church.

Undoubtedly, religious must be significant persons in our world. But not by external elements, such as the habit, not by different signs of their “social status”, but rather by the radicalism of their evangelical life.

They must have clarity in the vocational nuclei together with a flexibility in the external expressions or forms of life.

A pluralism of styles of religious life within the same province should be accepted as normal: communities of welcome, communities of young people, communities of older people, communities in which there are young and old, communities with integrated tasks into pre-established structures....

And, finally, they must have an experience of God and of the world, of consecration and of mission, well elaborated on the spiritual level, without dualisms or accommodations.

b) With regard to community life: it should not be based, as before, so much on the regular life, with established and rigid schedules, with common acts that punctuate the day, but in strong times (morning and evening) that concentrate the life with God and in fraternal encounters. The common acts will be different, due to the type of community. Like also they will be different at specific times: weekends, vacations....

It is important to live the community in discernment. And it should be a community project, which should not become a simple desire, but should be the objective expression of the group's progress, taking into account the kind of community it is, the moment in which it is living and the tendency options of the vocation.

Interpersonal relationships are becoming more and more important in community life. It is necessary to take care of them, as well as the mediations that facilitate them.

Importance must be given to the liturgy, as the life-giving center of the community. Word and Sacrament, Liturgy of the Hours, all these must be lived with great depth and in fraternal love.

The charism proper to the Institute must be assimilated more and more, but without a particularistic sense, and giving to the laity more and more entry in it every day.

The enriching relationship with the laity will grow little by little, as true brothers, who can participate in the same charism, even if they live it differently.

c) As far as the *mission* is concerned, the dedication to poor children, abandoned, and ignorant children, must be a significant mark of the mission. Preference, however, does not mean exclusivity, but priority and real praxis, personally and institutionally.

Preference is also given to places where the structures of the ecclesial institution do not reach. Religious life must be the frontline of the Church in a state of mission.

It will be necessary to take care that the main criterion is not efficiency, which is of course important, but service and gratuitousness. The religious will be a messenger to the extent that he cultivates his abiding in Jesus (cf. Jo 15).

Finally, the professed Piarist must cultivate a passion for his ministry, like Calasanz, and be willing to do anything to be faithful to what captivated the Founder and why the Pious Schools exist.

All this is in the mind of those who are concerned with vocation ministry, because knowing the goals, one can choose the paths, one can discern the possible vocations and can take better care of the candidates.

THE STUDIES

In Calasanz' time, once the profession was done, one entered a period with different possibilities. That time, and we are not speaking here of priests, belongs, in the terminology that we have been using, to vocational ministry.

There were the worker brothers, who had to attend to the domestic chores, even though some of them went on to teach. When the Brother Clerics were instituted, if they had a certain culture, would teach, otherwise they would dedicate themselves to studies, even if, at the same time, they could give some classes. Finally, there were those who devoted themselves fully to the studies, until they were able to have a class. The question of this chapter is, what did the Founder want his children to learn? How did he want the students in this phase of vocation ministry?

1. The novices

He did not want the novices to study before the end of the first year of the novitiate. If they engaged in studies earlier, there was a danger that they would not do well in the novitiate. He, as we have seen, gave great importance to this phase of formation. Besides the fact that, in the future, once professed, these people would complain that they had not made the novitiate properly and could even claim that their profession had been invalid. Let us hear the saint: "I am sending Br Joseph of the Annunciation there for a little while, because at the end of the first year of the novitiate, I want to send him to the Study. See to it that he devotes himself there to learning something; and if it is ever necessary, to help some of the little students to recite the prayers and the Christian doctrine." (EP 781). "Regarding the instruction of the novices, let it be known that in Carcare, study has been given to those who have completed the first year under the discipline of Br John Francis of the Annunciation and that they

profit a great deal, according to what they write to me. Here too, when they have finished the first year, they will be taken care of either at the Nazareno School, which will be opened soon, or by sending two or three to Nursia under the direction of Br Francis of the Anunciation; and two or three here at home, so that, under the direction of the teacher of the first school to devote themselves to the letters. (EP 237). "It is not my intention that as long as the young men in the first year of the novitiate have not made some profit in the spirit, they should devote themselves to studies, and I am sorry that because of the carelessness of someone who has governed them, they will have occasion, after having professed, to regret that they have not made novitiate and that they have not been taught beforehand the things of the spirit as they should, and that they have dedicated themselves to letters from the beginning, as you say" (EP 4120).

On the other hand, it was different for those who were already in the second year of the novitiate; they could dedicate some time to study: "See to it that the novices who are in the second year of probation take care of study, so that after they are professed, soon they can become suitable to help the Institute" (EP 3796). "Some religious can teach the novices, in the second year of probation and with the approval of the Superior, the methodology for the teaching of Christian doctrine, calligraphy and arithmetic. And complete this formation in those whom you find well gifted, even if they are clerics" (CC 207).

2. Reading

Even this element of general culture sometimes had to be taught to some religious brothers who, as far as we can see, had entered the Institute almost illiterate. In the letter, the saint does not say that there are brothers who do not know how to read, but rather that they should be taught to do so perfectly. They could be brothers dedicated to the chores of the house, but that was no reason for them not to be able to read perfectly: "See to it that the brothers who cannot read perfectly are taught to do so, a little bit each night, so that they will be able to teach the pupils" (EP 1003).

3. Writing

Those who were to become teachers had to learn not only to read, but also to write: "I really like the fact that Br Giacomo has such good

opportunity to perfect himself in calligraphy. Therefore, tell him on my behalf to take great interest in it during this summer; and to please the Marquis in everything, for his great charity deserves the best service. Also see to it that Br Dominic learns something, for it is very important that among us there be individuals who are skilled in this practice of calligraphy” (EP 900). “As for the other Br Andrew, I like that he has a good hand for writing, because here we need calligraphers” (EP 1631). “I marvel that in such a long time Y.R. is in Naples he has not required anyone to learn calligraphy, so that in some cases, like the present, he can substitute in the class of writing and abacus. To think that I always have to send from Rome, to the other houses, the teachers that are lacking, is a great mistake; because every Superior should be able to prepare suitable individuals for his house, so that, in case of death or sickness, there will be someone there to replace them” (EP 3041).

At times, he even indicated the time that could be devoted to this apprenticeship: “I would like very much to see that there, many will learn to write well, and also abacus, since this exercise is very necessary among us, and it would be necessary that the clerics also learn to write well. In winter they can spend half an hour after lunch and in the evening much more” (EP 1537).

He wanted to see the progress of the students and for that purpose he used to ask them to write to him and send him some compositions in prose and verse. On the one hand, in this way he encouraged those asked for the works, and, on the other hand, the saint was becoming aware of the progress they were getting from their studies. He wrote both to Fr Cipolletta and to Fr Cherubini asking for the works of the religious in their houses: “ I am very pleased to hear that they study there with great interest. I want Br Augustine to write to me, sometime in prose, sometime in verse, with Br Camillus of Narni; for I am told that, after my warnings, everyone has dedicated to study with interest” (To Fr Cipolletta in Nursia, EP 1302). “As for Br Matthias, who has written to me in Latin, tell him that every month, both he and the other four students, write to me in prose or verse half a sheet of paper” (To Fr Cipolletta, Nursia, EP 1419). “Tell Br Peter Antony of Gorzegno that his companion Camillo, who is in Narni, sends me almost every week many of his works in verse and prose, and so does Augustine Fei, called Bianchino; and he does not let me know about his improvement” (To

Fr Cherubini, Naples, EP 1214). "I received the elegy of Br Dominic; because of my occupations I have not been able to read it in its entirety or to respond to it. If he practices in verses, and in knowing how to be inspired by an author, it will be a help to the Order. Therefore, let him practice as much he can. I see it as interesting, so that in this way, and with holy humility, later he will be able to profit among his students" (To Fr. Cherubini, Naples, EP 686).

4. Abacus

Calasanz soon became aware of the importance of the abacus for students and therefore worked hard so that it could be taught in his schools with ease and effort of the teachers. They had to learn this subject even if sometimes they did not like it, because it was a very useful subject for the students. This is what he said to Cherubini: "As for Br Archangel, it will be necessary to make him learn the abacus with abstinence, because that is how it is necessary to proceed with those who show so little love for his neighbour, by not learning in order to be useful later on. Let learn it all those who have the aptitude, so that in case of need, they may be able to exercise it. As soon as somebody knows a little abacus, Br Placid should return to the novitiate" (EP 560).

The importance he attached to it can be deduced from the insistence with which he wrote that the religious should learn this subject: "I am very glad that the study has begun, not only of clerics, but also of abacus. If they all cannot have individual books, let them content themselves with those of common use. (EP 554). "As for Br Placid, he is not well in Narni, and I wish that, when there is someone who knows abacus, he goes back; and there at home, if there is anyone who can learn, let him learn, for on such occasions it is good for many to learn it." (EP 562). "As for Br Theodore, see that, at all costs, he learns Abacus well, for I will appreciate him as if he were a priest" (EP 3434). He asked that at least one person in each house learn abacus: "As for the writing and abacus class, it seems to me a great thing that we do not force everyone to learn it in every house. Your Reverence see who has the disposition to learn it in that house, which I commanded that in virtue of holy obedience they learn it, even if they are priests. For that is the most important class of all, apart from grammar, and it requires an individual who, together with the teaching of writing and abacus, teaches also the Holy Fear of God; because from that class

they go out into the world to learn some trade, and it is very important that they be well prepared in the holy fear of God” (EP 2742).

The saint said that he himself had learned these subjects in order to be able to teach them later, both to the religious and to the students: “And I would like that Y.R. apply yourself with the said Brother to learn some things, so that you can teach them later, since I have learned calligraphy, abacus and grammar, and I have taught everything according to the occasion, particularly to our students. And also see to it that at least two who have the talent learn it this summer, so that they may be good teachers in this exercise of writing and abacus” (EP 3379).

At other times, as of superior matter, he spoke of mathematics: “It pleases me that they study mathematics” (EP 2302), and that because of the importance that subject had in the business world. That is why he wrote to one of the great mathematicians of Florence, Fr Morelli: “Take care to perfect yourself as much as you can in mathematics which you see they are very pleasing to the world” (EP 2538). Morelli was one of the great Galileo’s disciples of his time.

We see his insistence on learning mathematics, which indicates how the Founder had become aware of the importance of this subject and how it would be of use in the future to those who learned it: “I have written that Br Theodore and two or three others to devote themselves this summer to learn mathematics. Let Y. R. also learn it so that you can teach it to others” (EP 3400). “I wrote by the last mail that you take all interest in mathematics; I would like it very much, having as you have there, a magnificent occasion, with Brother Francis of St. Joseph. If he leaves us without anyone who knows it, we would be in much lesser esteem, after having begun this practice” (EP 2251). “Since cleric John has arrived from Fanano, you are no longer necessary for the class; my wish is that you learn Mathematics in the shortest possible time..., because I hope to introduce, with general approval, our schools in Venice” (EP 2251).

5. Humanities

After the first elements seen above, the saint speaks of the humanities, which are so important in his schools: “I am sorry that no one there is dedicated to the study of the humanities, which are so important to

us. I will try, with eight students; a part of them will study here, and the other at the Nazarene School; we will start on the 1st of the new year" (EP 1283). "I am sending two clerics from that country of Naples, so that there they may learn the humanities well and be able to help the Order" (EP 1383). "I have begun here several times a plan to study humanities, and if I had not been asked for the subjects so hastily, I would have now some of them prepared for many things; but it has been necessary for me to get rid of the houses in Rome in order to make up for the houses outside" (EP 1275).

He wished that, in keeping with the Rule, there would be two students of humanities in each house, so that they would not have to go through the hardships they are going through, as he wrote to Fr Cherubini: "If all our houses had two students in the humanities as required by the Rules, we would not be so exhausted now without being able to satisfy all those who ask for our Institute. It seems to me that it has been a temptation of the enemy to introduce so soon the study of the major sciences" (EP 1267).

Within the humanities, we have grammar. The Fathers had to learn it and then teach it to the children. In this subject, Fr John Francis Apa was excellent. He had written a grammar, and the saint wanted him to teach it as a test to some religious, so that they could then apply it to their pupils. This letter speaks of Fr Apa: "As for Fr John Francis, I have sent him there with the purpose of teach the grammar that he has taught in Florence, to three or four of our students, who will be: Fr Evangelista, Fr Francis of All Saints, Fr Charles of St. Ignatius; and to others who are clerics or priests, who can -morning and evening, before or after classes- to learn the said Grammar with him. And if there cannot be four, let there be three, and if not, two; because I want to see at all costs, as soon as possible, if this Grammar is appropriate; the said Father John Francis has not taught it in Florence, and for this reason I have taken him out of Florence and ordered to go there. So you do not have to make any further changes in this regard" (EP 3759).

In the same way, he wanted them to study rhetoric in order to prepare them better and so the religious would know more: "I received your letter of the 20th of last month. I want you to care that as many as possible of our students, progress in rhetoric; I hope that will not be forbidden" (ET 420).

6. Higher sciences

He wanted the professed to study higher sciences. And he insisted especially in the countries of Central Europe, where he wanted to see solidly established the Pious Schools. In 1639 he wrote to Fr Conti, in Nikolsburg, asking him to be helped with some layman if he did not have suitable religious: "Since Fr Peter cannot succeed in initiating our people in higher sciences, so necessary in these countries, you can take a layman to prepare four or six of our people, as quickly and easily as possible" (EP 3038). And to Fr Novari, five years later, to the same house and on the same subject: "What I want now, if you continue in that Province, and since there is no house to teach higher sciences to ours, is to look for some suitable person who can teach there to some of our people Logic, Philosophy, and also Theology, according to our Constitutions. And if there are professed who teach in the higher classes the Latin language, some them who have taught the classes can take care of these studies, even if they are only three or four. I am sure that you will respond in this particular, not only to my desire, but also to your obligation. I believe that Fr Peter is also writing to you about the same thing" (ET 4224). And already very old, in February 1648, he wrote to Podolin: "Have the professed students study the higher sciences, taking care that the letters, as happens in many, do not swell or produce their own self-esteem. On the contrary, if they want to produce true effect, let them accompany with humility. And you will prove by experience that the examples of the humble are more convincing than the words of the proud" (EP 4531).

7. Houses of formation

Calasanz in asking that we study all that we have seen in the time of formation (we have not mentioned what refers to priests because they do not enter this phase) he understands the need for houses of formation, in which the students could stay and in which they could have more tranquillity for study. He called these houses "the studios". He refers to them in many letters. He manifests the desire for these houses to exist, but we will see that many times he manifests a desire that remains simply a wish, without ever becoming a reality. The matter of formation, no matter how hard the Founder tried, was never really settled in the saint's time.

We can see how he wrote to some houses of the Institute about these houses "of study". To Fr. Apa, in Florence, he says: "As for the study there, I would like it, but there are no young people for the purpose, since we have only a very few novices; nevertheless, if the occasion comes, I will not fail to help your good idea, but for the time being it is necessary to know how to adapt to the times" (EP 4178). In 1634 and again in 1641, he writes to Naples: "The study that is now in the novitiate is going quite well. I hope that during this summer we will get eight or ten, enough for any higher school" (EP 2192). "It seemed good to me that he could go and settle this matter, and open a study for our students, without hindering the house of the Pious Schools in the said city" (EP 3802). He writes to Fr Andolfi in Chieti: "Father Steven is preparing to go, and wishes to place there a study of seven or eight students of our professed clerics for the time being" (EP 3947). "As for the matter of founding in that province a house for the study of our students, according to the Constitutions, it is being considered. I want the house for the professed, or students, be separated from the schools and, if possible, the church be in the middle" (EP 4072). And to Narni: "I hope to set up a study soon and to see that some of our people who are intelligent can have higher schools" (EP 613). Finally, he says of Rome: "I am very eager and I am determined to set up a study for our people if those of Messina come, and to put them to study together with others, so that in two years' time we will have some subjects ready, because now we are in extreme need" (EP 606). "I think that Nazareno school will be opened on the first day of the year with only eight students, so I plan to have 5 or 6 of ours to study there" (EP 1275).

From what he says, we can realize the importance that the Founder gave to these houses and how he wanted them to exist everywhere. Unfortunately, his wishes were not done, and so the formation of the students suffered, because it was difficult to devote to studies in houses with a school; it was very easy, being there, to take advantage of the students on many occasions, preventing them from devoting themselves entirely to their studies. Without houses of formation, an Institute cannot do well.

8. The books

If you look into the old library of St. Pantaleo's house, you will be surprised by the large number of important works, especially of sciences,

that Calasanz bought in his time. Present-day librarians are astonished to see the wealth of volumes, not only by the number, but also, and above all, because of the importance of the authors. This indicates the importance to the Founder that the religious should have good material for their studies, so that all this would be for the good of the children.

On the acquisition of books, we also find evidence in the letters of the saint.

It was necessary to buy books on arithmetic and geometry so that the religious could become excellent teachers, since God had given them the talent for these subjects: “I will order Br Salvator to give you the money, and that [he] write to you, so that afterwards you may give part of it to the mother, and the other part to the said brother, to buy different books on Arithmetic, Geometry, and Mathematics, because he is very suitable for these sciences, and it is good to help him to excel in the talent that the Lord has given him” (EP 1342). The same for mathematics and algebra. He insists Fr Cherubini, in Naples, so that the religious of that city would benefit: “As for the matter of Mr. Plinio, this brother of ours is in great need of some books on mathematics and algebra, because he has great talent, and every week he speaks to me about it, because of his great fondness he has for the said subject. If they could be obtained, he would love them; I believe that if Mr. Plinio knew what a talent he has for such subjects, he would admire and help him” (EP 1480). “As for the 25 scudi of Plinio, Br Salvator says that 15 should be sent to his mother, and 10 should be sent here, to buy books on arithmetic and mathematics, since he is very intelligent in these subjects, and has a good hand for writing; but he is the only one” (EP 1366).

Books for the humanities were also needed: “For another mail I will inform myself of some books suitable for our humanists and I will write you something” (EP 1662).

Not only he was concerned about the purchase of such books, but he also gave norms on how they should be kept and cared for. The saint was present in all things: “As for having books in the room, let them be as few as possible so that they go to the library to study. To Br John Baptist of St. Mary Magdalene, do not allow him to have vulgar books of poetry, which distract him from the human letters that are necessary for us, and delights in things that are not suitable either for us or for the students.

Tell him immediately that this is the will of the Superior and should be also his will; and if he does not submit, we will impose on him the mortifications that he deserves for past things “ (EP 2162).

9. He makes some requests

He asks the Provincials to know whom they should send to study and what subjects they should study so that they do not run out of teachers. The Provincials were responsible for the houses of their own Province and for that reason they had to take care of this matter: “Now, the Provincial of Genoa and the Provincial there, realize that having previously assigned so many students to the study of the major sciences makes them short of subjects for the humanities and they do not have enough for the schools. They would like me to provide for them, but I cannot; let each one provide for himself in his own province, since here, not having a house of studies and comfort we cannot help so many” (EP 1226).

He complains about the behaviour of some religious and asks that they be made to really study: “I have pestered Br Mark Antony of the Resurrection, I can say for a little less than ten years, to study and to make himself fit to understand and celebrate the Holy Mass, like many others have done in the time that was left to them after classes; and I have never been able to make him put it into practice; so perhaps he knew the same as he does now, and even more, when he entered the Order. He has devoted himself to do flowers in the houses where he has been; whereas for him it would have been better to take care of study, “*absque eo quod intrinsecus latet*” (To Fr Fedele in Naples, EP 2829).

If he wrote the above to Fr Fedele in 1630, he wrote the following to Fr Penazzi in 1643: “I have seen what Your Charity has written to me. I am displeased that, having left the residence of the Nazareno School, where you could make progress in Latin, in order to go there to Naples to better carry out your studies, you will not succeed in your attempt. It seems to me convenient that, since the Novices have to study there, also Your Charity, being a professed cleric; and the sooner you could be able to teach in the class” (EP 4109).

He asks to have teachers who teach various subjects because they have the talent and should always to make good use of it. On the other

hand, if because of the places where are, they find some difficulty, they should make use of lay people to teach: "I have written to Fr Ambrose about the method to be used to introduce the study of our people in those lands, and I believe he has consulted with you. On the supposition that there is one who will teach humanities and Rhetoric to our students with habit, it is necessary also, for those who have taught for some time in the elementary classes the Latin language, that they may be taught in higher sciences, such as Logic, Philosophy, and Theology; for this purpose, in every province should be a house for our students. But since there is grave danger of permanence, because of the rumours of war, it seems to me that an intelligent man should be sought out who can initiate our people in these sciences, until be easy to found a house or school there for that purpose" (EP 4230).

Sometimes he even indicates the timetable for the studies, as we see in a letter to Fr Rubio and another to Fr Graziani: "As for the study of the Brothers, do not occupy them in the afternoon, so that they can study until the hour of prayer, and even for half an hour after they retire to their cell, when everything is finished. And if they are diligent in the morning, they can study another hour. I will recommend Fr Peter to help them according to the ability of each one, who will do something very pleasing to God" (To Fr Rubio, EP 2640). "As for study, I wish that Your Reverence would command all the clerics to attend to study. Brother John Thomas can give them some help. And I would like Y. R. to be there some times to explain to them a lesson from some author. In the evening, at 24 o'clock all can retire with two oil lamps or tallow candles, to the second school or wherever it seems to you, and for two hours or two and a half hours, as it seems to you, they can study and then pray. Likewise, the worker Brothers in another place with two other lights. And if they can have a long table where there can be four on each side, that would be fine" (To Fr Graziani, EP 549).

He asked Fr Thomas Campanella to give some philosophy classes to the students who were in Frascati and to do so during the summer. From the letters that follow we can see the care that Calasanz wanted to be taken with the great philosopher: "Warn these young men of ours not to do anything for which they would deserve any mortification, because I would be very sorry, for respect to Fr. Thomas Campanella, whom you will greet on my behalf" (To Fr Bandoni, EP 1631). "All of you serve Fr.

Thomas Campanella as good religious, and consider that every imperfection will be known not only by the said Father, but also by his servants" (To Fr. Bandoni, EP 1695). "To those students of ours I recommend modesty; I hear that they leave too much the reins to senses, and they do not realize that Fr. Campanella and his followers see their immodesty; and although they conceal it, they are aware of; it would be much better if they give them the example of mortified religious. (Fr Bandoni, EP 1697). "Let me also know how these students of ours, who have come from Rome, attend to their studies, and see to it that Father Thomas Campanella is fully satisfied" (To Fr Bandoni, EP 1699).

This behaviour of the saint indicates his open-mindedness, his liberalism and how he was capable of asking anyone to teach his students. He did it for the good of the children. In this case, he asks Campanella who had spent 25 years in the prisons of Castel San'Angelo, the Roman dungeons. We can also remember how he always supported the religious disciples of the great Galileo, even though these actions brought him unpleasant consequences. He was capable of enduring everything for the sake of his poor children.

10. Joys

The saint manifested his happiness when news reached him that the studies were going well. He himself had taken care to learn in order to teach the religious and the children: "It is a great consolation for me when I hear that the studies are going well in these regions. For I hope that, if letters are accompanied by humility, they will be of great benefit" (EP 3341). Moreover, "I wish to know how the clerics study" (EP 1030). And he is also happy when he sees the commitment of his sons to study, despite the fact that, at the same time, they have to teach classes, what is a heavier duty: "I am satisfied that those who have the ability to learn should study at the end of school, but they should have the exercises prescribed by obedience, so that they may be more useful in the service of God. If somebody miss the exercises prescribed by holy obedience, not only will he not be admitted to the examination, but he will be punished very severely. So then, you can do as many others have done: once you have finished your scholastic exercises and the other exercises of your office, devote yourself to study, but in such a way that you do not deprive yourself so much of sleep, to miss morning prayer" (EP 2631).

And if he expresses satisfaction when he hears that studies are going well (cf. EP 3341), however, when, in order to study, they stop doing the offices that they should be doing, then he expresses his displeasure: “As for the brothers who, in order to study, do not fulfil their obligation or ministry, mortify them, and take away their books until they fulfil their obedience, and they study only during the time that is left to them after their homework” (EP 2633).

This is Calasanz, a man who fights for what he wants, who desires the best for the students, who for this reason insists so much on study, but who does not want them to stop fulfilling their obligations because they are studying. In this case, in the study they were looking for their own plans. Calasanz is an upright man, passionate about the ministry entrusted to him by the Church, but who knows how it should be carried out, without betraying certain principles of religious life.

11. Displeasures

Studies did not bring Calasanz joy always; they also caused him displeasures. For example, when he realizes that there are clerics who do not like to study: “It displeases me very much that our clerics show so little desire to learn. It happens that they do not know the great good they would do to their pupils, and to themselves, if they were suitable to teach them both piety and letters. Being negligent, they will be fit neither for the one nor for the other. Exhort them from my part to study with great diligence, for I will receive great consolation and it will be of great benefit to them” (EP 576).

Or when he hears that the students do not have the necessary time for study; he knows that if they do not study enough and learn what they should, they will not be able to be good teachers, and that this is what he most desires. He even goes so far as to give the example of what happens at St. Pantaleo: “I am disgusted that the clerics do not have as much time for study as I wanted them to have. If they could be exempted from accompanying, as I do here, they would have a little more time. Here those who go to school have at least four hours of study every day, because I don’t force them to accompany. We are here 56 at home and sometimes there is no one to send out, all being busy studying, they are 22, or in other occupations” (EP 756).

Fr Bandoni was told how he should act with a religious who said he could not go to school, and makes the excuse that he has to study. The saint tells him to study after finishing his classes: "If Br Mark Antony would like to learn, he has plenty of time after school. The teacher of the first class can teach him, because the others have learned there" (EP 1710). The saint did not want excuses that would exempt the teachers from their ministry. He loved children like no one else and wanted the same from his religious. And this was to be demonstrated through dedication and work.

He complains and is displeased when he sees that there are religious who do not want to study, when study was the necessary means to fulfil their vocation, which was to educate by teaching, to give oneself completely to needy children, to teach them so that they would be able to lead a different life and open up a different future from the state in which they were born. Let us listen to him: "As for Br Peter, it seems to me that he has little desire to learn" (EP 2400). "A Brother of ours, from Naples, writes to Br Brother Luke in Latin to exercise himself in prose; and although there is no one to teach him, he does something on his own. On the other hand, this lazy one, cares very little about what the other Brothers may write to him to encourage him to study and to respond. He does not even care about my warnings, which should be commands to him, and I have told him that from time to time he should send me some epigram in praise of the saints of the calendar. But you will see that usually I dissimulate for a while, but when I do, I do it as I should, -sed de his alias-" (EP 576).

After all that has been said, this principle of the Founder stands: "A religious will be better employed teaching our own than teaching the pupils" (EP2924).

12. Today

On the studies we have today a legislation in the document "ad experimentum" approved by the General Chapter of 2009, titled "Formation and Studies of the Piarist" (FEDE). We point out three elements to what is the process of vocation ministry according to the moments established by Calasanz.

Before entering the novitiate, this is what is asked of the candidate: "No. 131: The candidates for the Novitiate, whether or not they aspire to

Holy Orders, must have completed the programs of studies required in their own country for higher studies, or, at least, the level of compulsory general studies. These studies must be accompanied by their respective certificates and diplomas.

Given that future studies, normally of a university nature, should make possible the necessary qualifications to exercise our educational and pastoral ministry in the Society and in the Church, it is necessary, that before the Novitiate our candidates must have the academic diplomas that will be required for these studies.

However, the Major Superiors who are responsible for granting admission to the Novitiate must take into account the peculiarities of each candidate and his region.

N. 132: The Major Superior, on the advice of the formators, will see that at least a part of the ecclesiastical studies, -especially “philosophy” - should be done before the novitiate, depending on the places and the candidate’s vocational process, so that he may also take advantage of those years for future studies.

As a pastor, he acquires a broad and solid knowledge of theology and pastoral work; as an educator, he is trained in human and pedagogical sciences as well as in the most suitable methods for educational practice.

Given the complexity of studies in the initial formation of the Piarist, the civil and theology studies and the specific studies for the Piarist ministry are treated separately”.

Speaking of the studies in function of the specific ministry of the Piarist, the same document, n. 144, says: “Within the specific Piarist formation studies that qualify more directly for the Piarist ministry are of great importance: educational sciences (pedagogy, methodology, psychology, sociology), pastoral ministry (infant, youth, family, vocational), religious pedagogy and catechesis, contemporary culture, and artistic and musical formation.

No. 145: In pastoral studies, we will give special importance to catechesis, so that our students acquire a qualified preparation in this field. In addition, we will train some specialists in catechesis who can promote and guide the constant renewal of the Order.

No. 146: The acquisition of knowledge in specifically Piarist fields must be accompanied by a progressive educational-pastoral practice, seriously programmed and evaluated, always counting on the accompaniment of experienced Piarists.

With regard to civil studies: “No. 150: With regard to “civil” studies, account should be taken of the following criteria as a guideline for choosing a particular speciality

a) that it be oriented to and compatible with the exercise of the Piarist charism; b) the needs and projects of the Order and Demarcation; c) the personal aptitudes and serious discernment of the student, by means of an open dialogue between the candidate and the Major Superior, after consultation with the formators, if these studies are made during initial formation.

No. 151: During initial formation, ecclesiastical and civil studies should be carried out at different times. However, in particular circumstances, civil studies and philosophy studies may be combined.

Each Demarcation determines in its Formation Plan the order of the studies, in such a way that the importance of the studies of philosophy and theology is never diminished. In the order of studies to be followed, it will be carefully considered whether or not the candidate, at the end of his novitiate, should pursue “civil” studies, always assuring his spiritual progress.

No. 152: The specialization of our candidates in humanistic, linguistic, and scientific subjects will be open to those who have the aptitude and respond to the needs of the exercise of our ministry. Let the same be said with regard to technical specializations, which may be useful in vocational schools or vocational training centres. Specialization studies, accredited by the resultant diplomas, are still completed with the qualification to teach and, in some cases, to research work.

The studies of our members should have university status in terms of academic level and make possible the necessary qualifications to exercise our ministry in the Society and in the Church.

The diversification of specialized studies will obey to a curricular plan designed taking into account at the same time the aptitudes of the candidate and the needs of the Demarcation and of the Order. It should be approved by the Major Superior.

Nº 153: Among the studies to be carried out today, the knowledge of languages is of special importance. Among us, English, Spanish, French and Italian will be studied in initial formation”.

And on study in general: “Nº 155: The Piarist manifests himself as a lover of culture and knowledge, servant of the truth and supportive in transmitting and sharing his knowledge for the benefit of others. His culture and knowledge will not be used for self-interest, nor for any exaltation of himself or others, nor for self-indulgence or ambition. He loves culture as a “co-operator with the truth” in a humble and gratuitous attitude.

The Piarist maintains throughout his life the restlessness and healthy curiosity to learn; he will be a lover of reading, of reflection and continuous formation. Because he wants to learn, he is qualified to teach”.

TO THE RELIGIOUS

In the preceding chapters we have seen what Calasanz was asking those who underwent the vocational process or itinerary to become Pia-rists. What he wanted was that those persons who felt called to the Pious Schools and to its ministry, were formed; and that the experience of their vocational level would be rich and deep. He did not want many religious, he wanted them to be good. And if the Lord sent many of these good ones, much better.

But in order to achieve a high vocational level in religion, he also turned to those who had already followed the path of formation and had professed their vows; to those who were already religious and had completed the formative itinerary according to the categories of that time. Now we emphasize something that was not done explicitly at that time, that formation and vocational experience lasts the whole life, and it is something that must be lived more and more deeply, following the Lord in the service of abandoned children, and thus be an example to the young people who are still on the path of formation. In this way we can elevate the vocational experience in the Order and be, at the same time, a call to other people who see these religious happy and joyful. That is why in all his letters, in addition to solve the material matters that were presented to him, Calasanz insisted on all those spiritual and ministerial aspects that would raise the level of vocational experience in the Institute.

Among all these elements that he mentions and insists on, we have chosen the ones that can influence the most in what the saint wants. It is not to mention all of them, but only those that in our opinion are important. Nor is it a question of making an exhaustive tour of each one of them, nor to quote all the saint's texts on each of these aspects, but rather to point out the main aspects that make relevant each one of the realities treated and that can be most adapted to our time. We will end with a guiding synthesis.

They “tend to the fullness of Charity” (CC 1)

1. The perfection of charity

The Lord says it in St. Matthew (5:47): “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”. Calasanz says it in the first number of his Constitutions: “In the Church of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Religious Institutions tend to the perfection of charity, as their true goal, through the exercise of their own ministry. Likewise, and with every effort, our Congregation intends to do”. It is clear; the Founder wants all his sons to strive for the fullness of Charity, that is, perfection. This was, therefore, the Founder’s desire: he liked his children, he wanted their redemption, that is, to take them out of the place in which they were socially placed; he wanted to open up a new way of life for them. But he always wanted his sons, who had to struggle for it, to walk at the same time towards the perfection of charity, love and imitation of the heavenly Father.

Perfection begins with one’s own knowledge. From there we pass to the knowledge of God. This knowledge beatifies man and he grows in divine love. This is what Joseph proposes to Father Casani in a beautiful letter of 1630: “It is a good beginning of the spiritual life that of the self-knowledge and misery in which we are all born, and also of the ingratitude with which, after so many benefits, we have corresponded to God. And, if you exercise yourself in them diligently, I assure you, that you will have in this life some knowledge of God, which is so great a science, that a particle of it surpasses all the human sciences.... The knowledge of God beatifies man according to the degree to which, after knowledge, he grows in divine love. I exhort you to make this study the first thing every day, after which the Lord will grant you all the other things that the world does not know” (EP 1339).

Perfection grants to be wise and prudent in the life of the spirit, in the interior life. This requires being small in the eyes of men, but this is how one becomes great in the eyes of God. The Lord himself said that the way is thin, the gate is narrow. It is not easy to enter and advance along the path of perfection. But if this is achieved, the vocational experience is richer, deeper and more firm. Calasanz wished his sons to enter through that door, even if for this to happen, it was necessary to become small

(and how he wished this!) and they would have to diminish themselves because the entrance door is narrow: “The way to become wise and prudent in the interior school is to make oneself like a fool in the eyes of men, allowing oneself to be led like a donkey. This is true doctrine, but since it is contrary to human sense and prudence, few follow it, and thus the word of Christ is confirmed: “Narrow is the way [that leads to Life], and few are those who find it” (EP 2300).

In order to enter the path of perfection, one must deprive oneself of the tastes of the flesh, of sense, of all that the body itself craves, since it is subjected to low passions. It is necessary to detach oneself from all this and to seek, long and procure the tastes of the spirit. We know how flesh and spirit are in continual battle and how succumbing to one of them necessarily drives away the other. Only he who strives to live according to the tastes of the spirit will be able to follow the path of perfection. If this is so, it is not strange that the saint asked his religious to do this. He knew that in this way they would make their vocation stronger, more joyful and attractive, and in this way they could influence those who saw them, and thus be a vocational attraction, at the same time raising the experience of living one’s vocation and its spiritual level: “If some of our religious have heard with displeasure that evangelical truth, that the way to heaven is narrow and the gate is slim, I am truly sorry for their ignorance, because they believe that, being subject to the sense, they can walk on that way. Instead, they should gradually deprive themselves of the tastes of sense and enter into the tastes of the spirit; then they would find this way to heaven easy, because the yoke of God is gentle for those who want to live according to the spirit, but it is difficult for those who want to live according to sense. And he who waits for the future time to make this trial, may lack it” (EP 2923).

For all these reasons, he asked his religious to “strive for religious perfection, which is more important than anything else” (EP 1043; cf. EP 2710). This perfection is achieved, according to the Founder, with the observance of the Constitutions, and with mortification and humiliation: “As for the observance of the Constitutions, I tell you that in this consists the perfection of the religious. To relax them, no matter how little, is a great sign of little spirit and much self-love. Therefore, persuade them, Y. R., that it will be of great service to God and of great benefit to them” (EP 554). “It gives me great consolation that you desire and try to be morti-

fied and humbled, since this is the true path to attain perfection in this life and glory in the next" (EP 771).

He who has entered the path of perfection and walks on it, lives in abandonment of faith with his God; he is not disturbed by things or events or sufferings or tribulations. He lives in God and nothing can disturb him. At all times, whatever happens, he is himself, because, entrenched in God, nothing can make him change. The Lord is his rock. Men like this encourage others and raise the experiential level of God's love and vocation: "A great servant of God is one who is not disturbed and does not move from his quietness, neither in adverse cases, nor in prosperous ones, but he is always the same, that is to say, of one being, without passion may move him from his place. This "being itself" is what conquers the crown. And wherever passion intrudes, reason is disturbed, and, once disturbed, cannot judge freely" (EP 2457).

2. Walking towards perfection

The road to perfection is not an easy one. After all, it consists in following Jesus, and this following is always costly. The Master on his way had to take up the cross and carry it on his shoulders. That is why it is impossible to follow without a cross. What happens is that those who identify with him find joy and happiness in the cross, which is impossible for the earthly man. Only those who accept it with their whole being and carry it behind the Master can experience what others cannot even imagine, the consolations that come from carrying the cross: "None of the ancient philosophers knew true happiness and joy, and, what is worse, few, if not very few, know it among Christians, because Christ, who is our Master, has placed it on the cross; which, though it may seem to many in this life to be very difficult to practice, it has within itself so many internal goods and consolations that it surpasses all the earthly ones" (EP 257).

For this reason, it is not possible to follow the path of perfection without carrying each one's cross, since the Lord does not leave anyone without it. It is true that the earthly man has the sensation of having something heavy; only those who give their hand to the Lord and trust in him, will feel a gentleness that no one else will be able to experience. Whoever sees another person carrying the cross and accepting it from the heart, who does not deny it but carries it with love, will be able to feel a call to imitate whom he has seen happy with the cross in the following

of Jesus in the Institute; we can say that he also carries out a vocation ministry: “The ways that the Lord has to bring souls to heaven are all holy and mysterious, and are guided with the utmost and paternal prudence. But he does not leave any person without a cross. In some, sensuality makes it very heavy, but with patience the spirit finds in it great gentleness” (EP 1565).

The Lord often tests those who walk sincerely on the path of perfection. The saint quotes his own experience: “I have seen what Your Reverence has written to me in the copy of the letter you sent to the Visitor and I can only tell you nothing else but to bear the grievances with patience, for, apart from these, I myself have been taken to the Holy Office without knowing why, and then when I was told I saw that I was innocent. God wants to test us by the way of tribulation. But trust in him. Still, be encouraged to suffer for God, for it is good for us to enter the Kingdom of God through many tribulations” (EP 4125).

In order to advance along the path of perfection, it is necessary to know the enemies within ourselves, who can lead us astray from the path and deceive us. In order for this not to happen, one must trust in God, to live in his arms, to be like a little child who does nothing but to look up to his father, who takes him by the hand and walks securely in this way. He knows that if he encounters difficulties, the father will help him and defend him. Otherwise, it is easy to fall into the hands of enemies and become his slave. The saint says this very clearly in a beautiful letter to Br Pietrangeli; we are in 1628: “I am happy to know that you have some knowledge of your enemies, which the more hidden they are within us, the more dangerous are, because they know how to feign as friends and deceive us with this fiction, not only to the laity, but to many religious. I would like all our religious to know them in such a way that they would see all their arts and trickeries, and they would realize that they are so enslaved to them, so to speak, that none of them knows how to take two steps without falling to the ground. This is already true of the righteous, of whom it is said that they fall seven times, which means many times a day. So then, what shall we say of the sinner who has his capital enemies for friends? If you consider the absurdities that pass through your imagination from morning to evening, when you should always be in the presence of God, you will see that you cannot take two steps without falling, because you have ceased to look at God in order to look at the

creature. Whoever arrives at this practice of knowing how to support himself like a two-year-old child, who often falls without help, will always distrust himself and will always invoke the help of God. And this is what is meant by this sentence, so little understood and much less practiced: "Unless you become as little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven". Learn this practice and try to attain this great simplicity. Then you will find truth in that sentence which says: "and with the simple his dealings"" (EP 912).

All this requires taking care of one's own life. It is necessary to work on oneself from within to make ourselves worthy of the way of perfection. The saint gives an example that makes it clear: "To become a vessel worthy to be in the presence of any lord, the metal must first be well hammered. In the same way, in the service of God, it is necessary to bear all things with patience, and to give back, with all charity and meekness, good for evil, so that the neighbour may be edified.

It is not unusual that moments of darkness, displeasure and uneasiness appear along the way. We do not know what to do. We are tempted to give up everything. But if we know well who the Father of heaven is, if we know that happiness resides in him, if we experience how exciting the ministry of the Institute is, we will know how to overcome the anxieties and walk towards God. To Fr Frescio, who used to go through similar moments, the saint consoles him in a beautiful letter that each one can apply to himself if he is in similar moments. And there is no doubt that doing in the way the saint indicates the vocational experience is elevated. The Founder wrote to him: "It is a great discomfort to me that Your Reverence has so many worries and troubles as your last letter refers. They do not come from humility. Had you it, you would know that the shortest and easiest way to be exalted to self-knowledge and from this to the attributes of mercy, prudence and infinite patience and goodness of God, lies in lowering oneself to give light to children, especially to those who are destitute of all; for it is an office in the eyes of the world so lowly and vile than few are willing to do it. But God gives a hundredfold, especially if, in doing it well, you have persecutions or tribulations, which, when taken patiently [with simplicity] from the hand of God, the hundredfold of spirit is found; and because few know how to practice this doctrine, few receive the hundredfold spiritual goods. And since you have already gone so far ahead in the temptation to go to Spain, or to change Religion

for greater imaginary quietude, that God knows whether you will find, I do not know what to say to you, because you would not give me credit either. I will only tell you that I will pray and I will truly beg Our Lord to give you light to get right because it is about the “summa rerum” which is vocation. I will write two words about this to Father Provincial, who has the authority for what will be necessary. May Our Lord make you a saint as I desire for me” (EP 1236).

On the way to perfection, we should never complain of afflictions or sufferings, if we heed the experience of the saint: “I dislike the word “affliction” very much because no one can more rightly feel afflicted than I do, since from many places I receive so many motives of great affliction. But considering that everything comes from the hand of God and that whatever I do, I do it out of love for him, and that he is such a kind and gentle Father, I bear all things with patience, resolved to die rather than give up the enterprise, and so I reject all affliction and melancholy” (EP 1148).

3. Elements of perfection

To walk on the path of perfection, some elements, attitudes, or virtues that help to progress in it are necessary. Undoubtedly the first is the fear of God. Fear is not to be confused here with terror. No one should fear because the fundamental aspect of Christianity is love. And true love expels all fear. This fear is united with vigilance, with affectionate care, with the effort to please and to thank. This is how the Founder puts it: “The fear of God, principle of wisdom consists in being ever vigilant so as not to do anything that would be offensive to God; and since we are of such a fragile nature, blessed is the one who always remains in this fear. We should all have it and always teach it to our students” (EP 1024).

The way of perfection is a way of love. It is not a search for oneself, but of praise and gratitude to another, to the Lord. The religious loves him, he is his all, he is the reason for his life. For this reason, he follows him and gives him his life. And if it is so important, he cannot lose it for anything in the world. It is his precious pearl, his hidden treasure. Whoever loves so, he is a significant call to others to follow the same path and to experience the passionate belonging to the Lord: “The more we humble ourselves for the love of God, the more we love him. Likewise, the poorer we become for the love of God, the more we love him. Some

lose this great love for the extraordinary affection they have for a book, a hat, a case, or any other such nonsense. However, those who have a bit of pride are rejected by the love of God, for God resists the proud and gives his grace to the humble. Your Reverence stimulate holy humility and poverty in our religious. You will do them great good" (EP 2630).

This path to perfection gives peace, serenity, tranquillity. One knows he is in God's hands, and being there nothing can fail. Whoever treads this path is safe; he does not let passion cloud his mind or deceive his heart: "I think to be a great servant of God who is not disturbed or shaken in his tranquillity in adverse or prosperous

circumstances, but always remains whole, that is, of one and the same being, without passion moving out his place. And he is who wins the prize. Wherever passion intrudes, the mind is disturbed, and once it has been disturbed it cannot judge freely" (EP 2457).

If the religious truly loves God and walks in the way we have indicated, there is no doubt that he will conform himself to the will of God. This conformity makes him similar to God and thus fulfils the words of Jesus, already quoted, "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect": "It is necessary to conform to God's will in adversity as well as in prosperity, for he ordains all things that happen to us with a high purpose and for our benefit. And it is of great prudence to know how to accept everything from his hand and to bear it with patience, giving thanks to him for the honour he does in sending them to us" (EP 4229).

On the path of perfection, we must use the language of God. What language is this? Calasanz says: "It is said that it is the language of God when among the religious it is a matter of mortification, humility, observance of the Rules and contempt for the world and its vanities and greatness, and of esteem for divine and eternal things. It is also said that it is the language of the devil to speak of relaxation, of pastimes, of pleasures, of self-esteem, of accusations, of murmurings, and of defending one's own faults. Where there is the first language, God reigns, and where is the second, the devil reigns. Well then, Y.R. may consider who reigns among your religious and take this as the certain truth" (EP 2923).

In the way of perfection, the language of God goes hand in hand with the fineness of true virtue. It is a fineness of love, of self-giving, of love to the one we know he loves us incomprehensibly. This is how the Lord

lived it, and living it makes the vocational experience of the religious richer, more intense and deeper, since it makes us more and more like the Lord: “The fineness of true virtue consists in suffering calumnies and outrages from those to whom man has done good, and is ready to do them more. We must keep our sight fixed on this target” (EP 2646).

On this path it is necessary to know the enemies that can come between the religious and Jesus. They are all the more dangerous the more hidden they are. Calasanz said earlier that it is a good exercise to know oneself in order to lead a true spiritual life. Here again is his warning which, because it is so important, we must return to it with other words: “I am glad to know that you have some knowledge of your enemies; the more hidden they are within us, the more dangerous they are, because they know how to make friends and deceive not only the laity, but also many religious. I would like all our religious to know them in such a way that they would know all their arts and deceptions, and they will realize that they are so enslaved to them, so to speak, that none of them knows how to take two steps without falling to the ground. This is already true of the righteous, of whom it is said that they fall seven times, which means many times a day. What shall we say, then, of the sinner who has as friends his capital enemies?” (EP 912).

If we want to arrive at the end, we must remember that passion blinds, that the door is narrow, that the imitation of Jesus is necessary. If all this were lived by the religious, the life of the Institute would undoubtedly be deeper and more spiritual: “I am very sorry that passion has blinded many and that they do not know the way by which they go, blessed Christ having said with his mouth ‘narrow is the gate that leads to life and few find it’, and this is a truth that is exact among the Religious, for few are those who walk in the narrow way of imitation of the blessed Christ, who also said “wide is the way that leads to perdition and many are those who walk in it”, and it would please God that there were not so many Religious who, guided by self-love, walk along this broad way” (EP 3673).

4. What the Lord commands

If we want to advance on the path of perfection, some elements are necessary that put us in relationship with the Lord. He is concerned with all who tread this way, gives them what they need, helps them in their difficulties. He is not a strange God, distant, who leaves man

alone with his problems. Therefore, a necessary attitude on this path of perfection is to know how to accept what he sends, to receive it as coming from God's hand, because everything that happens to man is under God's Providence, even if at times man does not see it as that way. If the religious knows how to behave in this way, he will attract others to the vocation he lives, and his vocational experience will grow in love and acceptance of the Lord's will: "All things are governed by God with supreme providence and understood by few; it is necessary by force or by love to go through them.

But it is better to be always ready to receive from the hand of the Lord whatever happens to us, as the things that are best ordained that can happen for our good" (EP 380; cf. EP 4229).

At the same time, we must ask the Lord to show us the path to follow. We must ask him for light, because "his light makes us see the light". We cannot walk towards perfection if he does not show the path, because we can easily make mistakes and, what is worse, deceive ourselves: "As the choice is God's, so the success of the enterprise really depends on his hand. Hence, we must often turn to Him, asking for light to know the path to follow, and, perhaps, to get to the end. Therefore, you must, remain indifferent, since you serve only as a simple instrument" (EP 2006).

The light that we need from the Lord and the grace that can help us to accept what happens in life are necessary for us to understand that everything is guided by the Lord for his greater glory and that nothing happens without his presence. The religious can make mistakes, but the hand of God constantly guides him along this path. Living in this way, he is honoured and thanked. The interior life grows, becoming support and manifestation of the vocational experience that will be enriched day by day: "We must believe that God guides all things to his greater glory and our own good, even though we, as ignorant and weak in his things, sometimes, we consider as adverse what is useful to us, and as convenient what is contrary to us. Let us, therefore, allow his divine Majesty to guide the boat and receive from his most holy hand whatever happens to us" (Moncallero p. 136, letter 15).

We have already indicated that the cross is present in the life of those who follow the Lord, wanting to imitate him and lead a life similar to the one he led. But why the cross? We have already given an answer.

More broadly, and from another perspective, the Founder wrote to one of his spiritual daughters, Mrs. Racani, in 1630: “Ordinarily the Lord is accustomed to mortify in this life those whom he loves as children so that he will not have to mortify them in the next; and this being true, we all must receive everything that happens to us as from the hand of a Father, especially sickness, which if we could, not only with patience but even with joy, to conceive it as coming from his hand, we would make a most pleasing sacrifice to him. I hereby exhort Your Excellency that, considering how good is the Lord, who for temporary and brief evils, he has prepared an eternal kingdom, to praise and bless him, and to conform to his most holy will with joy, telling him that if he wants you healthy, you are ready to serve him, and if sick, you are readier to serve him. This joyful conformity to the Lord is a great perfection in the Christian” (EP 1468).

Also writing to Fr Frescio: “If, as Job says, the life of man (which is understood to mean the servant of God, since the others are men but in name only) is militia or war on earth, why are you wonder that the Lord allows you so many interior and exterior adversities, if not that like a good soldier you may fight valiantly, not trusting in yourself, and trusting in divine favour and demanding it continually with great importunity” (EP 1165).

Not only on the path of perfection, but all life, we must remember these beautiful words of the saint and live according to them: “The voice of God is the voice of the spirit that comes and goes, touches the heart and passes by. We do not know from where it comes or when it blows; so it is very important to be always vigilant not come unexpectedly and pass without fruit” (To Narni, EP 131, year 1622).

5. The road to perfection

- Perfection does not consist in complying with the rules, however important they may be.
- Perfection does not consist in obeying others because they show us God’s way.
- Perfection consists in putting ourselves in God’s hands and living in them.
- Perfection consists in trusting in God and not in one’s own works.

- Perfection does not consist in seeking the most difficult thing, which for that reason is what pleases us most.
- Perfection does not mean difficulty, but loving obedience to God.
- Perfection is not in idealisms that we want to achieve.
- Perfection is in the acceptance of our reality, when the Lord shows it to us and we know how to accept it.
- Perfection is not reached by fleeing from what we are, but by facing it from God.
- Perfection is to carry the cross of each day, in the peace of the Lord and in gratitude for what he provides.
- Perfection consists in accepting wholeheartedly what the Lord commands us, even if it costs and is painful, and to live in gratitude for it.
- Perfection is not attained by letting oneself be carried away by what pleases us, even if it seems very evangelical, but by what God commands us, even if it does not seem so beautiful.
- Perfection does not shine; it is hidden under veils of simplicity.
- Perfection is in the faithful abandonment in a God who takes care of man and loves him in a way that he could never have imagined.

“In profound silence and calm” (CC 44)

1. Being before God

A fundamental element of the vocational experience is prayer. If we want to raise the level of vocations and the experience of faith, it is necessary to pray. Prayer is not only necessary for the individual, but also for the Institute. This is what the Founder believed and that is why he wrote in his Constitutions: “Without the cultivation of prayer every Religion is close to relaxation and collapse” (CC 44).

Calasanz was a man of prayer, as is indicated by the many testimonies we have from those who lived with him. And it is something to admire, because in addition to his prayer, we must add the work he did daily in the schools, hard work for the children he had, and, at the same time, the concern for each one of the houses, the foundations and the whole Order. Prayer and action were indissolubly united in his life. He was a man devoted to God and dedicated completely to the poor children.

How did he want his religious to pray? He tells us in his Constitutions and his letters. He wanted them to pray in common twice a day, and to do so with great fineness of spirit: “The most exquisite care should be taken never to break the custom of praying internally twice a day: one hour at sunrise and half an hour at sunset, before supper” (CC 44). It was a personal prayer, even if done in common, in which the religious cultivated his relationship with God; it was to be the basis of his existence.

In the same way, he wanted to pray vocally, also twice a day. He tells this, pointing out at the same time what such a prayer should consist of: “Also, twice a day, make community vocal prayer: after lunch, the Loretan Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the five customary psalms in honour of her name. In the evening, before the examination of conscience, the litanies of the saints” (CC 47).

Along with prayer, he asked for the examination of conscience. He wanted his religious to constantly examine their lives. He wanted to examine their life because it was the best way to become aware of how they were walking, what they had to correct, and, at the same time, what to prioritize in their behaviour, and how they had to live daily: “Twice a day,

before meals and before retiring to the dormitory, ask for a strict account of your thoughts, words and deeds" (CC 46).

So important was the subject of prayer for the saint that if a religious was unable to pray one day, he was not excused from prayer, but had to replace it as soon as possible: "Whoever, with the permission of the Superior, has not participated in common prayer, let him do it as soon as possible" (CC 45).

How was it to be done? Regarding the position of the body, he indicated: "In profound silence and calmness of body and spirit, kneeling or in another convenient posture..." (CC 44). And more concretely, in n. 48 of the Constitutions indicated how the religious could behave in the room while praying: "With all earnestness, we exhort all in the Lord that, as long as it is possible to them to remain in the room, they strive to practice external, and especially internal acts of humility, contrition, thanksgiving and others that the Spirit will suggest to them. The Father, who sees what is hidden, will reward them and lead them to perfection through the practice of robust virtues" (CC 48). For this reason, he wanted that all the religious should have a room to which they could retire to pray, that for him was the fundamental thing: "As for the works, I am very anxious that they should go ahead, so that each one of our religious may have the comfort of being able to retire to his room and do a little prayer alone with God" (EP 1085).

As for the place, in addition to the chapel where the whole community gathered for the above-mentioned prayers, Calasanz, as we have seen, speaks of the room itself. This is what he said in 1642 to a relaxed and difficult religious (Cf. EP 1085).

We can see the importance that the Founder gave to prayer by the comparisons with which he explained it: "The religious who does not have prayer is like a body without a soul" (EP 1085). The body without a soul is stench, death, lack of life. What gives life to the body is the soul, and so what gives life to the religious is prayer, according to Calasanz.

Prayer is also the way to reach perfection. Writing to Br Julius Pie-trangeli, he linked prayer to perfection and to other virtues. He said to him: "I wish that you would not take things so much to heart, but that as a good religious you would pay attention to prayer and to the exercise of holy obedience in order to attain religious perfection. Commend to God

with great fervour the actions of the Superiors, for in this way you will do much more than by trying to straighten out what you think not to go well. The latter is often a temptation. I would want you to be a perfect religious, but to get there it is necessary to attain a holy simplicity and detachment from all things and even from oneself, which very few people know how to do, and I wish you knew it. Pray to the Lord for me and may he bless you always” (EP 586).

Prayer is like food for the soul. The body, if it is not nourished, faints, can get sick and even dies. Something similar happens to the religious if he neglects prayer, does not take care of it, or neglects it: “I wrote to you last week some things, especially about prayer, for without it, one cannot be at peace with God, and it is as necessary to the interior man as bodily nourishment is to the exterior man” (EP 1542).

To Fr John Francis Apa he said, -and here we cite another reason for the importance of prayer- : “Know that prayer is the only remedy for overcoming temptations” (EP 3357).

Prayer is also the way to obtain God’s mercy. Through prayer a Christian communicates with God, and the Lord pours out his love and his gifts on the one who prays. The saint reprimands Fr Cherubini because he has been told that he does not attend prayer [and he is the superior of the house], and if he continues to act in this way, he is going to perdition. And the fact is that in prayer, the religious opens himself to God, his heart is laid bare before him and it is a means of deepening his vocational experience: “These few lines that I am writing to you, I write them with true love and the heart of a spiritual father who wishes you the true good as for myself. I have heard that you do not attend and care only very little for prayer, this being the only means necessary to obtain the mercy of God, as the prophet says: “Benedictus Deus qui non amovit orationem meam et misericordiam suam a me”; seek to remedy this fault with all diligence, and as Superior go before his subjects with exhortation and example, for you will do more with one degree of example than with many of exhortation, and you should do so, being young and healthy” (EP 1537).

The saint makes another comparison; without prayer it is impossible to remain in the service of God. For this reason, in spite of all the work in which his religious could be occupied, the saint insists that they should

not give up prayer. He unites prayer with participation in the Eucharist and examination of conscience. Calasanz asked with great love for all of this to his sons. To Fr Reale, superior of Carcare, he wrote about a confrere in his house: "I will write to Br Lucius (Bigliato) that when he is not legitimately impeded by the construction of the house, he should go to prayer without which it is impossible to remain in the service of God; in this matter he cannot abandon, and when the fatigue is great he could go to rest for a little, but it must always be preceded by a little prayer and the examination of conscience, and in the morning I would never want him to miss the Mass" (EP 1086).

Relying on what Calasanz says and fixing ourselves in our today, we can affirm that prayer has priority among the forms of Christian existence. That is why it is very important for us and why it raises the vocational level. It has priority for various reasons. Let us list some of them.

First of all, because we are sinners and we must receive the Word as light and life. Prayer is not the most important thing, as it is told sometimes, or because it is a spiritual activity, not even because it puts man in contact with God. It is because, being sinners, we understand that salvation must come to us from God, and so prayer is nothing more than the act by which man feels that he is a sinner and sets out to receive.

Another reason. It has priority because God wanted to communicate with man through the Word and his Spirit. He wanted to communicate by way of knowledge and love. And this is what prayer consists of, an explicit exercise of faith, hope and charity.

Thirdly, because God, in giving us the Holy Spirit, he does not give it to us once and for all, in fullness, but he gives it to us as a germ, and also united to our sinful flesh. That is why in Christian life we insist so much on the interior life and on the presence of God. However, this presence does not necessarily have to be a mental presence. In the same measure in which God is doing his work in us, he is giving us another type of presence that is more interior, more hidden presence. This is the signal that the Holy Spirit is doing more in the depths and less on the surface. To make real that presence is not a question of repeating many acts, but rather to have an open heart, but for this we usually have to act on faith.

Another reason: through prayer we show that the new life that Jesus Christ has brought is born of God. This is the main reason why prayer has priority. Prayer itself consists of listening to the Word and receiving the Spirit of God. As a form, it is dedication; that is, to proclaim that God is enough, that God is life and life comes from God.

2. Being with Jesus

For Calasanz the center of prayer is Jesus Christ. His prayer is basically Christocentric. In the Constitutions he has this beautiful sentence: “Remain united with Christ the Lord, desiring to live only for Him and to please Him alone” (CC 34).

But if Christ is the center, this Christ has a particularity that is also pointed out in the Constitutions: “...we will strive, after the example of St. Paul, to contemplate Christ crucified and his virtues in order to know him, imitate him and remember him frequently during the day” (CC 44).

The saint had Christ crucified in his heart; that is the image in which he looked at himself; the passion of Jesus was the object of his prayer. According to him, it was necessary to delve constantly into the passion of the Master, and the Piarist had to meditate on it constantly. To Fr. Alacchi he said: “If we would delve into the passion of the blessed Christ with patience and constancy, any mortification would seem very light to us... but self-love hinders us from doing so great good” (EP. 2646). For this reason, the saint considers the Passion as the book of the Piarist, and this is what he told to Fr Busdraghi: “The true book, in which all must study, is the passion of Christ which gives wisdom according to the state of each one” (EP 1563).

Since the passion is the book of the Piarist, he must use his intelligence considering and meditating on what is said in it. Then he will experience the delights of that which frightens so many people, because in the crucified Christ there are hidden great treasures that beatify man and lead him to an ever more intimate imitation of Christ Jesus: “The religious who does not lack food and clothing, it seems to me that God is giving him a magnificent opportunity to use his intelligence for his own purpose, which is Christ crucified, where there are hidden spiritual treasures for those who abhor the tastes of sensuality and love the tastes of the Spirit. Let us ask the Lord to give us the spirit and fervour to follow him as far as possible” (EP 2921).

For this reason, Christ and Christ crucified must constantly guide the sons of Calasanz. We must be disciples of the Master in order to follow him in all his steps and in a special way in his suffering: "I have read your folio written on both sides and I have compassion for you, because you do not know how to have the necessary patience to be a good disciple of Christ. You say well and according to the reason that you should not suffer, but if God wants you to suffer in this life so as not to make you suffer in the next life, it seems to me that any prudent person would take it for a grace" (EP 2362).

He wanted all to remember the Lord on every occasion, and it is beautiful what he says to Br Stiso, who was in Florence, about the collection: "I have seen what you are writing to me and I have compassion for you, and I exhort you to have a little patience, that the fatigue will not last too long; and when you go for collection, think that you walk behind the blessed Christ when he carried the Cross, even though yours has no comparison with that of Christ, who bore it for our love. May he bless you and give you courage to suffer for his love" (EP 2219).

Thus he spoke to Fr Alacchi about carrying the crucifix: "If there is a person who will carry it for sure, I will send the crucifix of Fr Anthony Mary, who would have to carry it as his guide and as the authentic sign of superior, as the Apostles did when they went to distant provinces to preach the holy Gospel. The fewer things he carries with him is a sign that he trusts the Crucifix more, and the more things, the less; and if the Lord would give him to trust in him, it would be of great benefit to him and grace to do much good to his neighbour" (EP 1301).

Given what we have said about prayer around the person of Jesus, we can affirm that prayer is not an act of piety that is born of man in order to be able to communicate with the divinity. Prayer is, above all, the incomprehensible grace that we can participate in the prayer of Jesus. What does it mean that God is looking for speakers in spirit and truth? It means that God allows us, sinful, wretched people to pray the prayer of the only Son, so that man will be able to call God by the intimate name by which the Word calls his Father, Abba.

To look at Jesus crucified is to recognize our own sin and, at the same time, our salvation. On the one hand, no one can know the sinner he is, if not by kneeling before a crucifix and saying as Paul did: he loved me and

gave himself for me; or saying with all his heart that he himself has killed the Son of God. But in that very act the great mercy of God is manifested, because our greatest sin -killing the Son- has become the greatest mercy of God, to us, to give us salvation in the dead Son. The Piarist must be constantly imbued with this reality and to live it at all times, as we have seen Calasanz asked it to the brother who went to the collection.

And we must imitate Jesus praying. The mystery of Jesus' prayer is the truly ineffable mystery of his intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus is prayerful not only because he prays from time to time, and because he dedicates moments to prayer. If we see Jesus dedicating moments to prayer, we see that these particular prayers of Jesus are nothing more than an expression of his intimacy and of his permanent prayer to the Father. The prayer of the Piarist has to be a prayer before a crucified Jesus who turns to the Father with total trust even in the most crucial moments of his life.

3. Together with Mary

As we have already affirmed that the prayer of the Piarist is Christocentric, we have to say that it is also a Marian prayer. Marian prayer in the sense that Mary must be present in the life of the son of Calasanz. To live with Mary, to entrust oneself to her, to imitate her; all this leads to a deeper vocational experience, because if from anyone we can learn to respond vocationally to God who calls, to say "yes" to God, to live more intensely for him, it is precisely from Mary. If the love for Mary grows in the Pious Schools, the level of vocations will increase. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin has gone through moments of crisis, but she is once again the Mother who leads her children to meet the Lord, her Son, and intercedes for them, helps them in their vocation and teaches them to follow closely in the footsteps of the Master.

For Calasanz, Mary was Mother and Patroness: "It is a sign of the Lord's love that he mortifies you and does not want death but amendment. This is what is meant by all the great and small illnesses that the Lord sends you. You have there the Blessed Virgin who is the Mother of mercy and Patroness of graces. Ask her to grant you one of two things: either health to serve the Lord with all perfection or her grace to appear in his presence" (EP 315).

The saint founded the Pious Schools under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, and for this reason he wants all his children have recourse to her intercession: "It is necessary that we have recourse to the help of God and to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, under whose protection the work was founded" (EP 4417). Calasanz himself tells that he entrusts himself and the Institute to Mary: "I entrust and will always entrust myself to the Most Holy Crucifix and to the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, his Mother, so that they may deign to protect this their Religion" (EP 3982).

He wants that every evening a prayer be dedicated to her because in this way the Piarist community, religious and students, entrust themselves to her and ask for her protection: "Every evening, make some devotion to the Blessed Virgin, with a Salve and a 'We fly to your patronage', so that through her intercession she may deliver us all from evil adversities" (EP 1459).

Perhaps remembering when he was a child and prayed in his native house, he asks that the holy rosary be prayed in a special way. When he was on his deathbed he asked the Piarists to pray this prayer again. Fr Berro was present that time. Later, he wrote a circular letter indicating the wish of the Founder at the point of death. "Pray again the rosary following our first custom: first of all, for the Holy Church, and then for the needs of our Religion" (EP 1049).

Not only the religious were to pray and entrust themselves to Mary, but he also asked the children to do so. He asked them to do so precisely at a very delicate time that the Institute was going through. He writes: "Have all children of the school pray morning and evening to the Blessed Virgin, reciting the litanies, because in a few days some resolution about our Institute is expected from these Cardinals" (EP 4291).

Our Lady will always be the help that the Institute needs, and with this help it will be possible to overcome all the setbacks: "May the Lord come to our aid; with this, we will overcome all the setbacks of the enemy who insists on disturbing the spirits of our religious. For this purpose, Y.R. make recite a Hail Mary at the end of the prayer. She, as a Mother of mercy, will give us her help" (EP 2256). For this reason, "whoever serves with devotion this most holy image of the Blessed Virgin [Our Lady of Frascati] will be always protected and favoured by her" (To Fr. Castilla, Frascati, EP 1463, 1630).

It is clear in the Founder the importance of Mary in the Pious Schools. It is not surprising that this devotion has been maintained over the centuries. Although it has gone through crises, it has always emerged victorious. Mary remains as an example of response to the vocational call. The “yes” she said is the “yes” of every religious and of the whole Institute to what God asks of them at every moment, to the ministry they have received, to the eagerness to follow Jesus, to the passion for the love of men and their salvation. Devotion to Mary will always be in the Institute an impetus for vocational experience and a means to raise the vocational level. She, who lived her vocation in sincerity and depth like no one else, will teach the sons of Calasanz to live their own vocation in the same way. And she, who accepted in faith the call of God, is an example for all those who feel the call of God, even if they do not see the future clearly. She did not see it either.

4. Other aspects

Calasanz’ appreciation for prayer is clearly manifested in a letter he wrote to Fr Alacchi, at the time in Venice. He links prayer with forgiveness and with the purity of children: “I am also pleased with your sentiments on prayer, of which all the saints say very beautiful and blessed things; and blessed is he who truly knows how to pray to obtain from our Judge, with efficacious prayer, the remission of sins and the abundance of graces. This is the prayer that young people learn while they are preserved in holy purity, for the immaculate law of God is well established in the heart before it can be stained with ugly things. I would like that the boys you receive to be cared with great diligence, so much so that the good smell could be perceived from here” (To Fr. Alacchi, Venice, EP 1755, year 1632).

It is necessary to pray for those who do evil to the Institute and to forgive them; after all, this is how the Lord has behaved towards us. Calasanz does not keep grudges in his heart, but cleansed of all enmity, he loved everyone and asked for everyone, no matter what they had done to the Institute: “It is necessary to forgive everything for the love of God and for the good of the Religion, and to be kind also in our hearts to those who have been contrary. This is required by the law of Christ our Master; and to pray for them” (EP 2593).

The Founder prayed for the sick. In a letter to Mrs. A. di Falco, his spiritual daughter, who lived in Naples, the saint explained to her what

God does for his beloved children; he asks her for patience and, at the same time, promises his prayers. Every son of Calasanz can apply what the saint says in this letter when he is going through similar situations: "The Lord generally tests in this life those whom he loves and does not want to punish them in the next life with many tribulations. These, now patiently taken as come from his most benign hand, are of great merit. I rejoice with Y.E. that you have come out so well from that tribulation of the knee, which had caused you so much fear. Do not think that the Lord forgets you in sending occasions to deserve a greater reward in heaven, for it is necessary that the elect suffer many tribulations if they wish to enter paradise, and it is much better to endure them in this brief life, where we also find temporal or spiritual consolations, than to endure the other tribulations that should be endured according to the gravity of those suffered in this world. I will not forget to ask the Lord to behave with Y.E. as he usually does with those whom he loves and has predestined for paradise, hoping that Your Excellency will also pray for me" (EP 2205).

He asks the same lady to pray precisely when she is most troubled. It is the Lord who calms the storms of the heart. Precious teaching for the Piarist, because we all go through difficult situations, complicated situations, and we have the feeling that we cannot go on any longer and feel the temptation to throw everything overboard. The saint writes: "I exhort you, as far as I know and I can, that no event, no matter how serious it may be, should cause you to lose your interior peace. But always keep your heart calm and united to God, having recourse to prayer when you are most troubled, because the Lord then tends to calm the tempest of the sea" (EP 826).

Through prayer, we trust in the Lord's mercy; in him is the help that man needs at all times. The saint asked for prayer at a difficult time for the Institute, when the Commission of Cardinals was studying the future of the Order. We are in 1645 and he writes to Fr Berro: "Even if up to now the prayers made here for the arrangement of our affairs, did not give the desired fruit, we cannot distrust the divine mercy, but to persevere in prayer so that the Lord will send the most opportune remedy, when it seems most convenient to His Divine Majesty. Our things go as usual and those who govern boast that the Religion has never gone so well as it is now. And so it is believed and favoured by persons who can do a great deal in this matter. Let us hope in the divine help, which will make it

possible, against our hope, that we may be able to dress novices to keep the religion on its feet. But there is no talk of this among those who can help the Religion” (EP 4272).

The Founder placed everything under the intercession of prayer. And something as important as the outcome of the Institute. There are many letters that could be quoted from this period between 1645 and 1646 and in them we would see the constant request for prayers. Here is one example, addressed to Fr Berro: “Although some write giving bad prospects, I hope, nevertheless, in the blessed Lord that our Religion will remain standing, and that it has yet to grow for the benefit of our neighbour. In the meantime, do not cease to pray there to the Lord so that he may be pleased to do what is for his greater glory” (EP 4335).

But Calasanz wanted his sons to unite contemplation and action. They were not simple workers for the Kingdom, nor were they simple contemplatives: he wanted them to unite the two aspects: “Y.R. tell him to attend to the service of God with the active life, but not to forget that he can unite a little of the contemplative, and in this way he will be in conformity with the precept that says: “During the day the Lord sent his mercy and at night the song”” (EP 1573).

Basically, to pray is nothing else but to hope in the Lord’s mercy. This is what the religious has to do. To wait; and this waiting is a sign of love. He loves, and for that very reason, he waits. And he who loves and waits is a sign that he trusts, that he has faith. Let us look at two quotations from the Founder that we all should make our own. To trust helps us to live a vocational experience that places everything in God’s hands, a vocational experience that only feels safe in the hands of the Father. This raises the spiritual level of the Institute. Let us listen to the Founder: “We will be helped by the confidence in God and not in men. Let us strive to serve him and trust in him, that our affairs will go well” (EP 388). “Let Y.R. exhort all to holy patience and to hope in the Lord’s mercy, who, though he seems to abandon his own, will not abandon them, but reserves his help for the opportune time. It will be for me satisfaction that Your Reverence, with the prudence and credit that you have before me, keep there the Institute for the pure love and glory of God, and if anything contrary to the good government and observance of the Institute is written from here with the purpose to disturb the spirits there, do not believe it. If anything new happen, I will inform you” (EP 4439).

For all these reasons and in order to pray well, he asked for the purification of his intention and the help of the Guardian Angel, to whom he was devoted. Here is an example of both realities: "My desire is that Y.R. always try to purify your intention, as I see you do and will do, and to submit it to the pure love of the Lord, from whom you will continually receive greater light" (EP 4445). "If you had any greater knowledge of the assistance of the guardian angel and would deal with him a little with familiarity, you would feel great and manifest help in temptations. But much purity of heart is required. Thus, when the enemy suggests a dangerous image, the person immediately turns away from it and, unable to do so, avails himself of the guardian angel, he will find a remedy. Let not the saying be fulfilled: If in my heart I had seen iniquity, the Lord would not have listened to me" (EP 1961).

5. What is prayer

- It is not a means by which man attains divinization.
- It is not a rational honesty, by which man, seeing himself limited, recognizes God as creator, and asks.
- It is not a religious feeling before "the divine and mysterious".
- It is not a kind of method of reflection, in which man halts and reviews his life.
- It is not a means for action to be well done.
- To pray is to contemplate God who works wonders for mankind.
- To pray is to hope in God against all hope.
- To pray is to be confident in God's hands.
- To pray is to praise God for his immense goodness.
- To pray is to glorify Him at all times.
- To pray is to be more sure of Him than of anything else or anyone else.
- To pray is to expect Him to give us what He wants.
- To pray is to believe that we are loved more than we deserve and that we do not deserve to be loved.

- To pray is to open our hearts and accept with simplicity what he gives us.
- To pray is to beg for his mercy.
- To pray is to live the life of the Son in an act of love.
- To pray is to accept his undeserved forgiveness.
- To pray is to enter into his life, which is simply and purely his grace.

“They will love venerable poverty” (CC 137)

1. To be poor

One of the virtues and, at the same time, religious vow that Calasanz loved most was poverty. In fact, at the moment of becoming a religious, that is to say, at the moment of taking vows, the formula that he used and also those who lived during his long life, said: “... I make vow to Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, of supreme Poverty, Chastity and Obedience...” (CC 31). The word “supreme “ applies only to poverty. He does not make a vow of supreme chastity or supreme obedience; only of supreme poverty. And so he lived, in extreme poverty, and so he died, totally poor. On January 24, 1647, he wrote these beautiful words: “I, being poor and of advanced age, do not covet superfluous things. I wish to die poor in earthly goods” (EP 4439).

Behind all this admiration and love for poverty is undoubtedly his conversion to it. The saint lived three conversions in his life, conversion to poverty, to humility and to pure grace. Having lived the conversion to poverty, it is not strange that he loved it deeply, that he insisted on it when he wrote to his children about it, and that when he made his religious profession, he professed the “supreme” poverty. Moreover, at his profession, the following words were also said: “I further promise that I will never attempt, nor for any reason whatsoever consent, to modify the legislation of our Constitutions in matters of poverty, unless for a just cause a stricter observance seems desirable” (CC 31). And he affirmed: “More than any other Religion, it (ours) would sin to let the jewel of supreme poverty be taken away” (Memorandum to Tonti, Eph. Cal. 9-10 (1967) 475).

Such was his belief that he said: “As for holy poverty, which is known to few and embraced by very few, the more perfect we can make it, the more we will secure the Religion” (EP 1755). And thinking of the Institute, he affirmed: “There is no Religion poorer than ours, and which is more concerned with the service and benefit of the poor” (EP 2304).

In this brief exposition on poverty, it is not a question of indicating what the saint said about this vow and to accumulate texts about it. Rather, the objective is the same as that of the brief comments in the

previous sections, which is to make us aware of how living in poverty, loving it, being more aware of what Calasanz wanted, and applying it to our times, the Order would raise the vocational level, the spiritual experience, which is what the Founder wanted in his time for all his sons and for the Pious Schools. So, it could become a vocational call for young people.

Calasanz told Cardinal Tonti: “We are men of apostolic life, very poor and simple” (n. 26). Living in poverty was for the saint an immense joy because he knew that in heaven they care for the poor: “Consider that there is one in heaven who sees all things and responds for the poor when it is convenient” (EP 248).

For those who live in this way, the Lord with his generosity will fill them with spiritual goods, which are much better than the goods that one renounces by living in poverty: “If we have this holy spirit of apostolic poverty, we will do great things in the service of God and souls. For the Lord, instead of temporal poverty, which we will truly profess, will give us generously spiritual riches, which are so important” (EP 729).

He who lives poorly has his abundance in heaven, which he will fully enjoy in the future: “Who profess the poverty we profess must be content with little things, because our rest and breadth must be sought in heaven” (EP 557). It is the other life that must attract and encourage him when the religious detaches himself from all earthly goods. After all, he does not do so much if the reward he expects is eternal life: “And if, together with him, we observe holy poverty, contenting ourselves with the food and clothing of the poor, we will acquire great merits for the next life” (EP 1931).

Those who live in poverty are supported by divine Providence and, therefore, he has the best satisfaction because there is nothing greater than to depend on her: “From such a legacy, our Religion could not demand anything else than food and clothing, and the rest would be distributed to other pious works, so that all may understand that we do not intend anything else but the good of the children. I intend to confirm this determination with an Apostolic Brief, because it seems to me a very great folly on our part if, tiring ourselves as we do, we were to seek the temporal reward of men. On the other hand, if we devote ourselves to this exercise, it seems to me that it would be a great offense to Divine Provi-

dence, which procures what is necessary to the birds of the field, by not having faith in it, having tasted by experience for so many years the care that the Lord has shown for us. He be blessed forever”.

If in the Institute we live in poverty, according to Calasanz, it is because we do not want to be burdensome to anyone. The Piarist religious needs very little to live, because what he wants above all is to do good to others: “The purpose of our Institute is to help all and not to be burdensome to anyone, being totally incapable of acquiring and possessing temporal goods. We profess it, according to the advice of the Apostle, *as long as we have food and clothing, we are content with that*” (EP 3875).

That this poverty was authentic, we can see by picking out some of the saint's phrases and seeing how life was lived in San Pantaleo. We follow a chronological order.

- 1619: “As for Mr. Cyprian I would have wished that by now, given the misery we are suffering...”.
- 1620: “... and given that in this house there are neither cassock to change when we arrive wet, nor clothes to wear underneath the cassock, nor shirts, nor underpants, nor socks, nor firewood, nor bread, nor money, but 16 scudi a month, we suffer great misery...”.
- 1621: “... and God knows how we are covered at night...”.
- 1622: “Here we find ourselves in so much poverty that you would be shocked...”.
- 1623: “I have sent the novice to look for summer clothes for under the cassock, and they told me that they do not even have for the inhabitants of that house.
- 1625: “Do not marvel that you have no fish, for we have none here either, and we are used to living with some narrowness, and in this way, on some occasions instead of a second course we have again soup.
- 1626: “Those of us who profess the poverty that we profess, have to be content with little, because we have to seek peace and abundance in heaven”.

- 1628: “We find ourselves with many debts, and God knows how our religious are in clothing, shoes, shirts...”.
- 1629: “I have left the house in Rome in extreme poverty...”.
- 1630: “They are here so full of debts that you would be frightened if I sent you the list...”.
- 1630: “It is no wonder that they do not find alms outside, if here in Rome sometimes we cannot get letters from the post office because we have no money at home”.
- 1632: “Now I find myself with many debts...”.
- 1633: “I sympathize with the prolonged illness, and I wish I could console you with deeds rather than words, but the need of our poor house in Rome does not permit me to do so”.
- 1634: “I think that this house is very poor”.
- 1635: “Here, in Rome, we find ourselves unable to pay our debts”.
- 1636: “At present we are here as many as in the novitiate, with much hardship, and a year of great famine is expected”.
- 1638: “What you have to do is to sell something if you can and get money and send it to us, because here we are in dire need”
- 1639: “We find ourselves indebted to the Bank for many scudi”.
- 1640: “...knowing the great misery of this house...”.
- 1641: “At present there is a great lack of money”.
- 1642: “I have not been able to make another cassock for Br Bernard because this house is in great need”.
- 1648: “May God grant you will no longer become sick because of the suffering and scarcity of bread, which is small and bad, and we can hardly find it, since there is a great lack of alms”.

It should be noted that the saint sometimes went to non-convenient extremes but they were, for him, the application of the “extreme” poverty or the result of living it. But, as we shall see, there were situations which he did not approved because they amounted to misery, and he would have wished not to happen.

Poverty cannot and should not be lived in this way today, but this must serve to inculcate what can be done and should be lived, which is perhaps more than what is done. And to remember that living in poverty behind the poor Jesus, we can raise the experience of following, of interior life, and of love for Jesus.

An important moment in the life of Calasanz in which he struggled in favour of poverty, was when the Institute was in danger, because reduced to a Congregation without vows, it was thought and decided to write new Constitutions. One of the promoters of such a change was Fr Cherubini, who was given the faculty of writing them. The saint immediately sensed that if the Constitutions were changed, poverty was in danger because Cherubini did not like the poverty that was lived. The saint wrote to Fr Vincent Berro: "With regard to the things of the Religion, it is now being discussed before the deputed Cardinals whether Fr Steven should be Vicar General, the whole Religion being opposed to this, as you will have learned from the letters of others. And with regard to relax the Religion, it seems that Fr Steven, his secretary and that Fr Visitor are of the opinion of relaxing it in some things and particularly in regard to poverty. But all diligence will be taken to maintain it in its degree, and we hope that it will be done in a way that everything will be to the greater glory of the Lord" (EP 4153).

He fought, and in this battle he won. Although Cherubini went so far as to draft other Constitutions, the cardinal protector hid them and they never saw the light. Only later on they became to be known. In this matter at least the saint was satisfied.

Poverty, according to the Constitutions of the saint, must be manifested in concrete elements. He says: "Poverty must also shine forth in the room and in its indispensable furnishings. Let no one have in it reliquaries, richly bound books, sculptures or pictures of Saints, but simple paper prints of Our Redeemer and his Mother, of the Patron Saint and some Saints. And keep nothing locked up" (CC 151). From these words we can get an idea of the few things that were in the rooms of the religious. He even indicated the measurements and what was allowed to be in them: "The rooms should not exceed three meters long by two and a half meters width" (CC 152). "The width of the bed must be only one meter. Each one shall have a mattress and a pillow of straw and two or three woollen blankets, without sheets. Whatever else, let it be only what

is indispensable and in conformity with our poverty. The Superior will go to see everything frequently, monthly or more often; so that we will keep nothing that would remind us of the vice of property. And have nothing dirty or untidy” (CC 153).

2. What does poverty entail?

What does poverty include for the Founder? Having nothing of his own. He even wanted this to be reflected in the very language he used in speaking of things: “Let no religious dare to have anything of his own or to call it such. By the word ‘our’ let it be understood that in this world he possesses nothing” (CC 138).

No one was to possess money or hold it in his possession or keep it in the hands of another person: “No one should have money or goods with him, or kept by another person” (CC 139). Seeing that this constitutional norm was not observed, he wrote to the Fathers in the Duchesca in Naples: “It is heard that some, to the great harm of their own consciences, have paid little heed to our Constitutions, which treat of the observance of the supreme poverty, of which we have a solemn vow, in which it is said that no one should have in his possession or in the possession of any other person any kind of money. In order that in the future the said constitution may be observed as it is observed by other reformed religious, it is hereby ordained that whoever has any kind of money, whether a little or a lot, in his own possession or in the possession of others, shall be obliged, upon learning of this order, to manifest it as soon as possible to the bursar or the administrator of the house, to be appointed by the said Provincial” (EP 727a).

Nothing was to be possessed without the permission of the superior, and he was very rigorous in this regard: “Without the Superior’s permission, no one may grant or receive loans; nor dispose of what is in his room or in the house in favour of outsiders, nor even those inside” (CC 140).

Regarding alms, he speaks in a double way. In n. 144 of the Constitutions says: “Let all live on the alms that you have begged or that have been offered spontaneously. You will be able to make provision of them for convenient times throughout the year; thus, the teaching work will not suffer from a daily occupation of this kind”. And this is

ratified in a letter to Fr Cherubini, in Ancona, telling him: "In case of need, it is not unworthy of the Poor of the Mother of God to go around asking for alms for what is necessary and not superfluous. And such an act of humility, being priests, will produce so much greater edification, knowing that we all are accustomed to exercise it when necessary" (EP 1934).

On the other hand, in n. 150 of the Constitutions, it states: "No one may ask for alms for his friends or relatives, nor for strangers; neither may they receive, without the explicit consent of the Superior, those which are spontaneously offered to distribute among the poor or to make restitution". The same is written in a letter to Fr Vitali, in Narni, with these words: "God knows how much I dislike not having to ask for alms, in accordance to our Constitutions" (EP 480). It is true that in this second case he speaks of alms not for the religious' living, but for other people, who are poor; and this must have hurt the Founder. Hence the lament of his letter.

He did not want them to have anything superfluous: "Let him also see to it that there are no superfluous things in the tailor's shop, but that there is no lack of the necessary things, of which you can stock up without any scruple, as long as you have the possibility" (EP 914). This had already been legislated in the Constitutions: "The movable goods should not be superfluous and should bear witness to poverty, as will be noted in the Rules for the Visitors" (CC 149).

If a religious received something, he had to hand it over to the superior or to the bursar, and if he did not do so, he should be punished: "Try to discover the secret dealings of some who go around seeking Masses in order to have them celebrated by others, and they spend the money, God knows how. And if you discover someone who deals in this way, give him a month's penance, with three days a week of penance" (EP 3285).

On the subject of money, he wanted total transparency: "As for Fr Michael, he himself, for the sake of his honour, should keep the money, and look after the interests of the Order with great clarity, and with the knowledge of the Superior, because in this way he would avoid all suspicion" (EP 3284). "As for acquiring debts, no one could gossip if everyone knew the alms that come in and on what they are spent; but if they pass

through one hand only, it is not strange that those who endure very little, they whisper; but the real gossip is when it is seen that the observance of our Constitutions does not stand up. You should know the Constitutions almost by heart, to see that they are observed whenever you see a failure” (EP 3350).

Basically, what the saint wanted, and he repeated on occasion, was his sons to have a spirit of evangelical poverty. Only in this way great things could be done: “If we have this holy spirit of apostolic poverty, we will do great things in the service of God and neighbour. For the Lord, instead of temporal poverty, which we truly profess, will generously give us spiritual riches, which are so important” (EP 729). “The more you separate yourselves from property and imitate holy apostolic poverty, the richer you will be and the more enkindled with spiritual gifts by God. May he, in his mercy, be pleased to instil this spirit of apostolic poverty in all our religious. Amen. Amen. Amen.” (EP 727).

For this reason, poverty should to be evident in everything, even in objects of worship: “For no reason are to be placed, in the Church or elsewhere, moneyboxes or alms-boxes. Nor under the pretext of sacristy expenses, Masses, preaching, confessions or library, or for any other purpose” (CC 141). “As for pictures with gilded frame, you may allow them until further notice. As for those that are to be made, avoid external silver and gold, but may be simulated, red or green. As for silk vestments, let our people by no means use them; but you may have them only for when some distinguished person goes to say Mass” (EP 3756).

It is true that in many of the said things, the mentality of the Founder’s time appears. We wanted to quote them in order to show what the saint wanted, how he expressed it and how he was aware even of the smallest things. It is logical that much of what has been said cannot be applied today, but this does not mean that it should not be quoted. And that is because underneath it all, it appears the love of the saint for a vow that today can go unnoticed. If only it were lived in depth, but in a different way! If this is the case, it would be enough to see what the present Constitutions say. With what has been said about the saint and with what we will still say, we want to underline the fact that poverty, lived in its integrity, deepens the vocational experience and makes the religious live more seriously the following of him who had nowhere to lay his head.

3. To behave as a poor

How did the Founder want his children to behave in this matter? First of all, if they wanted to be truly poor, they had to experience in their own flesh what it is to be poor: "Religious must love venerable poverty, mother of exquisite humility and other virtues, as the most reliable defense of our Congregation. They must keep it in all its integrity and will strive to experience its consequences" (CC 137). One way of experiencing the consequences of poverty is to desire to be given the poorest things in the house and to be happy that this is the case: "Each one must not only be content with the poorest things in the house, but positively desire them" (CC 138). He must be willing to beg, which is an exercise of poverty and humility: "He should always be ready to beg from door to door if necessity or obedience demands it" (CC 138).

Moreover, as a truly poor person, the alms received by the religious should be given to the treasurer without keeping anything for himself (cf. CC 142). He must not handle money, and in this he must be very delicate: "See to it that no one handles money except the bursar, the one who does the shopping and the sacristan when he puts it in the cash box" (EP 3898). Money is like absinthe, and for this reason one must be very careful with it; one begins by something that seems small and one does not know where it can lead to: "Do not allow anyone to possess money, as the Constitutions say, even if it is a gift from relatives to buy something; but they should give it immediately to the Superior or the bursar and if they have need of something, the Superior will provide, even if there is no money from relatives" (EP 2162).

He commented in a very graphic way to Fr. Graziani: "If the property enters by the julii and testoni, it will soon reach the scudi. And poverty has disappeared, and then the grace of God" (Ibidem).

He did not want the religious to accept any gift from the students, even if they gave them voluntarily; much less he wanted to ask for them: "In no way ask the students to bring any gift whatsoever, because it is against our Institute. And you have done very badly by introducing such a thing without consultation" (EP 1292). It is better to improve life than to possess goods, and he repeats this constantly: "It was not my intention to know what you intend to give as alms, nor the way in which you intend to do. I am more moved by charity and

the profit that can be made to my neighbour, rather than temporal interest” (EP 3755).

The Piarist religious cannot claim any temporal remuneration for their work, because it would be madness and an insult to Providence, which has always watched over them. They did not enter the Pious Schools to obtain temporal goods, but to live and imitate the Lord: “It would be our greatest folly if, working as we do, we would claim temporal remuneration from men. Besides, it seems to me that if we do this, we would be doing a great harm to the divine providence, which provides the necessary things for the birds of the field. We would not have so much faith in his providence, having seen by experience for so many years the care that the Lord has for us” (EP 1961).

But it is true that in order to live we need certain things, food and other things, so “for the necessary things we should do all the required diligence. Human means are not forbidden, especially to the poor who live on alms, as we do” (EP 819). “Do not have superfluous things in the wardrobe. But let there be no lack of necessary things” (EP 914).

The saint said this maxim very clearly: “The poor religious eat as they can. Rich religious eat as they wish” (EP 2249). The poverty that is practiced must also have its manifestation with others, and he wrote to Fr Cananea in 1623 about guests: “It is convenient that, being poor ourselves, we should behave towards strangers as poor people, and not to make superfluous expenses” (EP 122).

4. Some observations and issues

We have seen the poverty that Joseph Calasanz lived and loved. But this love of poverty did not make him immune to the sufferings of many of his religious. Let us quote some cases to see also the other side of poverty, a heart pained by what he saw in some of his religious, and his desire for the good and welfare of his sons.

He complains bitterly to Fr Alacchi about the way the religious of Palermo are dressed, in this case because they do not look like the poor of the Mother of God: “They write to me that in Palermo our religious are dressed in good cloth, leaving poverty aside, and that all of them wear socks, the same as they used to wear at the beginning, and other similar things, that it gives the impression that this one in Palermo is a Religion

different from ours” (EP 2225, year 1634). He complains, also to Alacchi, this time in Poli, of the contrary, because of how poor some religious have reached San Pantaleo: “Three young brothers have arrived in Rome, without beards; and, what is worse, with such ragged clothes that I wonder how they have not died in such bad weather. And, above all, having their mantles and the cassocks torn, and without shirts, which is a sign either of a very great scarcity of these things, or of very little charity on the part of the Superiors, who I do not believe are so badly dressed. In this particular it is necessary to put remedy.” (EP 2799). This displeased him because this was not the poverty that he desired, nor what he practiced personally or with those under his care.

That is why he wanted the religious to have the necessary things; otherwise is not to understand the religious life and Calasanzian poverty: “See to it that they have the necessary things, because then our Rules can be observed without any protest” (EP 3898). “If it seems to them to wear clogs on rainy days, they may do so. And see that everyone has shirts and other necessary underwear, so that they can withstand the cold” (EP 100). “When the alms are not enough, you will go elsewhere, but I think that with the neighbouring villages will suffice. Try to make money from something and buy the necessary things” (EP 180). He also complains to Fr Fedele about what he has heard: “It seems to me a great folly to have some of our people in Cosenza living in huts or barracks made of boards and suffering many discomforts, without being of any use to the people” (EP 2261).

As we can see, the saint wanted his children to have the necessary for life and not to go around in a disastrous way: “Then, regarding the provision of temporal things, Fr Provincial seems to me very indifferent, and even incapable. So you should care for what is necessary” (EP 819). In spite of all this, we have already seen how life was sometimes in San Pantaleo, even to the point of not having any clothes to change when they arrived from outside completely wet: “And in this house there are no clothes to change when one comes wet; neither vest, nor the necessary shirts, nor underpants, nor socks, nor firewood, nor bread, and no money but sixteen scudi a month, and we are living in such great misery. Because of that, it will be necessary to provide something from there, first and foremost, 30 buttons for the cassock and eight or ten for the mantle, four or five pairs of used sandals, grey cloth for a vest” (EP 56).

All that has been said indicates several things: First, that Calasanz loved poverty deeply because for him it had been an experience of conversion. Secondly, that, consequently, this personal charism, extreme poverty, was imposed on the Institute. Thirdly, that consequently, the situation that many religious were living was really very poor and difficult to bear. Fourth, that this could sometimes lead to a certain relaxation. Fifth, that the saint did not want certain situations that arose in the Institute in this regard, and he reproached the superiors when they seemed to him that they were to be blamed for the way the religious were doing. Sixth, that it is always necessary to separate the personal charism from that of the Institute.

With all this, we do not want to forget what we wished to emphasize in this part on poverty, and that is that the saint sought it as a means of conversion of his sons (he had experienced it in this way), and that if it is lived according to the spirit of the Founder rather than according to the letter, which pays its tribute to the mentality of the time and to that of a convert, it is and will be always an element that helps to a profound experience of following Jesus. And thus, it will elevate the interior and spiritual life of the religious and, consequently, of the Order; and it has to be an element of vocational call for young people who wish to live like the poor Jesus, loving and giving themselves to children.

5. In today's world

- Poverty is not identified with misery; poverty is loved, misery is hated.
- Poverty is not having more than what is necessary to live.
- Poverty must be identified with one of the traits of the life of Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head.
- Poverty is related to economic means, but not only to them.
- Poverty leads to give others what they need, even depriving oneself of what is not necessary.
- Poverty is lived by not enjoying what is superfluous when others do not have the necessary.

- Poverty is also living every human decline with a grateful heart.
- One is poor if one accepts, looking to Christ, pain, sickness, crises, fatigue,
- Poverty includes the cross.
- Poverty leads the true believer to assume death as an offering to God.

“You will not precede the least important” (CC 30)

1. Humble before God

Humility was the second conversion of Calasanz. It went hand in hand with conversion to poverty. He lived both of them in a period of about ten years, shortly after his arrival in Rome and the first failures in his desire to obtain a canonry. This conversion, like the previous one, had a strong impact on his life. It is not strange, therefore, that in his letters to the religious, responding to many issues that they raised, he took the opportunity to inculcate humility. That is why it appears so often cited in his letters. The reason was not intellectual, understanding the importance of this virtue. The reason was vital: he had experienced in his life how God had converted him from his eagerness to obtain a curial office to the simplicity of giving his life forever in a dedication considered in his time as something “vile and despicable”. And when a convert has experienced the goodness, beauty and richness of what he has received by grace, he wants others to live the same reality. This is the reason why Calasanz quotes humility so often in his writings.

To begin the path of simplicity of heart or humility, it is necessary to know oneself. This is how we encounter the ingratitude of a heart that does not love as it should, and the many ills that exist in our life. Calasanz explains this by indicating the beginning of the spiritual life, writing to a Brother who lived in Frascati; it is in 1630, and he tells him: “It is a good principle of the spiritual life the one’s own knowledge and misery in which we are all born, and also of the ingratitude with which, after so many benefits we have corresponded to God; and if you exercise yourself in it diligently, as you show in your letter of the 10th of this month, I assure you that in this life you will have for your reward some knowledge of God, which is so great a science that one particle of it surpasses all the human sciences, after which men consume the most and the best years of their lives, and for the reward usually they inflate and fill with pride the possessor. The knowledge of God beatifies man according to the degree to which, after knowledge, he grows in divine love. I exhort you to make every day the first thing to be that study after which the Lord will grant you all other things that the world does not know” (EP 1339).

Humility is so pleasing to the Lord that he is usually at ease with the simple of heart. Therefore, if anyone wishes to deal intimately with the Lord, he must be humble and thus he will achieve his desire: "Holy simplicity is very dear to the Lord, and with the truly simple he is usually at ease... You should close your eyes to the imperfections of others, consider yourself only in the presence of God; in this way the faults of the brethren will not bother you. Moreover, you should pray frequently to the Lord for them, and in particular for those who show the greatest lack of observance" (EP 862).

Since it is so pleasing to God, the consequence is clear; we will be the more favoured by God the simpler we are, and by practicing this virtue, we will attain a peace that nothing and no one will be able to take away: "Use all diligence to be the humblest in the house and you will be the most favoured by God. The religious who does not walk along this path of humility will be deceived by the enemy at the end. Practice this virtue, and you will find true peace" (EP 2390).

On the other hand, the more we feel favoured by the Lord, the more we must be strengthened in simplicity of heart; the greater the favour, the greater the simplicity, and this pleases the Lord: "When one is more favoured by God with certain graces or particular feelings, the more must humble oneself, so as not to lose them. They are lost with a little presumption. Let us recognize that we are useless instruments of the Lord, and that we hinder his works rather than help them" (EP 1817).

Humility brings us closer to God and to his knowledge. The more intense the humility, the greater will be the knowledge and love of the Lord and neighbour. Calasanz wished that his sons loved God wholeheartedly and served the children totally; and for this reason he asked them to increase their humility: "May the Lord grant you all a great spirit of profound humility, which, the more profound it is, the higher and greater will be the virtue of knowledge and love of God and neighbour. If you know how to combine the said virtue with study, you will achieve an incredible benefit to your neighbour, as those who know how to do it will experience in practice. I will help them with my daily prayers" (EP 4557).

God is pleased with humility. He is pleased by overcoming sin and evil. That is why one must humble oneself and endure every tribulation and suffering. The Lord will then teach what holy humility is, something

of great importance for the religious: “In order to please God, it is necessary that, imitating him, we humble ourselves and know how to endure tribulations and adversities that befall us, in satisfaction for our sins. You cannot do anything more pleasing to God than, when you are most afflicted and troubled, to humble yourself and recognize that every affliction and tribulation is sent by God, so you may learn from Him, as Master, holy humility. In these actions, the religious achieves more honour without comparison than if you defend your opinion with many reasons” (EP 3339).

Humility is also the way to go to paradise, nothing more desirable for the Christian and the religious than to be with God forever. If the religious wants this to be realized in his life, he has to be simple of heart, because only he who humbles himself will be exalted in the hereafter: “I have great compassion for those of our religious of the house of Genoa and of others of the Province, who do not know how to find the way to go to Paradise, which is the virtue of holy humility. And let them all be certain that he who does not humble himself in this life will not be exalted in the next. I hope that in our Religion there will be no lack of those who consider it a great benefit to humble oneself not only to teach writing and abacus, but also to teach the little ones to read” (EP 4276).

Simplicity of heart is fundamentally a gift of the Lord. We can spend our whole life striving, struggling to acquire it, but if the Lord does not grant this grace, we will never become simple of heart. In order to make us humble, the Lord uses of various situations, whose common denominator is to bring down the conceited man by means of weakness. The Founder explains it very well: “With regard to the temptation you suffer, you must not be discouraged by the feeling of uselessness, because this is God’s way of proceeding, for it is through weaknesses that he overthrows the strongholds. Neither you should take pride in the fact that you have been chosen for such important things, even if you feel unfit. If the choice is from God, also the successful completion of the matter depends on his hand; therefore, you should frequently have recourse to Him, asking for light to know the path to follow and perhaps to bring it to a perfect conclusion. You must therefore remain indifferent to yourself, who serves only as a simple instrument” (EP 2006).

Therefore, who lives in simplicity of heart and is humble before God, will elevate his interior life, he will find himself closer to God, his voca-

tional experience will be more intimate, and he will be able to help all those who contemplate his life and behaviour. There is no doubt that humility is a necessary virtue in the Piarist life, and if the religious were more and more simple, the Institute would also be more pleasing to God and would do more good to others, in this case, to the children of the schools, who would learn, imitating the religious, to come closer and closer to God.

2. Fruits of humility

The fruits of holy humility are many. The saint enumerates some of them in a positive or negative way. From among those quoted by him, we list only a few.

It is necessary to act according to the will of the Lord. He manifests this will to the humble: "Let us walk according to the holy will of the Lord, which is manifested only to the humble; let us strive to be such" (EP 4510). If we wish to walk in the path of God, we need an inner light, a light that the Lord grants only to the humble: "The said Father needs a little mortification, so that by humbling himself he may obtain more interior light" (EP 549).

We have already pointed out on other occasions how, for the saint, self-knowledge is the beginning of the spiritual journey. This knowledge of own weaknesses and problems must be done with humility and asking the Lord's forgiveness: "I would like you, considering your imperfections, to know your misery and, with deep humility, to ask God's forgiveness. For otherwise, he who lives according to his own will, usually dies with it" (EP 3402). The divine realities, which are proper of God, He makes known only to the humble, so that the humbler we are, the more God will raise us to this knowledge: "God usually gives the grace of knowing the truth of invisible things to the humble, according to the prophet: giving intelligence to the lowly. The more we humble ourselves in our own knowledge, the more God will raise us up in the knowledge of the invisible and eternal things" (EP 4392).

Often the root that a person is not feeling well and suffering for many things, is simply a lack of humility. This is what, according to the Founder, happened to a brother named Archangel who lived in Naples. The saint did as a good psychologist, realizing the reason for his suffer-

ing, and explaining to the superior what is happening to this brother, and what he must make him understand to be cured: “As for Br Archangel, I am sorry that he is unwell and I suspect that his sickness is in the interior after he returned from his village where he was reproached and mocked because he is not a priest. Neither they nor he understand that Christian perfection does not consist in being a priest or a brother, but in loving God more, that can be done without letters as well as a learned man. He should strive for this love of God with many acts of humility, without ever presuming to reach such a dignity. Regarding that he was accepted as a brother, he is mistaken, for I wrote to him that he was dressed as a cleric, and he, as I say, should consider his misery (which we all should do) and thus humble himself in the presence of God, which is the sure way to paradise. Do not cease to insist on this particular, not only to him but also to all the others in the house, by word and example” (EP 1385).

The saint writes to Fr. Graziani and makes him see what happens with humility and what happens with pride. Consequently, religious must be humble and must cast out pride. In the text, when the saint speaks of murmuring and of what it is, he uses the language of his time, which, of course, today we do not accept in the same way; but apart from the expression, the opposition he establishes between virtue and vice is well discernible: “With all charity, try to call back to your room one by one those who seem obstinate in their own judgment, and with fatherly kindness exhort them to holy humility, for just as this is a great sign of predestination, pride and self-judgment is a very great sign of reprobation, which should not happen among religious, because God turns away from them and they fall into interpretations and gossip which are very great deadly sins; and not recognizing them, they do not take in account and so they rush from error to error in many sacrileges. It takes a particular grace of the Lord to convert such people” (EP 593).

He says the same thing, but with other words much more in agreement with us, writing to Fr Sabinus: “Actions that proceed from pride prevent grace, which should be sought with humility” (EP 2445).

Therefore, humility is a necessary virtue in the religious life - also in Christian life - and he who is humble will enjoy the favours of the Lord. The simple of heart will have a profound vocational experience because humility brings him closer to God, grants him the light he needs to walk

his paths. The humble attract the eyes and the heart of God. On the other hand, the proud, conceited religious, who is not humble, lives in the convent as in a hell, because he is not at ease, he is unhappy and hopeless. It may be that at times this does not manifest outwardly - but often it does - but this is the way he lives in his heart: "The religious outside the convent is like a fish out of water, who does not know how to do the usual works and is easily relaxed. The religious who in the convent is not humble and obedient is as in hell, because he cannot act as he pleases and does not enjoy the fruits that good religious receive, of whom the smallest surpasses all the pleasures of the senses. Your Reverence should try to make these brothers of ours understand this truth, and to teach it to them personally I hope to be there next Monday, with the Lord's help" (EP 1894). For this reason, he complains to Fr Beretta about a letter he had received from him, which displeases him deeply for the reasons given in his reply: "I have seen that you show little humility, not receiving the warnings and admonitions with the spirit with which they were sent to you, because I have always warned you of the faults that are said of Your Reverence, so that if there is any defect, you may correct it. And it is not true what you say, that when I am certain that someone has committed some serious fault, I never forgive him, nor do I think well of him until I see the amendment. And in this I act in the same way that blessed God does, that when one commits a mortal sin he never forgives it until he makes amends. Be careful to behave well with God, who cannot be deceived by a false conversion of the sinner, as I can be deceived by a false amendment. May the Lord give us all the true light to save our souls" (Naples, EP 3345).

For all these reasons, the words that the saint addressed to Fr Scazzi in Nikolsburg are those that he could address to each of his sons: "For the special affection I have had always for you, I have asked the Lord to make you a great servant of him, and an imitator first of all of his most holy humility; there, you will discover the mysteries hidden from the wise and prudent of the world and reserved for the humble" (EP 4521).

3. To act with humility

If humility is so important, we must always act with a simple heart. This is the way to live pleasing to God and to receive his graces, forgetful of oneself, close to others and without believing oneself better

or more important than anyone else. And all this, what else is it but to raise the experiential level of one's interior life? What else is it but to make the Institute ever more suitable for the ministry entrusted to it and to be able to love, help and serve poor children better and better? Undoubtedly, the Founder was right when he wanted his sons to be simple of heart.

Who is humble knows how to act always, since humility gives him this capacity: "May Your Reverence make love the virtue of holy humility by means of which you will be able to know the way in which you should act at all times" (EP 1325). When the Institute was going through bad times, it was 1647, and it had already been reduced to a Congregation without vows, similar to the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, the saint writes some wise words to Fr Grien, in Nikolsburg, and advises him to receive everything with humility, because in the end, everything will serve for the good end of eternal life, and also so that, when the time comes, other supreme pontiffs will bring back the ill-treated Institute to its original state: "But the Lord, with fatherly providence, has willed that our Religion be mortified at this time, not to say persecuted, perhaps with the help of our own. And on this occasion it will be seen who shows signs of being predestined or of being reprobated, so that those who accept this mortification from the hand of God as of efficacious cause, and bear it with humility and patience in imitation of Christ, and pray to the Lord for those who persecute us, conforming themselves to the divine will, and persevere, will be an occasion for them to merit eternal life, as I have said; but for those who accept this mortification of the Religion as an occasion to live with greater freedom, it will be of the opposite sign" (To Fr. Grien, Nikolsburg, EP 4439, 1647).

The humble person obeys more easily because he has a simple heart and knows that when the will of the Lord is manifested to him, he must immediately fulfil it with his whole being: "If you knew the value of humility, you would obey more easily, and would put aside your own judgment" (EP 393).

On the other hand, many times the perturbation of the heart, the interior reluctance, the lack of hope, and the like, come among other causes, from a lack of humility. It is necessary to make every effort to get out of these situations, and to know that the humblest is always most favoured by the Lord. If, on the other hand, we are not humble, we

can be easily deceived by the enemy: "From the reading of your letter, I see that you have a need to be consoled, and I am sure that your confusion is born of a lack of humility, which you should show to everyone, and much more to the Superior of that house, who takes my place; and if you do not remedy it, your uneasiness will grow and you will find yourself far from the true path of good religious. Therefore, put all diligence in being the humblest of the house and you will be the most favoured by God. The religious who does not walk in this path of holy humility, in the end he will be deceived by the enemy" (To Fr Sorbino, Cesena, EP 2390, 1635).

For this reason, "to be little humble and to boast too much of oneself is an occasion for great falls" (EP 2403).

With humility true charity is achieved; and since the community must live in reciprocal love, it is required that all those of the house compete among them to be the humblest: "Strive to practice the virtue of holy humility if you wish to attain the true charity and holy love of God, and to understand with true foundation the things of the spirit" (EP 3761).

Calasanz insists, as we have seen, constantly in his writings that his children enter the path of simplicity of heart; then God will enlighten them. They will achieve a great harvest of merit, they will see the good deeds of their superiors, and if they ask the Lord for it, they will attain true patience: "I ask you to enter into the true path of humility, judging yourself as low as possible, if you want God to enlighten you to judge the good actions not only of your Superiors, but also of all the others, because it is the sure path to paradise" (To Br Pietrangeli, Savona, EP 649, year 1627). "I beg you to walk with holy simplicity and make an abundant harvest of merits, by means of great patience, which the Lord will grant you, if, with devotion and perseverance, you ask for it" (EP 893).

And just as he complains to Fr. Alacchi because the letter he received from him is full of continuous praise, which is not befitting a religious, he instead praises Fr Mussesti because he hates titles, which means that he is humble and this pleases the Founder very much. Here is a passage from the letter to Fr Alacchi: "I read your last letter, which took up the whole page; most of it contained nothing but praise of your

own; and being all of us, as descendants of the rotten root of our first father Adam, rather tainted and deeply inclined to evil, it would be more proper for us to accuse ourselves and humble greatly, than to utter a single word in praise of ourselves. Moreover, when we feel more favoured by God with particular graces or sentiments, we should humble so as not to lose them, for they are lost even with little self-confidence or self-esteem. Let us recognize ourselves as useless instruments of the Lord, since we hinder his works rather than help them” (Venice, EP 1817, year 1632).

And here is also a passage from the letter to Fr. Mussesti: “I greatly praise the humility of Your Reverence who hates honorific titles and gladly gives himself to works out of pure love of God. In this I wish that Y.R. may go on purifying more and more all his actions with the love of God; since it is true that he who loves the earth becomes earth, and he who loves gold becomes gold, and who loves God “*unus spiritus fit cum eo*”. In this way you will overcome all the temptations of the infernal enemy, and will always continue help your neighbour with much merit of your own” (Pisa, EP 4527, year 1648).

How to find the path of humility? Given the immense confidence that Calasanz has in the prayer of the children, he asks that they turn to it because the Lord listens to them with pleasure: “Try to help yourself with special prayers especially of the little children, so that the Lord may enlighten you in knowing how to find the path of humility, which is the sure way by which you will find many gifts and graces from God. All the rest is vanity and great fatigue” (EP 979).

This is how Calasanz asked his sons to be humble. He wanted them to experience something similar to what he had experienced; that they do not believe themselves to be more than others; that they live with a simple heart; that they be close to God in this way, and that they should abhor all that was prideful; that they should imitate the Master, meek and humble of heart. If even today the sons of Calasanz were as the Founder asked them to be in his time, there is no doubt that the Lord, grateful for such behaviour, would send vocations to the Order and the level of vocations and the experience of interior life in the Pious Schools would grow. But this cannot be achieved by one’s own strength; we have to beg insistently to the Lord, and then he will undoubtedly give it, because if it is asked in faith, it is received gratuitously.

4. In humility

- Humility is the truth.
- Humility is the acceptance of myself as I am, without any decoration.
- Humility is to leave at the right time the ideals in order to live from my own reality.
- Humility is to accept what God sends even if it is painful.
- Humility is to live with open hands towards the Father.
- Humility is not to be conceited.
- Humility is not believe that I am more than others.
- Humility is to consider myself the least of all.
- Humility is to know and accept myself as a sinner.
- Humility is to thank God for all that I have received.
- Humility is not to defend myself when I am criticized.
- Humility is to recognize that everything is grace.
- Humility is to experience that I deserve nothing.
- Humility is to live serving others.
- Humility is to abandon myself to the Providence of God.
- Humility is to lower myself to the misery that exists in life, helping others.

“United by the bond of fraternal love” (CC 171)

1. Purpose of the Congregations

At the beginning of his Constitutions, in n. 1, Calasanz affirms that all Religions tend to the fullness of Charity as their true purpose, and that this is what the Institute of the Pious Schools does. But he does not remain here. In a letter of August 24, 1630, he introduces a new element as the finality of the Institutes and Congregations, since the letter is addressed to a Congregation. He says: “Congregations have been founded for the brothers may live in charity and strive there, with holy emulation, to acquire the virtues, and particularly that of humility, which is so pleasing to God” (EP 1473).

Love of God through the perfection of charity; love of neighbour, which is charity among all; acquisition of virtues, especially humility, so loved and desired by the saint. Therefore, Calasanz refers in this text to the religious Institutes and Congregations of various devotions that are founded and which must possess a Christian spirit of fraternity and love.

2. The Superior of the community

In this section we refer to the common life of the religious and specifically to what Calasanz wanted to be lived in the Institute of the Pious Schools. He knew that the behaviour in the Institute, especially with regard to the second precept of the Law, could have repercussions on the students, because if they saw love and fraternity among the religious, and could affirm like the ancient Christians “see how they love one another”, this could invite them to religious life and thus become a kind of vocational attraction.

In the community, the superior had a special place and it was his responsibility to make the community a place of love and peace. What did the Founder ask of his superiors in this regard?

The first thing that every superior must get is that there be peace and communion among all the members of the house, taking advantage of the talents of each one. To Fr Reale, in Carcare, in 1628, he wrote: “Try to behave in such a way that peace and communion are preserved in that house, and that all be employed according to their talents; that the

priests have a meeting at least three times a week on a case of conscience in the afternoon recreation so that all may be more prepared to confess" (EP 1008).

Peace can be maintained if he behaves in a fair manner and does not show himself to be partial in his behaviour, appreciations or conduct, because lack of impartiality is not helpful to any member of the house: "Your Reverence, try to keep the brothers and clerics in peace, and not show yourself partial in any way, but as a Father, help all, especially to keep them in peace" (EP 2848).

He will insist repeatedly: peace is the greatest good of a house; It helps everyone and disposes us to serve our neighbour wholeheartedly and to be at peace with God: "Let all strive to live in peace and attend to the ministry with holy emulation, to see who will bear more fruit in their pupils" (EP 4081). "See to it that all remain united in charity. Let each one see who can advance more in the virtue of humility. And do everything possible so that the children be pious; it will be most pleasing to God" (EP 856). "Try to be all united in charity, and serve your neighbour with good example. You will have a hundredfold reward" (EP 1730). "Let all be united in peace and charity. And let each one take care to be right with God and to observe our rule punctually" (EP 1102).

The superior must have charity for all the brothers and must show understanding, since in this way he will obtain that they esteem him and fulfil what he commands them with a father's love.

Writing in 1646, already close to death, and seeing the situation of the Institute, he asked the superiors to bear the laxity and for that purpose they should resort to prayers and exhortations, because the religious of the house needed it. He wrote to the superior: "It seems to me that, in such a calamitous time, those who are not guided by passion should show prudence and spirit, bearing with patience the inobservance of those who are relaxed, helping them with prayers and also, when the occasion arises, with charitable exhortations, to flee from discord and vain pretensions and to attend to the salvation of their souls" (EP 4382).

In order to achieve union and fraternity among all the members of a house, he legislated in his Constitutions: "Let the Superior strive to ensure that all tend toward unity of sentiment, language, thought, and will. Thus, united by the bond of fraternal love, they will devote them-

selves with greater efficacy to the service of God and the good of their neighbour. Severe punishment should be inflicted on anyone who speaks to outsiders about what is going on at home and among the brethren” (CC 171).

The common recreations could help to unite all, but for this they had to be useful. According to Calasanz, they were useful if the following was observed: “During the time of recreation, either sing, or deal with the things read in the refectory, or of the way to remedy some problems of the schools, or of ceremonies of the Mass. That recreation will be useful to the spirit, and that of the table to the body. Otherwise, the recreation of the spirit will be impeded” (EP 1536).

The superior had to be careful that the religious did not allow themselves to be deceived by the enemy who wanted them not to participate in the common acts, because that was the beginning of the relaxations. And often excuses could be made for not being in prayer or in other acts of community: “The astuteness of the enemy goes to such an extreme that in order to prevent a religious from the common acts of the Religion, he so obscures his mind that he makes him see that without fever he is sick, and that he is not able to attend the common acts of the community, nor can he eat ordinary things like the others. This way, little by little, it takes away his prayer, and makes him restless, and burdensome, and scandalous to others. It tends to be a serious plague, and easily spreads among religious” (EP 798).

The saint was sure of the importance of fraternal love in community to attract others to the life of the Institute. It was a strong vocational appeal. If there were more charity, there would be more vocations: “Charity having grown cold among our people, it is no wonder that there is such a shortage of teachers” (EP 3673). It is true that he speaks here of teachers, but it can be understood as “of vocations”, since at that time in the Pious Schools, outside of Ventura Sarafellini, there were no lay teachers.

Charity demanded that when somebody wrote to the saint, he should speak of himself and not gossip about others. This was something he disliked. He was weary of the letters of a religious who, whenever he wrote to him, always wrote about the faults of others and said nothing about himself. The saint was not happy by this way of acting, not at all in accord with simplicity of heart. So he wrote him this kind of reprimand

and succeeded in stopping that religious from writing to him in the sense he used to do: "Instead of writing to me about the faults that others have committed, you should tell me of the good works that you do in those regions. Because, if some things cause me affliction, the others give me consolation" (EP 3066).

We see, then, the importance of the superior for the peace in the houses and how this union of hearts must be a vocational call for those who see and admire the behaviour of their teachers. Thus, charity and union elevate the vocational experience and the interior life of the religious and of the Institute itself.

3. Community meetings

Community is built through communication. If there is no communication - and we will see how this should be - it is impossible to form community. This is why the saint insisted on having meetings of all the members of the house; in this way they could be more united. But it was necessary to care the meetings, since they could be a double-edge argument. What did the Founder want in this regard?

He wanted a weekly meeting: "I would like the Congregation to meet every week, in union and charity, each one looking more to the common good than to his own particular one" (EP 1199). It should be about schools, which was the ministry entrusted by the Church to the Institute. Also the superior should ask what was being said about him: "I wrote some time ago that the priests should meet once a week to achieve the greater good of the work since the Lord says that "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst". The Superior should always ask his companions what is said of him, as Christ asked the apostles for our example. And if they would warn you of something, Y.R. should receive it well" (EP 1172). "Let all be united and know and all participate, by means of the weekly congregation, in what is being done. And let them remain without occasion for gossip" (Moncallero p. 221).

A few weeks apart, the Founder writes twice to Fr Matteo Reale, in Carcare, about the way in which the meetings should be celebrated. The saint wished to make good use of them, dealing with everything concerning the house and the schools, and being a motive of union among

the religious. He also told him that he hoped that no one would object to any point of the Rules; he indicated that at the meeting, observations could be made to the superior if he had failed in something and was not aware of it. They should be, therefore, profitable, open and -using present terminology- democratic meetings. Here are the two letters to which we refer: "I wrote that in order to be in agreement and united, it is necessary that all participate and understand how our Rules are to be observed. You should meet once a week, and there will be no one so bold as to dare to propose something against the Rules because then, it will be necessary to warn me. Everything will be observed in its own time and all will walk in agreement knowing that it will be like this. Now there are those who interpret them in one way and those who in another. If the Superior fails in something he is not aware, he should be notified. On his part, he will see that everything goes well and with good example for all, which that is the obligation of the Superior" (EP 1180). "I wrote two or three weeks ago that every week should be a meeting or congregation in that house for the common good, in which we could deal with what is necessary for the punctual observance of the schools and of the house. The Superior can often forget certain things that in this way he will be reminded of, and many eyes see more than one. If they are united in this way and the Superior does not take it badly to be warned of some things, the observance will go well. But if the Superior thinks that he is the absolute master, he is very much deceived and God will allow him to commit many mistakes, which would not happen if he humbles himself to ask the opinion of others in the house. I hope that the Lord will grant you the grace to remain united and in agreement, for in that way we will serve God, which is what we should all desire" (EP 1182).

A meeting implies dialogue, and this can be done well or poorly. For that, Calasanz did not want anyone to be obstinate in his positions, but rather that (again democratically) each one give his reasons and listen peacefully and calmly to the opinion of the others: "None of you should remain obstinate in your opinion, but rather, as servants of God, when one proposes something and gives his reasons, the other should peacefully speak his mind and give his reasons. And then, without passion, resolve between you what seems more convenient" (EP 1958).

These acts of community, precisely because they were communitarian, were to be attended by all. It was one more way of increasing

charity: "Try to be all united and to meet all together in common acts. In this way you will increase charity, without which meetings are a great confusion" (EP 1068). Because among the members of the community there are always some, often the simplest ones, through whom the Holy Spirit speaks and shows his will through them: "I am sure that the Holy Spirit will always show his will through someone. Gathered together, therefore, let each one of you decide the work to be done, according to his aptitude. And then, with this union, let all attend first of all to the benefit of the own soul and then to the service of the Religion and of the poor students. I will be very happy for all your good" (EP 3198).

For this reason, when charity was lacking in these meetings, the saint complained, because this could influence the bad functioning of the schools and also the non-observance of the religious: "It seems to me that, instead of charity, discord reigns there. And this is not the way things can go, neither of the observance nor of the schools" (EP 3151).

We can see the care that the Founder showed for this very important act, the community meeting; how he wanted it to be beneficial to all and how he wished that all could talk about everything concerning the schools and the religious life.

4. Behaviour of religious

Charity implies interpersonal relationships. How did the saint wish the religious to behave in this respect? First and foremost, he wished that they all be of one heart and one soul in love: "I desire that all be of one heart and soul in the service of God" (EP 4028). The saint was sure that the benefit they could bring to the pupils was in direct relation to the union that could exist among the religious: "I am sure that if they are united, they will obtain a great benefit for the pupils; and little if they are not united" (EP 1444). Precisely so that they could live in peace, and mutual love would flourish, it was necessary to avoid grouping to which some religious could be prone at times: "Every week I await news of the progress of that house in Palermo, because, if the subjects being well distributed according to their own talents and trying to keep them all united in holy peace, things can only go well. Grouping should be forbidden and silence must be maintained, if we want the Holy Spirit to dwell among our people. Otherwise the enemy will always be found in the little

groups and the trifles that could be remedied by notifying the Superior, will become great” (EP 2559). “For the common good, grouping must be eliminated in every way; there the devil is surely the counsellor, and it is the poison of religion” (EP 2756).

Given that the religious are men with their faults, difficulties could arise. Therefore, if love and peace were to reign, the saint asked that all offenses received on some occasion should be forgotten: “For the common good, a man should forget any grievance or particular displeasure, following the Spanish saying: “Giving thanks for wrongs, wise men negotiate” (EP 2593). It was also necessary to avoid all gossip or hurtful words: “Let there be no gossip, neither of those in the house, nor of those outside the house. All should avoid funny or mocking words, biting or offensive words, excessive speaking and anything that reveals a lack of modesty or relaxation” (CC 168). On the contrary, all were to speak to each other with great respect: “All must treat each other with esteem and speak to each other with great respect. They must kneel down when they speak to the Superior “ (CC 167).

Each one was to bear the imperfections of the others, just as the others bore theirs: “Seek to put into practice the counsel of St. Paul, that is, to bear with one another’s imperfections, so you can live in holy peace, which I would rather give you by deeds than by words” (EP 2036).

The behaviour of all should be of peace and union, as Christ himself recommended: “I recommend peace and unity among yourselves, as Christ recommended it to the apostles” (EP 1998).

They should strive to be of one mind when dealing with something in a way that will be to the greater glory of God: “I desire that all of you agree on the same problem that will be for the greater glory of the Lord” (EP 360, because observing the common life is a sign of true charity, and where charity exists, the Lord is there: “I hear that you always observe the common life. This is a sign that true charity exists there and, consequently, that God is present” (EP 2971).

And since sometimes it is difficult to live together because the different characters are so different and sometimes even opposed to each other, it is necessary to bear many things with patience and good spirit. If discord enters into the community, all is lost: “In order not to break the union, many things must be endured.

For when discord enters in associations, the spirit is immediately lost, and all the gain belongs to our enemy” (EP 1486).

The saint wants simplicity to reign always among all and that they live - he uses here a strong expression - without “biting” one another: “Oh, how I would like all of us to live in holy simplicity and not to bite one another, but to help and defend one other, especially in those matters in which the laity are involved. You will do a great service to Fr Provincial if you succeed in making this bad habit disappear in some, although I believe that they are few; but it is a great affliction to me when I feel something like this” (EP 1392).

Sometimes Calasanz notes a certain aversion among the members of a house, which displeases him greatly: “In the last mail I received a letter from Your Reverence in which I understood, although not clearly, that there is a certain aversion among our religious, of which I felt great displeasure. The infernal enemy does all he can to stir up discord among our religious, so that, later on, by the grace of God it may be seen who are constant and love the good of the Institute. Accept all things from the hand of blessed God, who loves us much more than we love ourselves, and not from the hand of certain disturbers of our Institute. May Y.R. have the right intention of conforming to the paternal will of God, who will guide our things to his greater glory and will give us his holy grace to serve him in the future with the religious perfection that is convenient. And do not rely on anything else than what I write to you about our affairs” (EP 4458). And when this happens, it is because the enemy has sowed the weeds that can cause so much evil, and it is already difficult to pull them out: “I believed that there would have been among you three, the holy union to restore the schools to the reputation they once had. But it seems to me that the enemy has tried and continues to sow weeds. With humility this enemy would be put to flight and the desired advantage would be achieved” (EP 2798).

In the Constitutions he legislates how should be the behaviour of the members of the Religion: “Nobody should mortify others unless this is his office; nobody should argue; nor raise his voice when talking or calling others using nicknames or calling them by the name of their country. Everybody must be called always by his religious name, as it is customary in our Congregation. The Superior General and other Superiors may be called by the name of their office” (CC 170).

It is clear that Calasanz wanted an authentic community in each of his houses. He was sure that, on one hand, this would make it easier for the religious to sanctify themselves, on the other hand, they could do more good to the students through their ministry and, thirdly, their fraternal life would be a constant vocational attraction. There would be children who, seeing how the religious who taught them and cared for them behaved, could give rise to a desire in their hearts to be like them and to belong to the Institute.

At the same time, the common life deepens the interior experience of the religious, makes him walk more rapidly towards the Lord, and in this way the vocational level is raised in the Institute. This is the authentic following of Jesus and the passionate dedication to the proper ministry, the good of children, especially the poor. The Pious Schools cannot fall in individualism, but they must intensify interpersonal relationships, which must be of fraternal love. Common life does not consist in living together, but in the love of those who live together, even if the physical presence is not so constant nowadays as it used to be for reason of the ministry, of the decreased number of religious, and communities be usually fewer in number. But, I repeat, the fundamental thing is in the interpersonal relationships.

5. Today

- Charity is manifested in fraternal love.
- Charity is accomplished in interpersonal relationships.
- Charity does no harm anyone, neither in word nor in deed.
- Charity respects all things, suffers all things, bears all things.
- Charity is not envious.
- Charity does not commit injustice.
- Charity attracts others.
- Charity helps others in their difficulties.
- Charity supports the good and rejects evil.
- Charity has no partiality with people.
- Charity is in favour of the defenceless.

- Charity takes care of the poorest and most abandoned.
- Charity gives what it has to help those who have nothing.
- Charity endures everything.
- Charity offends no one.
- Charity unites all men, regardless of race, colour, religion or social class,
- Charity makes us similar to God.
- Charity is the following of Jesus.
- Charity bears the burdens of others.
- Charity is noble.
- Charity does not turn against those who have wronged you.
- Charity defends the defenceless.
- Charity brings us closer to God.

“To win the children over to serve God” (CC 333)

1. Purpose of the ministry

We know how the schools of Calasanz began, because Calasanz himself told in a letter in response to one he had received from Fr Vincent Berro asking him about this subject. It was May 20, 1645. The Founder wrote to one of his beloved sons: “Regarding the beginning of the Pious Schools, I met two or three members of the Christian Doctrine who were going to Trastevere to teach in certain schools that were being held at St. Dorotea. And a large number of the students in these schools, each one paid a certain amount per month; and the companions, some came in the morning and others in the afternoon. When the parish priest died, who lent us a small room and another room on the ground floor, I decided to move them to Rome. I was aware of the great poverty there, having visited for six or seven years the neighbourhoods of Rome when I was a member of the Confraternity of the Holy Apostles. Out of companions I had, only one followed me; and the Institute settled in Rome. Little by little it became a Congregation and then a Religion which, because it is so useful in favour of the poor, is so persecuted by the infernal enemy and by some of his followers. But I hope that the Blessed Virgin will help us to overcome this storm” (EP 4185).

Thus the Pious Schools were born. Calasanz was already teaching in the schools of Santa Dorotea, and when the parish priest died, the saint was appointed Prefect of the schools and, passing through the Tiber, he introduced them in the city of Rome. This was the beginning of Joseph’s entire dedication to the abandoned, poor and uneducated children of Rome at the beginning, and, later, in all the places where he founded Pious Schools. This dedication constituted the ministry of the Institute. For it he fought, worked and gave his life. He loved it intensely and he had discerned, by means of prayer, the spiritual accompaniment of three Carmelite Fathers, and the reading of the reality present day by day before his eyes, that God wanted him for it.

He defended this ministry with all his strength, as it was seen when Cardinal Michelangelo Tonti refused to elevate the Pious Schools to a religious Order with solemn vows. He wrote the famous “Memorandum to Cardinal Tonti” that everybody who works to carry forward the work

of Calasanz should be aware of, and which had the effect of changing the Cardinal, who was opposed to the Pious Schools, into its greatest advocate. The appraisal of this paper will encourage anyone who reads it and will make him better understand the importance of the educational or pastoral work he is doing.

Among the facets that the Founder develops in it, we highlight three: First, it is a ministry for which everyone, teachers, collaborators, the Church itself and the children, should be grateful for what they derive from it: "Ministry the one most to be thanked for by the people who unanimously applaud it and desire in their homeland, foreshadowing perhaps the good of the universal reform of corrupt customs, which is a consequence of the diligent cultivation of those tender, easy-to-straighten plants which are the children, before they become hardened and difficult, not to say impossible, to guide; as we see in men already made: in spite of all the help of prayers, talks and sacraments, few of them change their life" (Tonti, no. 15).

Secondly, it is an irreplaceable ministry and perhaps the principal one for helping children to overcome their bad habits: "[Our] ministry is irreplaceable - in the opinion common to all, ecclesiastics and laymen, princes and citizens - and perhaps the principal one for the reform of corrupt customs; a ministry that consists in the good education of children inasmuch as the rest of the good or bad life of the future man depends on it. The Councils of Chalcedon and Tridentine and Saints Basil and Jerome, Benedict and Ignatius rightly judged it, enlightened by God," (Tonti, n. 5).

Thirdly, it is the most meritorious ministry, because it is preventive and a substitute for evil and an inducer of good, destined for all the children who can pass through the schools: "It is truly the most meritorious ministry, because it establishes and puts into practice with fullness of Charity in the Church an efficacious remedy, preventive and curative of evil, and of inducement and encouragement to good, intended for all children of every condition - and, therefore, to all men who first pass through that age - by means of letters and spirit, good customs and manners, the light of God and of the world..." (Tonti, n. 4).

It is worthwhile to continue reading the Memorandum to Tonti, in order to realize what was the grace Calasanz received in accepting this ministry, which is still alive in our world.

2. Educated in prayer

One of the things that impressed the Founder the most when he walked through the eternal city and met many young people who did nothing but to play and to waste time, to play pranks and worse, was, as Berro tells us, that they did not even know the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the most fundamental elements of Christian doctrine. For this reason, when he founded his schools, a fundamental element was religious education.

In this, as in the other chapters of this book, we do not want to comment on what Calasanz says on this subject; the purpose of this essay is to point out which aspects, living them as Calasanz wished, can elevate the interior and religious experience of the Institute, and the vocational level in it.

In this sense, he asked that in the schools the children should be taught the mysteries of the life of Christ and to have spiritual exhortations that could help them. He wanted Jesus to be a model for them and for this it was necessary to know well his life and his mysteries: “Let the teachers see that the children know the mysteries of the life of Christ and the acts of virtue, and they all have the fear of God and they frequent the sacraments” (To Fr. Carbone, Nursia, EP 1450, year 1630). “Always take care that the schools run well, and that spiritual exhortations are frequently given to the students, and that they learn the life of Christ and also the exercises of piety” (EP 594).

To foster piety in them and especially Marian piety, he asked that at the end of school in the afternoon, the children recite the Litany of Our Lady. This would help them to have devotion to Mary, Mother and Patroness of all graces: “Do not miss that students recite the litanies of the Blessed Virgin every day at the end of the school day. And in that house, have particular prayers for this fact and in particular for a serious matter entrusted to us by an important Prince. Be all of you very much in agreement and observe our rules with all diligence” (To Fr. Reale, Carcare, EP 824, 1628).

A special practice instituted by the saint was the continuous prayer. While the students were in class, there was always a small group, that in turn, prayed in the chapel for the intentions proposed by the saint. In this way, study and prayer were united. This is how Calasanz explains it: “There will also be, if possible, another priest to lead the continuous

prayer. It is done in shifts of ten or twelve students, morning and afternoon during the classes: for the exaltation of the Holy Roman Church, [the triumph of the truth], concord among the Catholic Princes and good government and development of our Congregation. This father will teach the little ones how to be prepared for the sacrament of penance; to the older ones, for the Eucharist, a simple and accessible method of prayer and other subjects adapted to the capacity of the boys" (CC 194).

In religious education, the saint placed special emphasis on confession. He had seen the children abandoned in the squares and streets of Rome and he understood that they needed it. That is why he constantly insisted on this topic. It was always necessary to confess for the love of God. Only then it was possible to spend time and time listening to the children, encouraging them and forgiving them: "I would like you to attract the pupils by means of confession, just as you attract the laity, which would be a greater service to God, since our institute is for the students. Thus they will obey you to come to the oratory and to other devotions, as I hope it will be done from now on" (To Fr. Castilla, Frascati, EP 807, 1628).

The priests had to be more disposed to hear the confessions of the pupils than to the laity. If the saint indicates this in the 'Declaration to the Constitutions', it is a sign that it was not always the case; many priests preferred to dedicate themselves to adults rather than to children: "Confessors will always be more willing to hear the confessions of students than those of lay people, since this belongs to our specific ministry; consequently, they will prefer school children before anyone else".

He asked Fr Garcia, in Frascati, to call the children on Saturdays to confession. and the saint told him that then he would be persuaded of their need for confession. Most probably, Joseph himself have made the test and recommended this to his sons, because his experience: "I remind you again to attend to the confessions of the students by calling them on Saturday, for you will see that they need this remedy, since this is our institute and not to attend to the laity; this is an accessory when the students have finish. And you will immediately see the improvement if you will make them to frequent the sacraments" (EP 1387).

He wished the pupils to confess with the priests in the schools, not with the teacher himself, so as not to intimidate them or induce them

not to tell the truth, but with others; and he disliked when he heard that pupils were going away from school to confess to other priests. If the Pi-arists took care of the children spiritually, one of the main services they could do for them was precisely the confession: “As for the pupils going to confession outside, I am very much displeased, because Y.R. should hear the students rather than the laity, and leave the latter rather than the former, since this is what our Institute demands” (EP 793).

The saint also wanted the priests of the Institute to dedicate to adults but only on certain occasions. As an example we have what he wrote to Fr Alacchi, who, while in Venice, dedicated himself heroically to the care of the sick. The saint praises him and says that he should do this beautiful work for the love of God. In this charitable service he was able to help, through the sacrament of confession, and lead them to eternal life. In Venice, Alacchi served the plague-stricken with all his might; he did not end up infected: “If we consider well the work of those who serve the infected with the plague out of pure love of God, it seems to me to be a very extraordinary benefit and one that the Lord grants to the one who gives such a spirit and vocation; consider it and persevere in helping the souls of those who are in such an affliction. Even if you did not achieve anything else but to make only one person to pronounce the act of contrition, it would already all your fatigue well spent; how much more so if we believe that many, by the administration of the sacraments, are saved because attrition, through the sacrament, is converted into contrition. I hope that the Lord, by this service, will either have our Institute admitted in Venice, or, as a reward, will give you eternal life. Let us await the outcome of this matter and whichever it is, we will believe that it was God’s will” (To Fr. Alacchi, Venice, EP 1584, year 1631). “For the time being devote yourself to the service of the sick for love of God alone for which we must expose ourselves to every bodily danger. He accepts in his own person all that is done for the poor and the sick, especially on such occasions” (To Fr Alacchi, Venice, Moncallero p. 118, 1631).

If with confession they also receive communion, the priests can obtain much benefit: hence, the saint asks that they insist on the two sacraments: “If the students frequent confession and communion, they will be of great benefit; insist much on this and always make some reasoning to prepare them for confession and also for Holy Communion” (EP 882).

An idea of the Founder that was translated into practice and introduced into the schools, and which is not easy to find in other educators, was the idea that confession does more good than punishment, a common practice in all schools at the time. Therefore, if a pupil who was going to be punished asked to confess, and the confessor spoke to the teacher, the teacher had to stop the punishment and allow him to go to confession. Undoubtedly the saint knew that such a practice could be manipulated and be an excuse for not being punished, but he took this into account and taught his followers how to know when the student was acting sincerely: "As for the punishment of schoolchildren, let it be ordered that whenever the confessor asks that one be pardoned in order to confess him, be forgiven, because the sacraments produce a greater result than spanking" (EP 1441). "Try to amend as best you can by making it clear that young people always deserve punishment, and to excuse their teachers as much as possible. And also that it is better for them to make the students frequent the sacraments, even when they should be punished, than to give them a few lashes" (To Fr Castilla, Frascati, EP 1427, year 1630).

3. The schools

If the Founder insists on one thing, it is that the school is the principal ministry of the Institute. We must remember the experience he had when he was walking through the city of the Popes: a multitude of children, ignorant of letters and piety. He looked for a way to help them, and at that time, he found no other way than to send them to school, giving them classes, making them learn so that they could get out of ignorance and be able to build a better future for themselves. This insistence is constant in the epistolary. How could the poor and ignorant get out of their situation if no one teaches them? How could they build a better future for themselves if they did not have the tools to do so? How could they not succumb to the "status quo" if no one fight for them so that they could get out of their social class, since culture was the weapon they had to use but there was no one to teach them? The saint, therefore, insisted on this aspect: "Regarding the schools, since they are our main institute, we should try to make them with great diligence in what concerns letters, in order to attract students to the schools. But our principal aim must be to teach the fear of God. To this, every teacher

is obliged, lest his material fatigue remain without the reward of eternal life” (EP 2876). “I have repeatedly written that the schools, which is our principal institute, should be taken care of with great diligence and that all should attend to them when they have nothing else to do” (To Fr Reale, Carcare, EP 1107, year 1629). “I hereby remind everyone to attend with the greatest care to the exercise of the schools, which is our principal mission, not only as regards letters, but also as regards the holy fear of God. For it is a treasure which will be found in the trance of death by those who have exercised it with fervour and patience for the pure love of God” (EP 1068). “I cannot fail to remind everyone in all the mails to attend to the schools with all care, even if they should sometimes give up other exercises, for this of the schools is our proper institute and when this is not going well, we deviate from the true way of our salvation; it is up to the Superior to watch over and help with his own fatigue. I have heard that many of the people are not as satisfied as they should be; no doubt there will be some lack in the schools since the laity do not appreciate them as they used to do. I hope that this year, the schools will be attended to with all diligence” (To Fr. Reale, Carcare, EP 1287, 1639). “Try to be very humble and make the schools run very well, for this is our principal ministry” (EP 1035).

The saint was right in what the people needed. This is seen by the numerous requests for foundations that he constantly received. So many that it led him to say: “If I found myself right now with ten thousand religious, I could distribute them all in one month only in those places that have asked me with great request, because our Religion is not like others, which try by various means to introduce themselves in the cities; ours is sought and requested by many Cardinals, Bishops, Prelates, great lords and major cities, as I can demonstrate with various letters” (To Fr. Alacchi, Venice, EP 2027, year 1633). Therefore, the fame of the Institute, the good of the Institute depended on what the schools were, on the esteem in which they were held by the people: “I recommend diligence with regard to our schools, on which depends the good or bad name of the Institute; and to achieve this it is necessary that they observe the Constitutions” (To Fr. Romani, Florence, EP 2808, 1638).

The saint appreciated those who defended his schools. One of them was Cardinal Dietrichstein, a great friend of the Founder. To him he wrote a beautiful letter in 1633, thanking him for having written to Propaganda

Fide in favour of what the Piarists were doing in his domain. The saint confided that he was ready to go ahead even if “the furious impetus of the devil” opposed him. Here is an excerpt from that letter: “The letter which, I believe, Your Eminence has written to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide seems to me to be the work of the Holy Spirit, because in the minds of some Superiors a certain aversion to our Institute has crept in and it has been heard that sending our people to foreign countries is not well regarded by all because they are so few in number and do not have subjects as well prepared as the other Religions. I yield to more sound judgment and words, but we, being co-operators of the divine will and of his power, as long as we do not enter into such functions by ourselves, I want to hope that he will give us the necessary strength. I am more than ever ready to continue the enterprise begun, and I am sure that the furious impetus of the devil, who fears to suffer great loss because of our poor family in these and other parts, will not prevail in overthrowing us” (To Cardinal Dietrichstein, EP 2049).

We have already indicated that he received many requests for foundations. This forced him to respond as he did to Gaetano of Anagni in 1633. In this passage of the letter we can see what the saint was asking for and when he was ready to found. He knew well that if the foundations were not done well, the outcome of the schools would not be good, and that would be detrimental to the Institute: “Your Excellency believed by my letter that the whole matter was concluded, but it is not so, because it is not our custom to move to a new place to open schools with less than twelve religious; and even then it is not enough, because not all of them are suitable, since one with maturity and prudence is necessary to be Superior and in the new Religions these are few. Moreover, according to the places, four or six are required for the schools as teachers and of these, fully prepared, we suffer great shortage. We will try to prepare some of them, but one or two years are not enough to make them perfect. Therefore, Your Excellency, it is not convenient to begin to build until we notify you. This will be when we have subjects suitable for such a service. Do not think that we can do like the lay teachers who with one or two can attend to a city or town. They have no other obligation than to teach, but we are obliged in everything by Constitutions which command us to perform daily, morning and evening and even during the day, certain spiritual exercises, which we cannot neglect, and not even with four or six in community can we manage to do them properly. And we cannot

neglect our spiritual advantage to help others, since no one will replace us in divine judgment” (EP 2034).

Since he loved his schools so much, he rejoiced when he saw how hard his children worked and toiled, and he acknowledged it: “As far as study is concerned, let it be noted that the fatigue you take, you do only out of charity and let no suspicion be cast on your person. On the contrary, let all your works be such that they may appear to the sight of all” (EP 1759). “I deeply praise your good desire to work wholeheartedly in the service of the Religion; and know that your work being for the love of God, you will overcome all opposition, because true virtue always comes out on top of the passionate, like oil over water. And having God on your side, you should not fear the adversaries, whom we will soon try to remedy” (EP 3891).

As for the students, he took special care of those of the first class because at the end of the course they had to go out to earn a living. That is why he wanted the best teachers for that class; one more sign of his kindness and a manifestation of his determination to do good to the poor: “In almost all the States the majority of their citizens are poor and can only keep their children in school for a short time. Therefore, let the Superior take care to appoint a diligent teacher for these boys: he will teach them writing and arithmetic; thus they will be able to earn a living more easily” (CC 198).

He did not want idle children in the streets because they could and should go to school. And if they did go to school, he asked them to make the most of their time; and they should go to the civil authorities, if it was necessary to do so. In his letter to Father Castilla we can see the saint’s thinking. He is referring to Frascati and we are in 1626: “Regarding the boys who are idle, let them make every effort to go to work or to school or have the prefect of the city put some of his authority, so that they will decide to occupy themselves with something and will not be idle. As for Spineta and others who want to come to school, they may be received, but with the warning that, if they set a bad example, they will be punished and that they should take care to learn and not waste time. And if the energy and authority of the teacher is not enough, that of the superiors will be used. But if they come to the schools, let it be in the spirit of study and profit; and if not, let them not come. Let them go to confession frequently, and let the older ones also receive Holy Communion, for the

sacraments tend to enlighten the intellect. And, if they are received with devotion, they tend to inflame the will to abhor sin and to love works of virtue. Insist much on this, which is the whole of our Institute, and you will receive a great reward from God" (EP 471; cf. EP 444).

Whenever he received good news about the schools, the saint's heart was gladdened, especially if, for whatever reason, had been spoken ill of the same schools beforehand. This is what happened in 1627 in Frascati and the saint wrote to Fr. Castilla: "I was not a little consoled by your letter dated Rome, for the good news you gave me about the house in Rome and the schools of Frascati. As I have always told you, I wish them to go with great care, so that the Pope may hear of our concern and the good work of the students, and realize that what he was told in past years, that they were not profiting, was a false information. Moreover, by doing so, we will fulfil our obligation before God, who in due time will repay our efforts with generosity" (EP 588).

4. Some obligations

In the letters that follow, the Founder refers to religious who have various positions that influence the schools and tells them how they should behave so that schools would run smoothly. To give us an idea of what he asked of the various offices, we have collected three situations: To Fr Alacchi, Visitor of the Pious Schools in Messina, he asked: "I hope that you, together with the other Fathers, will have tried to put order in the schools, so that they will be few but well attended. Put a superior to watch over the teachers and pupils, so that they may be advanced in the letters and in the holy fear of God. Another, a priest, cleric or brother, who has talent and is zealous for the Work, to take care of temporal things. But the head of the house, let him watch over the schools, for if they are going well, not only we will fulfil the obligation we have, but we can expect from the Lord the necessary temporal goods and an abundance of spiritual ones. Thus, we should insist more on this than on anything else" (EP 2670).

To the superior, in this case Fr Fedele, he encouraged him: "I exhort you herewith to an act of perfection and of good example for all those at home and for the laity outside. And that every day, at least once, you go to the classes and have four or six pupils recite the lesson, whether they are reading or writing and to the little ones. With your example, you will en-

courage the other Fathers and Brothers to do the same. I assure you that by doing this out of pure charity, they will obtain greater merit before God than if they were praying, since that saying of, I do not remember which saint is, although it seems to me that it is from St. Augustine, who says, “qui orat bene facit, sed qui iuvat melius facit”. And as old as I am, I often go to the classes to help” (EP 4204). He had already asked the same father for something similar (cf. EP 4199).

And to the Prefect of Schools he said: “If you exercise the office of Prefect by checking and helping the schools, I expect great benefit. See also that the teachers are in the schools at the proper time. And on feast days, let them be in church for Christian doctrine. And if anyone is negligent in this, Your Reverence will mortify him, as you see fit. And having a Corrector, see to it that he is careful about the hours, and that he gives all the signs; and when necessary that he punishes, do it by order of Your Reverence, but that the punishment be moderate. And that each one may fulfil his office with all diligence, which is what I desire” (EP 2816).

With all that has been said, we see the importance that the saint gave to the schools, how he wanted them all to go well, how each one of those in charge had to behave, and we see how the schools were the apple of his eye. In the saint there is no extracurricular theme, in the sense that we give it today. And it is normal because at that historical moment the important thing was precisely to educate as many children as possible and to make the schools function in the best possible way if we wanted to achieve the pre-set objective, the fulfilment of the ministry that the Church had entrusted to the Institute.

We must realize that Calasanz founded the schools for poor and needy children. In the beginning, he even asked for a certificate of poverty issued by the parish priest in order to have access to the schools. It is true that later it disappeared and that he accepted not so poor children in his schools. But witnesses say that he always preferred and dedicated himself to the smallest and poorest. This behaviour of the saint was in line with the ministry received from the Church. And the Pious Schools must constantly examine how they live and put into practice what the saint loved and cared so much about, the needy children. Insisting on this aspect will undoubtedly raise the vocational level (of all those who feel called to give themselves to God's beloved) and the spiritual experience of the Order.

5. Letters and fear of God

If we want to refer briefly to letters, Calasanz asked that the poor children be taught writing and the abacus in a special way, since they were two tools that in the future could help them earn a living in the various trades. Excellent calligraphy and some knowledge of simple mathematics were required and appreciated by the world so much: "Try to become more apt every day to teach the poor little ones writing and abacus, and also the holy fear of God, and do not worry about accepting elder school-boys in your class, but attend to the poor little ones" (EP 2238).

Christian doctrine had to go hand in hand with letters. The saint had experienced that some began with great enthusiasm, but soon got tired. He called their attention because then the desired fruit was not achieved: "To teach Christian doctrine to the poor seems to me a holy work, and he who does it with charity will obtain great merit for himself before God; but try to arrange things in such a way that there is perseverance, and do not do as some do, who at the beginning have great fervour, and then get tired and give up the work" (EP 3935).

The saint wanted the students to be educated in the fear of God. He considered it the highest and most meritorious doctrine that can be taught. Therefore, this virtue had to be attended to: "Try to teach everyone in school and in the oratory how important is the holy fear of God in the hearts of the boys. It is the highest doctrine that can be taught in this life and the most meritorious, doing it only for the pure love of the Lord, since it is true that among the divine works, the most divine is to cooperate in the salvation of souls" (EP 1374).

If the fear of God is also taught through letters, he was convinced that the Institute would be much sought after everywhere, given that his sons did not seek goods for themselves, but only wanted to do good to the poor. "It is necessary to give a good example to the laity. This will be achieved by attending with great diligence to the benefit of the students, not only in letters but what is most important in the holy fear of God. If you do it as you should, our Institute will be much sought after, especially since we do not seek anything other than simple food and clothing" (EP 3002).

It was, therefore, the fear of God that was most important in the schools: "I recommend to Your Reverence and to all the members of the house to attend with all diligence to the exercise of the schools and es-

pecially to the spirit and holy fear of God in the students, which is our own Institute; in which there is greater merit than in attending to the older ones, who have many Religions to help them, but the children have only ours” (CL 2623). “...the schools are doing well and the number of students is increasing, to which Your Reverence should put all your efforts, since our Institute is not only a school of letters, but what is most important, of the holy fear of God” (EP 4176).

This teaching of letters and the fear of God had to be done with love, and then the teachers themselves would receive great graces from the Lord. This is how God behaves with those who give themselves totally to his beloved, who are the poor: “I recommend to Your Reverence the interest in the schools, so that the students, together with the letters, may learn the holy fear of God. Let the teachers know that if they work for the pure love of God and sow in the hearts of the children a degree of love of God, the Lord will give them a hundredfold, if they are in the grace of God. In this exercise, the return or remuneration is so sure and so great, that everyone should contrive to make the pupils devout” (EP 3042).

This dedication to the children pleases the Lord very much because it is a lowering to them. Just as the Lord lowered himself to us men, poor and sinful, the Piarist lowers himself to teach the children, poor and ignorant. It is an imitation of the Master: “[The Piarist] stoops down to give light to children, especially to those who are the most helpless of all...” (EP 1236).

The saint worked for free and wanted his children to do the same. Some pupils, after the first class left for life, others continued their studies so that they could then enter the Roman College. So the Jesuits had nothing to fear; on the contrary, they should be happy because they were receiving well-prepared students from the Pious Schools: “Teach the others the principles of Grammar, until they are ready to go on to the Roman College, and try to make them as devout as possible, and have them frequent the Holy Sacraments; because we have to wait for the reward in the next life” (EP 2843).

6. What are the poor?

This is a simple outline of what poor children meant to the sons of Calasanz. The first thing they had to remember was that what is done for a poor child is received by Christ in person. It is the identification of

Jesus with the poor, and how working for them one is giving oneself to the Lord: "If those of our people who have gone to those regions would consider that what is done for a poor child is received by Christ in his own person, I am sure they would use greater diligence" (EP 2441). "Your Reverence could and should exercise your talent in favour of many poor people who represent the person of Christ, who, if he saw in you the affection you should have for our Institute, he would undoubtedly remove his scruples and increase his holy grace. Your work is desired and expected in Nursia and Ancona and in other houses. See to it that you do not have to give a strict account of your idle talent" (To Fr. Balzanetti, Poli, EP 4465, year 1647). Therefore, poor children should not be abandoned. They too have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus like all other men. And the son of Calasanz has been sent to them: "The poor should not be abandoned, because they too have been redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ; and so appreciated by his divine Majesty that he said he had been sent into the world by his eternal Father to teach them: He has sent me to evangelize the poor" (Faubell, *Antología Pedagógica Calasancia*, Salamanca, 1988. Exposition defending the right of the poor to education (1645), p. 34).

The Lord, since he identifies himself with the poor, will reward all that is done for them as if it had been done to him. This identification should gladden the hearts of the Founder's sons and encourage them in their daily work. If the children are cared for, the saint is sure that the Lord will provide all that is necessary: "The Lord will provide whatever is necessary, provided that we try to care for the children with all diligence, which I recommend with all possible affection" (EP 829).

7. Trusting in God

Since the ministry of the Pious Schools was so important, the Institute could not fail. The saint is convinced of this. We can review quite a number of letters in this sense from the years 1645-48. And although in March 1646 the Order was reduced to a Congregation without vows, and the Founder died with the Institute in this situation, nevertheless, his death was a grain of wheat that fertilized the resurrection of the Order. Now let us simply recall two letters of the saint in which he expressed his confidence: "If ever our religious have shown constancy and trust in the Institute, they should show it especially now when it seems that the

whole world is armed against us; hoping, however, as I hope, that where men are lacking, God will supply. Therefore, Your Reverence reassure all these Fathers that the Lord will send us the remedy so that the power of the infernal enemies and of men will not prevail against us. If anything should happen here that would be necessary or convenient to communicate to Your Reverence and to those other houses, we will write it down. Pray for us” (To Fr Grien, Nikolsburg, EP 4435, 1647). “Even if someone should write to you that our work is hopeless, I hope that the Lord will help us sooner than some think. Your Reverence exhort all to holy observance and persevere in teaching diligently; and be sure that where human means are lacking, divine means will come. Let them pray and persevere in their work” (To Fr Cavallari, Palermo, Moncallero letter 88, p. 325, year 1647).

The ministry should fascinate the son of Calasanz. And it should push him to give himself entirely to it, passionately, as the Founder did. If this is so, it is certain that the spiritual experience will grow in the Order because God cannot fail to give his gifts to those who give themselves wholeheartedly to his preferred ones, the poor children. It was the belief of the Founder, and it has always been the experience that the Order has had throughout its existence. Therefore, it should not be abandoned today; on the contrary, it should occupy the life of every Piarist: to evangelize by educating children in need. God will be in favour of those who work in this way. And he will give more vocations to the Pious Schools, so that there will not remain in the world a child orphan of knowledge, subject to the ambitious, manipulated by the powerful and those who have no conscience.

8. Today

- The Piarist ministry consists in evangelizing by educating.
- The Piarist ministry fights in favour of poor children.
- The Piarist ministry is the unlimited dedication to children who are abandoned, hurt and harmed by others.
- The Piarist ministry seeks a better world for those who have been abandoned by others.
- The Piarist ministry is indispensable in the world.

- Piarist ministry seeks to make children true men and true believers.
- Piarist ministry seeks to make every child a man of goodness, who loves justice and peace.
- The Piarist ministry is carried out in the school, as in the time of Calasanz, and in extracurricular activities, something that were not existing in his time.
- The Piarist ministry wants and works for a world in which true brotherhood reigns among all men.
- The Piarist ministry seeks that the fear of God be the beginning of wisdom for every child.
- The Piarist ministry is the great glory of the Pious Schools.

“Let all embrace sincere obedience” (CC 99)

1. Obedience

Calasanz had experienced in his life obedience united to discernment. It happened at a time when he was going through a deep inner crisis. It all happened in Rome. On the one hand, he sought to achieve what he had gone to Rome for and, immediately, to return to his beloved land. On the other hand, he discovered a scourge in Roman society that made his soul tremble. And he wonders, what does God want from me? It was not easy to know in Joseph's circumstances, because no one is a good judge in his own cause. That is to say, he could be deceived in the solution he gave. Then he went to three Carmelites, one after the other, men who were disciples of Teresa of Jesus and knowledgeable in the things of the spirit. He speaks and listens; he tells what happens to him and listens to the words of the wise teachers. They show him the way, but do not force him; they suggest to him, but do not impose anything. And Joseph, little by little, sees the hand of God in what they are telling him and, combining what he hears with other elements, he ends up deciding: he will stay in Rome, for God and for the poor children, the Father's favourites. And he will always remain grateful to these Carmelites who have shown him the way, and in it, the obedience to God.

That is why he will begin the chapter of the Constitutions on obedience in this way: “Christ the Lord, our Saviour, said: ‘I have not come to do my will....’. It is extreme foolishness for a religious to do his own will. All should embrace a sincere obedience. It alone, St. Gregory warns, strengthens in man the other virtues and preserves them once they are planted” (CC 99). And he tells Fr Costantini with certainty: “Religion without obedience cannot be called Religion” (EP 3202). Having lived what Calasanz lived, he can say that obedience is the way to perfection: “Be careful never to refuse obedience which is the foundation of religious perfection. I, not knowing with certainty the resolution of the Major Superiors about your person, exhort you with all my affection to let yourself be guided by holy obedience” (EP 4173).

He knows, he has experienced that obedience. Although men are involved in it, has its origin in God; man is the secondary cause: “If the religious were convinced that obedience comes principally from God and

secondarily, as an instrumental cause, from the Superior, I am sure that they would obey with great diligence. And God, with no less solicitude, would attend to the necessary things of the obedient" (EP 2692).

2. How the superior should be

We know Calasanz' thinking on how he wanted superiors to be through some writings in which he speaks extensively on this matter. The best way to realize how he wanted them to be is to read his own words. This must be done with great care, because the saint says many things that are truly profound. For example, the following text: "We exhort and beseech all Ministers by the heart of the Lord to remember that they take the place of that Lord who, being very rich, became poor to enrich his little children, and suffered hunger, thirst, heat, cold, weariness, enduring even scourging, thorns, nails and spear; and who in his extreme need wanted to be watered with gall and vinegar, when for others he had turned water into wine; and, finally, wanted to die naked on a trunk of a Cross. So that wishing [to follow him] worthily in bearing his holy Cross a little, it is necessary, after the manner of the humble Emperor Heraclius, to divest oneself of the royal garments of self-love, and with the bare feet of good example in everything, to clothe oneself all over, from head to foot, with the mantle of holy Charity, which joyfully makes that admirable saying of the Apostle: Charity does not seek its own. Therefore, as good shepherds of the Lord's flock, you must provide first of all for the spiritual and bodily needs of the sheep entrusted to you.... so that they may be at ease and do the service of God joyfully, for which they have abandoned their own house and its comforts, and what is more, even their freedom, which the Ministers, on the contrary, enjoying the power and authority that the Lord has given over those, must [follow] even in this the Lord Himself, who used all the power given to Him by the eternal Father over all creatures in our service and not His own" (Exhortation to Superiors, RC 13, 47).

And to Fr Cananea, Superior of Frascati, in 1623, he wrote a letter in which we can see once again how he wants the Superiors to be: "I would like you to exercise the office of Superior as it should be done, obtaining the respect and reverence due to a spiritual Father; and, if sometimes, warning the subjects they do not want to amend, consider that it is better to use lay people until we have obedient religious, than

to have religious who are lax. And warn everyone on my behalf that if they do not behave well, we will remedy it. And you, not only by words but also by example, teach them what is to be done, and in the future I will follow your reports... Your Reverence be very alert and vigilant and see to it that all are united in charity; and, among other things, that the students who come to our schools go to St. Peter's for catechism on feast days. Your Reverence be personally present for some time in the oratory on feast days in the morning and say two words of exhortation to the children and if there are any to confess, let them wait. In this way the oratory will go well and we will fulfil our duty. Likewise, visit the schools many times during the academic year, for in this way the teachers will do their duty, and keep in mind that the burden is on their shoulders, and in no way allow anything that is offensive to God. And in everything that you tell me, I will gladly try to help you to preserve and increase charity among the Brothers; or to put in place whatever remedy you see fit" (EP 167).

As we can see, he asked a lot from the superiors and tried to choose for such position those who he believed would do it better; although the truth is that he did not always succeed or did not always have at his disposal those he would have wished. This sometimes had consequences that were not good for the Institute.

3. Words of advice to Superiors

The Founder, realizing that the office or burden of the superiors was difficult, took advantage of the letters to encourage and advise them, according to the questions they asked him, the cases they presented to him or the behaviour of some of their subjects that the superiors made known to him. He never ran away from this work and responsibility. He was always ready to encourage, help and advice the superiors. We have chosen some of these pieces of advice because we believe that if they were followed today as the saint wanted them to be followed in his time, the interior experience of superiors and subjects would also be more intense and would grow in vigour. From the many pieces of advice that appear in his letters we have chosen only a few of them.

The superior must comfort his religious, because they often need it, and in doing so he must teach them how to live in order to be happy in the following of Jesus: "Do not fail on your part to comfort all your sub-

jects in the holy fear of God which is acquired through profound humility and the knowledge of one's own misery" (EP 4321).

He must watch over them in all aspects, without forgetting one aspect that Calasanz was careful to take care of, and that was the health of all his children: "It is the duty of the Superior to be concerned about the health of all his subjects. See to it that no one indulges in prolonged studies, vigils, abstinences and other external penances, nor in indiscriminate works; they usually bring great harm and prevent greater good. Whatever the religious does in this regard, let him manifest it punctually to the Superior or confessor" (CC 81). Chapter IX of his Constitutions on the sick is beautiful in this sense.

One of the things that he always took into account, and he asked his superiors to do so, was that they should try to know the talent of the religious, of each one of the subjects, in order to take advantage of it without spoiling it. The talent of the religious was good for the schools and for carrying out the various offices that existed in the Institute. To find the right person was an advantage that could not be wasted: "It is great prudence to know how to make use of the talent of each one and to support him in some things as long as they are not an offense to God. All subjects cannot be governed in the same way" (To Fr. Alacchi, Palermo, Moncallero, letter 44, p. 225, year 1635). "Y. R. walk very cautiously with the subjects and see the way to know the talent of each one and to make use of him according to his talent" (EP 3264). "V. R. knows from experience the tribulations to which superiors are subject, but it is necessary that you have great courage and hope in divine help and know how to make use of the talents of your subjects, treating the good with kindness and the obstinate with the necessary mortification" (EP 3654).

"The superior must be a guide in everything and for everything, and teach his subjects by example" (EP 1058). He should be like a father to the religious he has in his house. He should reprimand them at times, but without anger or passion: "When Y.R. reprimands or mortifies someone, do not do it with anger or passion, because it does not produce a good effect; do it with gentleness, showing that he would deserve much more. Tell Fr Francis to be careful not to fall once again into the disgrace of the Superior and to behave well with Fr Bernardino and the others" (EP 1840). Otherwise, "instead of winning the hearts of your subjects, you cause them to dislike you more" (EP 2529).

He must behave in such a way that he cannot be accused of partiality or negligence: "I would like you to behave in such a way that no one could rightly accuse you of partiality or negligence, as befits a Superior. Your Reverence must love and favour any religious who is observant, even if he is not from the country. There are some who are so attached to the detriment of their souls, that it seems to them that they are not at ease except in their own country. This is a great defect for religious, who the farther they are from their relatives and their homeland, the more they tend to trust in the help of God, who never fails those who are faithful to him wherever he may be" (EP 3869). If he behaves rigorously with religious, especially if they are young, he can frighten them away and thus do them no good: "I have heard, and with pain, that you treat those young clerics with too much strictness and that instead of attracting them with love, you frighten them with harshness, scolding them with a face of anger and displeasure. The Superior should lovingly admonish the subjects as a father, and seek rather to be loved than feared. The corrections done in the room, in particular, usually obtain optimal fruit. Try for the future to have another way of behaving" (EP 1331).

Calasanz helps the pedagogy of the superior. He has to begin by asking his religious for easy things, so that they can achieve them, and then, little by little, he will go on to ask for more difficult things. Haste is not a good counsellor in the things of the spirit because it can hinder the progress and discourage those who do not get at first what is asked of them. On the other hand, the good pedagogue adapts himself to the pace of the disciple, encouraging him when he does not achieve what he would like and making him make an effort so that he does not become indolent: "The zeal of Fr Octavio to always look for the highest perfection in everyone is good, but in this matter the Superior must teach easy things at the beginning, according to the capacity of the subjects; and once these are understood, others a little more difficult and finally the perfect ones, because the purgative way is not as perfect as the illuminative one, nor the latter as the unitive one. He would want everyone to be united to God" (EP 899).

The superior must teach humility to all: "Our clerics who came from Nursia are very poorly trained in the things of the spirit. The Superior must be continually vigilant with private exhortations and other means for the purpose of making all his subjects humble. And if in this he shows

the heart of a father he will undoubtedly draw great fruit. And if he fails in this he will increase in them laxity and pride" (EP 1397). He must mortify those who are lax: "If Your Reverence would seriously mortify those who are lax there, and introduce a little silence, punishing with bread and water for three days anyone who enters the room of another and those who have gossip meetings, there would not be so much murmuring" (EP 3431). But the rigor that is used - and sometimes it should be used - must be tempered by compassion: "They say that Y.R. does not treat them with the love of a Father. And although I do not believe this to be true, it is nevertheless good for you to know it. If there is some fault, let you make amends in the future, and show the love of a Father rather than the severity of a superior, except with the stubborn, to whom Y.R. must correct small faults so that they do not fall into greater ones" (EP 3931).

It is the same thing that he legislates in his Constitutions: "For their part, Superiors should not forget to combine authority with prudence and discretion. Let them remember that they are in charge of men and practice humanity in advising rather than severity in commanding" (CC 111).

To do his work well, the superior must correct his subjects, not in public, but by calling them to his room; this is more constructive and the subject will undoubtedly appreciate it: "With regard to the things of the house I hear that Y.R. with his words, is sometimes the cause that the priests and the others have little respect for you. The Superior must have much patience and must not manifest his feelings in public; but call aside those who have committed some error and warn them like a father. And if they do not correct themselves, you will notify me and I will know how to correct them much better and without contradiction. Try to speak little and act much, so that you will govern better" (To Fr Bandoni, Frascati, EP 1851, year 1632). Especially if he realizes that the correction was deserved and that it is not the fruit of any revenge, even if it was hidden: "You must see to it that the subjects never see that the Superior imposes some punishment with the intention of revenge. They must see that the punishments come from paternal love and that they would deserve greater. When then, in particular, the error is shown to them and amendment is recommended, it would be very stubborn who would not yield to the love of the Superior. In spite of everything, do not be accustomed to be quick in punishments, because instead of benefit they do greater harm" (To Fr Cipolletta, Nursia, EP 1332, year 1630).

It may seem difficult to carry out the service of superior with all that the Founder asks for. He confided that the Lord, who asks for all that we have said, when he imposes a certain burden, also gives the religious sufficient strength to carry it: "Patience is very necessary and even very useful in the religious, especially in the superior. The Lord who gives the burden to carry, grants also the strength, if humbly and with perseverance you ask him. Those who have great needs are those who know how to ask, and with the grace of the Lord the difficulty is then overcome" (EP 140).

There is no doubt that the superior will encounter difficulties in exercising his office. But he must keep in mind that the greater the difficulties and the more he overcomes them, the greater the merit; and, on the contrary, the superior must always be encouraged, since we have indicated that the greater the burden, the greater the strength the Lord grants to carry it: "The better you know how to overcome the greatest difficulties with wisdom and prudence, the greater merit Your Reverence will have in the exercise of your office of Superior. And on the contrary, the greater the grief of those who despise the authority of the elders. Because they not only relax themselves, but they seek that others be relaxed like them. But Y.R. will have God on your side, who will help you and give you the victory against the lax and against the demons who tempt them" (EP 3844).

Since the office of superior is difficult, each one should do what he can, what he is able to do; and he should do it with peace and tranquillity. No superior should be obsessed by what his office entails, but should carry it out to the best of his ability, for God does not ask for the impossible: "In the works of God one should not be in a hurry, but with great patience and serenity, one should wait on the Divine Providence, who "attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter et disponit omnia suaviter". Your Reverence do what you can with great peace and tranquillity of spirit. Then you fulfil your office, nor can you deserve reproof from God or from men. Do not be discouraged Y.R., for we expect divine help soon" (To Fr. Novari, Litomysl, EP 4410, year 1646).

Also in this topic we have to affirm that the growth of the spiritual experience of the Order depends on the superiors. To them it is entrusted the care of their brothers. They should pray for them, correct what they see that is not right in a religious; although they should do it, as the saint asked, with a father's heart, benevolent and without passion or anger. If

they could get the religious in their communities to live in depth the following of Jesus, following his example, loving their ministry and working passionately in it, the interior and spiritual experience of the Institute would grow. And it could serve as an attraction for young people who wish to seriously follow Jesus.

4. The subjects

In his writings, the Founder does not speak only of superiors, he also and almost principally refers to the subjects. What does he ask of them? Let us enumerate a set of elements, simply as a sample of the thought of Joseph Calasanz.

He asks them to obey with simplicity, otherwise it is a manifestation of pride and self-love: "Whoever does not obey with simplicity gives great proof of pride and self-love, which is a clear sign of reprobation, and for this reason it is rightly said that "multi vocantur ad Religionem et pauci tendunt ad perfectionem". Y. R. continue to be 15 days in each house and try to be the first in all acts, if you want to maintain the observance" (EP 3055).

He wishes, for the good of the subject himself, that he communicates to the superior the inner feeling that he possesses. Let us remember that in the Constitutions, Calasanz asks the religious "not to hide from him [from the superior], not even matters of conscience; on the contrary, give him an account of it frequently" (CC 105). The saint wants the religious to be sincere with him: "I recommend to you as much as possible that, if you desire to negotiate with profit, your own merit and the good of Religion, you should try to negotiate and be well with God on whom all our good depends. To do this well, the only remedy is to communicate to the Superior all your inner feelings, so that the enemy cannot defeat you in anything. If you do this, you will achieve great peace, which is a great treasure" (EP 736). And he must consider that dependence on the superior is dependence on God. If he would attain this view, the subject would reach perfection, which is the most desired good: "Dependence on the Superior, when one knows it well, is dependence on the blessed God. Every religious should attain the way to maintain the balance of the scale; waiting for the movement of the Superior that puts greater weight on one side or the other. And whoever reaches this state will be a true and perfect religious, for having made an exchange with God of the understanding and the will" (EP 4427).

The most important things that the saint has to recommend to his subjects are explained and legislated in the second part of the Constitutions, chapter two. Let us see what he says and how he advises his subjects to behave.

First of all, they must respect the superior, no matter who he is: “To the Superior, whoever he may be, respect him as a father. Give him total and courageous obedience, in readiness and humility, without legitimate excuse or protest” (CC 100).

Now, how can this be achieved? It is often difficult for human nature. This is why the saint asks us to turn to Christ the Lord, quoting at the same time from Scripture: “You will succeed without difficulty if you strive to discover Christ the Lord in every Superior, even if what is commanded seems arduous and contrary to taste. It is the Lord who said to the Superiors: ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me’” (CC 101).

The saint wants obedience to be born from the heart, because the subject knows that to obey the superior is to fulfil what God wants. For this reason, he should not only wait for an explicit command, but also try to anticipate the superior’s desire: “The attitude of the good religious should not wait for the Superior to give a formal order in writing or by talking. It will be enough for him to discover any manifest sign of his will, even without an explicit command. And he will keep in mind that, if obedience is rendered to a man, it is for God alone, the supreme love of the religious. Thus the motivation of all obedience will not be fear, but love” (CC 102).

It seems that to ask for this is too much. It is easy to focus on the defects of the superior, who has them like every man. Then, what to do? The saint says it clearly and answers without a doubt to what he himself did: “Accustom yourselves not to fix your attention on the person whom you obey, but on the One through whom and in whom you obey in every Superior: Christ the Lord” (CC 103).

It could happen that no matter how much good resolve the subject may have, and how well disposed he may be to comply with all the above, he may experience that what is being asked of him is beyond his strength. No one can be asked to destroy himself as a person in the attempt to obey. The saint also understands this and asks, first, that the subject try

to fulfil what is commanded. But, if he cannot, that he would indicate it with simplicity to the superior: "Whoever believes that a burden beyond his strength has been imposed on him, do not refuse it if the difficulties are in sight; carry it with simplicity and trust in the Lord: 'The strength of the Lord works in weakness'. But if the Superior does not know of his weakness or ineptitude, let him know, simply, calmly, plainly and simply, the difficulties you find for this mission; do not insist anymore and wait with humility for his decision" (CC 194).

To obey for Calasanz is to place oneself in the hands of the superior and to leave there all that he possesses. Even more; reaching a really difficult aspect at times, not to manifest his disagreement, not to externalize a judgment contrary to that of the superior: "With total obedience leave in the hands of the Superior the free disposition of his own person and of the things that he uses with his license. Let him conceal nothing from him, not even matters of conscience; on the contrary, let him give him a frequent account of it. In no way let him show disagreement, and for no reason let him show his own judgment if it is contrary to that of the Superior: unity of thought and feeling and a suitable submission will strengthen us and make us progress in the service of God" (CC 105).

For this reason and for this purpose he should remember Jesus Christ. It is he who will help him. They must show total availability. And he remembers a norm that he himself will fulfil in the most serious moment of his Institute, when writing a letter to Fr. Novari and being on the point of finishing it, lacking only the signature, the bell of the chapel rang and he went out to it; there he listened to the Brief of Reduction of the Order to Congregation without vows. At that moment he had fulfilled the second part of a number of the Constitutions: "Let all show absolute availability before a proposition of the Superior; as if it came from the lips of Christ himself. And the same at the ringing of the bell: let us leave everything, even the letter we have begun to write and have not finished" (CC 106).

Obedience must be rendered to all authority, whether inside or outside the Institute, and always in what concerns its office. And making use of the theology of his time, he speaks very simply of something that today we would like to be more precise, but which has been evident for so many religious throughout history: one does not make a mistake in fulfilling the superior's command; he fulfils the will of God, as long as what is commanded is not sin. And he gives an example of how to obey. St. Ignatius

of Loyola said to obey like a corpse; the saint gives the example of the donkey that Jesus rode when he entered Jerusalem and that was led with docility: “They should obey with simplicity not only the Superior of the house where they reside and the Major Superiors of the Congregation, but also their delegates in what concerns their office. Let all maintain the firm conviction that it is impossible to err in carrying out the will of the Superior, if it is not a sin. On the contrary, they should adopt an attitude pleasing to God, allowing themselves to be led and guided by his Providence through the Superiors; like the little donkey that Christ rode on Palm Sunday, who allowed himself to be led and guided everywhere” (CC 108).

This is the obedience that the saint wanted from his sons. If the same spirit were preserved today, if many of the things the Founder desired were put into practice, surely the spiritual experience would be richer in the Institute, and the simple way of behaving, which in no way detracts from one’s own autonomy, well understood, would attract more vocations to the Institute.

5. A special case

Mario Sozzi was a special case. The story is well known and we will not go into it here. Mario was appointed Vicar General, leaving without any effect the office of Superior General that Calasanz continued to hold. How did the saint behave before this fact and what it meant for obedience? The fundamental answer we have in a letter to Fr Pizzardo, in Pisa, one of the rebel houses to Mario. Calasanz said to that Father, and it is worth meditating on: “I have never written to anyone of that house of Pisa not to obey the orders of Fr Mario, of good memory, nor those of Fr Steven, at present Superior of the Religion; but on the contrary, with this letter I exhort you as much as I know and can, to obey not only the orders of the said Fr Steven, but also his simple insinuations, assuring you that the said Father desires the good and progress of that house, as you will see in fact when the occasion arises; and I exhort you at the same time to the holy observance of our Rules and to give good example to the laity” (EP 4165, year 1644).

Why was it necessary to accept Mario as Vicar General, knowing all that he had done to snatch the post from the Founder? The saint says: “The election of Fr Mario must be accepted from the hand of God, having been made by the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, with knowl-

edge and will of Our Lord. The Father shows much desire to help that Province” (To Fr Scasellati, Pisa, EP 3842, year 1641).

A little later he wrote to Florence, where the disciples of Galileo lived, Mario's deep enemies. And he told one of them, Father Michelini: “No letters have been received from Your Reverence by this post and it seems to me that it is good to warn you of what we are touching here with our hand; and that is that Fr Mario shows that he wants to treat everyone with the affection of a father and to provide them with everything they need. And he only wants everyone to observe our Rules, and he wants all the religious of that house to know his good will and to be sure that he will treat them with charity; and in this he shows that it is an obligation to do so in order to correspond to the grace that the Sacred Congregation has given him knowingly and with the consent of His Holiness. I write this about the sentiments of the said Father so that all may be reassured and verify by experience his good will” (EP 3850, year 1641).

The saint's position regarding the conduct to be had with Mario is very clear in the following two texts: “I respond by saying that always you and all the others should try to please Father Mario, and obey him in everything he orders, having the help of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, which in no way should be contradicted in anything, no matter how small” (To Fr Scassellati, Pisa, EP 3970, year 1642). “I have seen what Your Reverence writes to me and I wish you to calm the spirits of all the religious of that house as best you can, and tell them to consider first the trial of Fr Mario's government, which I hope will be of much satisfaction. If the contrary should happen, which I do not believe, then the opportune remedy will be sought. Exhort everyone to be cheerful and to wait to see how things turn out; because if things go well through Fr Mario, everyone should be happy and each one should attend to his work for the good of his neighbour for the pure love of God” (EP 3910).

Taking into account this behaviour of the saint and his way of being and living, it is not strange his anger and the defense he makes of his actions in a letter full of ardour addressed to Father Apa: “Regarding the very false and unworthy opinion of my office, which some lousy tongue has invented, that I wish that our people were restless to prove that Fr Mario is of no use as Provincial, I answer that I wish that they all have one heart and one soul in the service of God, and that Fr Mario be a Minister who responds to his office. From this will come to me usefulness and

honour, and otherwise reproach. And to think that I consider these ours religious as amputated members of the body of Religion and as if they did not exist and that whoever does not rebel against Father Mario will be reproved by me, this seems to me to be unworthy not only for you to believe it, but even to write it, since neither you nor anyone else has seen such things in me, but quite the contrary. And I exhort you and all the others to walk in the way of the Lord with holy simplicity and religious perfection, which I desire for everyone as a true spiritual Father, and I say this in the presence of God who is the truth” (EP 4028).

5. Today

- To obey is to live God’s will.
- Obedience is an act of love.
- To obey implies stripping oneself of everything that is not of God.
- The obedience of love is the way to perfection.
- To obey implies submitting all our desires to those of God.
- To obey is to live by faith.
- Obedience leads to the stripping of everything for love of God.
- Obedience does not exist without simplicity of heart.
- Obedience entails mortification and humiliation.
- Obedience resembles us to the Son who was pure obedience to the Father.
- Without obedience there is no religious life.
- Obedience leads to detachment.
- Obedience leads to unconditional service of love.
- To obey is to lower oneself out of love in imitation of the one who lowered himself by becoming obedient even to the cross.
- To obey is to hope in God more than in anyone else.
- To obey is to remain attentive to what God wants through his representatives.
- Authentic obedience, only to God; to others, in his name.

“They shall celebrate the sacraments frequently and devoutly” (CC 55)

1. Ecclesial sensitivity

It is clear that Calasanz was a man sensitive to the ecclesial realities, to everything referred to the Church, in his life and behaviour. He wanted to spread that sensitivity to the whole Institute. Already in his years of priesthood in Spain, he was a family member of the bishops in whose service he assisted; and he did it with care and attention. He obeyed whatever they commanded him, with a spirit of faith, and took charge of the offices they proposed to him. That is why he was so highly esteemed by them.

In Rome, one aspect of his sensitivity is seen in the fact that he enrolled in various Roman confraternities, all of which were appreciated and encouraged by the Roman Pontiffs. He even asked Pope Clement VIII for the approval of the secular Congregation that he formed with some priests and lay people for the service of the schools. The Pope gave it to him verbally.

This constant practice continued after the founding of the Institute. In this way we have writings that manifest what we say and indicate the concern of the saint that the ecclesial sense he lived could be given to the Order.

In his Constitutions he had legislated: “At the death of the Supreme Pontiff all the priests will celebrate the Eucharist twice: once for the deceased Pope, the other for the happy election of the new Pontiff” (CC 87).

This same desire is expressed at the death of Pope Paul V, writing to Fr Cananea: “Pray for the soul of the deceased pontiff, to whom we are very much obliged, celebrating Masses according to our Constitutions. And also ask the Lord to send us a pope who will be a reformer of all past errors and a restorer of all virtues. The Lord will grant it if we devoutly ask for “ (EP 208). He wants us to pray for a Pope who had done so much good for the Institute and to whom it owed so much.

On many occasions he asks that prayers be said for the Supreme Pontiff. When the cardinals were in conclave from which Pope Innocent X would be elected, he wrote to Fr Apa asking for prayers for the prompt

election. He himself made prayers for the same intention: “Let us all pray to the Lord that as soon as possible it be elected the pontiff who knows how to remedy the present disorders, first in the States of the Church, and then in the whole of Christendom” (EP 4214). Calasanz did not know at that time that this would be the Pope who would reduce the Order to a Congregation without vows.

Not only in those special moments, but also in daily life it was necessary to pray for the Pope and for his intentions. It is even the Vice-regent of Rome himself who asks for prayers and disciplines for the intentions of the Pope, at that time Urban VIII: “According to what Monsignor Vice-regent orders and commands me, from His Holiness, as you see in the attached copy, you with all the Fathers and Brothers of that house do not fail to make the ordinary prayers, adding some discipline, abstinence, or other similar mortifications, so that God our Lord may grant the Holy Father what he desires” (EP 2028).

The Piarists were to show deep gratitude to the Church, to pray for it in the difficult times she was going through; sometimes, the saint asked to pray with the Blessed Sacrament exposed. When he asked for these prayers, he was still Supreme Pontiff Urban VIII: “May you expose the Blessed Sacrament... for the needs of the Holy Church, which commends itself to all its children in these troubles, and in particular to the most chosen ones, who are the religious. Therefore, let all those in that house and in the novitiate show their gratitude to their mother, the holy Church” (EP 3039).

For this reason, when news reached him from the houses that they had fulfilled his request, the saint praised the superior because in all the houses of the Province they had prayed for the Pope’s intentions. This indicates how the Church and its needs were not something alien to men who were all day in the classroom, teaching according to their ministry, working and struggling with those children who needed care, attention, effort and total dedication. The thought of the religious did not remain in the simple, although important, education that they gave to the children; and this was working for the Church, because one of the objectives of their education was to make them true believers. But it went beyond education. They were also concerned about the Church. The saint’s joy is manifested to Fr Fedele for what he had told him in the letter he received; and he replied: “You have worked saintly, making special prayers for the

needs of the Holy Church in all our houses of that province. This practice will last the whole Holy Week. And then it will be seen what mercy God will have used with his Church, for which we will thank him in all humility” (EP 3044).

Not only the ecclesial sensitivity is manifested in the prayer for the Pope, his intentions and for the Church in general, but also in the obedience that Calasanz gives and wants his children to have to all the mandates or desires that come from the Church and its offices. Thus, writing to Fr. Michellini who was in Florence, in the year of 1641, a time when the Order was under suspicion and the watchful eye of the Holy Office, he tells him his feelings before the dispositions that were arriving: “Through others he will know in particular the resolutions taken here in Rome, which must be believed to be from the Holy Spirit. And by putting them into practice, you will acquire a very great merit before God” (EP 3811).

The saint was convinced that he was not wrong in obeying the Holy Office: “I will try to do what you wish, having been ordained by the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. In obeying so high a tribunal, I will not err. Indeed, I think I get merit. I leave the success of the problem to divine goodness” (EP 3969); and he confessed that what he wrote was done out of obedience to that tribunal, and he manifested his willingness to obey it promptly: “I assure you that what I have written to you I have done out of obedience to the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office... And it seems necessary to me not only not to show any repugnance, but to show obedience with all readiness” (EP 3847).

Prayer, obedience and also work for the Church, and specially in a land of Protestants. Thus he wrote to Fr Conti in June 1639: “I have received a letter from Fr Ambrose, in which he tells me of the conversion of a heretic, which has cost him ten years. Such news from those countries is of much joy” (EP 3115). “In whatever way you can help the conversion of heretics, not only of the children who come to the schools, but also of the adults, do it with all diligence and charity” (EP 3061).

Just as the Piarists work in Protestant lands for the good of the Church and of the children who live in those lands, procuring their conversion, the saint does the same in Italy. He respects in the school the Hebrews in their beliefs, but welcomes those who, of their own free will, wanted to convert to Catholicism: “With the young Hebrew who has con-

verted to Christianity and who has been received at home, the greatest diligence should be employed to make him pious, to teach him with charity how he should confess well and receive communion fruitfully. So that he may know that he is among reformed religious” (EP 3410).

The ecclesial sensitivity that the saint wanted to imprint on the Institute should be a heritage that can never be lost. The Church has entrusted to the Pious Schools an important and delicate ministry, which it holds in such high esteem. To give itself to this ministry, to give itself fully to it, to live side by side with the children in the classroom or in other activities, trying to make them good Christians, and helping them to work tomorrow for a more just world, in more peace, in which people respect each other and the ideas of others, is to live the sensitivity of the Church. At the same time, to channel children so that when they grow up, they will go to ecclesial communities -calasanzian or others- to live their Christianity more intensely, is to have ecclesial sensitivity. To pray for the Church and its needs is to have ecclesial sensitivity. Undoubtedly these and other actions will have to be increased, but I do not believe that they have been lacking in the history of the Pious Schools. Neither the heartfelt acceptance of what the Church has always commanded. May this ecclesial sensitivity be preserved, grow and increase in the Pious Schools!

2. Priesthood

The ecclesial sensitivity is also manifested in the priests’ way of being. Calasanz wanted them to be humble, and in his letters he constantly insisted on this virtue. So much so that he goes so far as to say: “If the priest is not humble, it would be better not have been born” (EP 1436). Humility appears constantly when he speaks of priests. The proud cannot have authentic ecclesial sensitivity, and if they think they have it, they are mistaken, and if they behave outwardly in ways that seem to show it, inside they are lacking in truth and true love for the Church. Only the humble communicate with the Church and with the One who said: “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart”.

Let us look at this insistence of the saint on the humility of priests. He asks of them in the behaviour they should have in whatever situation they find themselves and in all the work they do: “It would have been better for him to have been a kitchen boy with humility than a priest with self-esteem and pride” (EP 3677). “Let everyone strive to earn heaven.

And priests must earn it by giving a good example of humility, obedience and silence to those who are not priests. This is their obligation, and if they do not fulfil it, it would be better for them not to possess such dignity" (Moncallero p. 226). "See to it that all priests humble themselves to exercise our ministry out of pure love of God, that they will have great merit before God. More than if they were to give themselves disciplines and [to shed] blood" (EP 4108). "May the Lord grant you the grace to know the priestly dignity and give you that humility and reverence due to so high a ministry and sacrament" (EP 4572). "You would do very well to consider that you are a priest and that now you must show greater humility, obedience, poverty and sobriety than before" (EP 451).

Priests will gain paradise by living humbly; if they do not live this way, it would be better for them not to have received such dignity: "I say no more for now, but that everyone should try to gain paradise and priests should gain it by giving a good example of humility, obedience and silence to others who are not priests. This is their obligation and if they do not do it, it would be better for them not to have such dignity" (EP 44).

The candidate for the priesthood must consider himself unworthy of the great gift he is about to receive, which is the best way to prepare himself to receive it: "Try to humble yourself and recognize yourself as unworthy of such a great office (priesthood) so that the Lord may grant you the inner disposition necessary for such a dignity" (EP 1948).

Hence, his bitter complaint when he sees or hears that there are arrogant priests. He does not understand how, having received such an immense and undeserved grace from God, they can be proud. When on the contrary, priestly life, what the priest celebrates daily, should be a call to behave with humility on every occasion: "Oh! how much it pains me that priests who should give good example of holy obedience and humility, are the first to give it of pride, showing disdain to the Superior, through whom God punctually warns them! They do not understand the words that Christ said to the Superiors: "He who hears you hears me, and he who despises you despises me". Oh! how much the example of the priests would serve to convert the clerics and brothers into spiritual ones; and, on the contrary, how great an account the priests have to give to God for the bad example they give them! I believe that this is the cause why even the brothers want to become priests!" (EP 2835).

The saint asks many other things of the priest in his ministerial work, but this is not the place to develop this theme. It is, however, to insist on the ecclesial sensitivity that must be lived and manifested by those who have been called to represent the Church before men, exercising the priestly ministry that they have received and that must be carried out with an ecclesial heart, as the Lord himself desired.

3. How to live the Eucharist

The celebration of the Eucharist has a special importance in Calasanz. It is the central moment of the priest's life and he must do it with great care, attention and devotion. Let us take a look at some of his letters written to new priests or to those who were going to be ordained priests, to see what was his desire in this matter. We must keep in mind that whatever he asked of his sons, he lived it, and in this sense, we have testimonies from many people who tell us the admirable way in which he celebrated the Eucharist. Now we refer to what he asked of the priests of his Institute.

The priests have to keep in mind every morning what it is that they celebrate: to speak with the Most Holy Trinity, to enter into dialogue with it, and this should have as a consequence to live during the day with a great zeal to serve God with which the priest should leave at the end of the celebration. The celebration of the Eucharist in this sense is the best thing that the priest does every day: "Everyone, especially priests, should realize that every morning they speak, and should speak familiarly [with the Eternal Father and the Blessed Trinity] in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, from which they should come out with great zeal for the service of God" (EP 3621). "Learn the interior reverence with which the holy words of the Mass are said, when speaking to the blessed God and to the Most Holy Trinity. That it is not enough to pronounce them with the mouth and little devotion, but with the heart" (EP 2954).

If the celebration implies a dialogue with the Most Holy Trinity and with the Eternal Father, priests must be very attentive to what they pronounce, to the words that come out of their mouths, which should flow from their hearts. This fact that the Eucharist is an encounter with the Trinity and the Eternal Father (sometimes the saint speaks of the Trinity and other times of the Eternal Father), Calasanz had it very deep in his heart. That is why it is not strange that he insists so much on his writing

to the new priests; and one wonders how the celebration of the saint himself would be: "I am glad that the two you sent have been ordained priests. Teach them with how much devotion they should speak with the Eternal Father and with the Trinity. So that they may obtain all possible benefit from the Mass, let them understand what the words they utter mean. They should say them with all reverence and humility, and not get into the habit of saying them hastily" (EP 3669). "Give my greetings to Fr Charles, with whom I rejoice that he has been ordained a priest. Exhort him to strive to have great reverence for the Eternal Father when he celebrates Mass and to speak to him with respect and awe, saying at the end of all prayers: Through Jesus Christ your son. If he knows how to accommodate himself to this idea, he will obtain for himself great spiritual profit" (EP 3683).

That is why priests should end their prayers with great devotion by saying at the end "For our Lord...", which is a way of imploring the intercession of the Master in everything they ask of God: "Give my greetings to Fr Charles of S. Francis, whom I rejoice that he has been ordained priest. Exhort him on my behalf to strive to have great reverence and great fear, saying at the end of each prayer 'For our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son', for if he knows how to keep to this thought he will draw great benefit of spirit for himself; likewise, exhort the others who say Mass; and if you cannot personally, do not fail to help by letter the house of Palermo about the observance" (EP 3683).

The Eucharist celebrated by the priest is an embassy of the Church before God the Father, in which we asks for the forgiveness of sins through the Catholic faith; so it should be done with great reverence and attention. The saint indicates that if it is not done like this, it would be better not to become a priest, as St. Francis of Assisi did, but only out of humility: "Tell Fr Joseph (Fedele) that I have received much consolation because he has begun to celebrate the Holy Mass; and that I beg him to do this office with great humility as much as he can. Before beginning the Mass, he should think that he is going on behalf of the whole holy Church to make an embassy to the Eternal Father, not only for the exaltation of the holy Catholic faith and forgiveness of sinners, but also for the relief of the souls of the deceased; and to ask for such graces requires great humility and it is important to begin well from the beginning" (To Fr Cherubini, Naples, EP 1350, year 1630).

The Eucharist has to be prepared with profound prayer and in the presence of God, according to the Constitutions: “With unceasing prayer and with the experience of the presence of God, renewed in the daily tasks, the religious will be ready to celebrate the Sacraments frequently and devoutly” (CC 55).

If the Eucharist is so important, it must be lived like important things: without haste, with much reverence, knowing that the priest brings before the Father very important problems of humanity: “... let him be a good priest and let him say the Mass not with much haste as some usually do, but with much reverence, considering that he speaks to the Eternal Father for very serious causes; and that he must speak with much reverence and attention, because if he does not do so, it would be better not to be ordained, as St. Francis did, who understood the purity of heart that the priest must have” (To Fr Ambrosi, Naples, EP 3706, year 1641). “Warn him very much to be a good priest and to celebrate Mass not as quickly as some are accustomed to do, but with much reverence, considering that he speaks to the Eternal Father of very grave problems, and it must be done with much reverence and attention” (EP 443).

It is striking the saint’s care for the celebration of the Eucharist, the profound meaning he gave to it, his insistence on the serious and attentive living with which it should be celebrated, and his awareness that in it he was entering into a special sphere, nothing less than in dialogue with the Trinity and the Eternal Father.

In the Constitutions, since the Eucharist is so important, he asks that the priests celebrate it daily and gives norms on how the Brothers should behave, as follows: “Our priests will celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass daily. The Superior or the confessor may dispense them; but we desire that such permission be rarely granted” (CC 56). “The Brothers, the Clerics and the Ordained in Majors shall receive the Eucharist every Sunday, once during the week and on feasts of the first and second class” (CC 57).

4. Other aspects

The priest, since he has received such a gift, must give himself to others and give freely what he has received freely. He has to be a help to others on their path of perfection: “I rejoice that Fr Andrew has been ordained priest, and that each day he becomes more suitable to commu-

nicate the path of perfection to our people and also to the laity, through the Institute” (EP 4539).

In the talks he gives, he should not exceed a quarter of an hour, otherwise he will tire the audience and they will not want to listen to him anymore; while if he does not exceed the indicated time, he will keep the attention of the audience and will arouse in them the desire to listen to him again: “As regards talks, do not go beyond a quarter of an hour and be all moral and without concepts and you will leave the auditorium with a desire to listen to you on another occasion; otherwise men will not go; for now follow this rule and get used to make the reasoning brief, and all with the desire to kindle hatred of sin and holy love of God in those who listen “ (EP 1410).

In order to maintain their knowledge and to be of help to one another, especially the older priests with respect to the younger ones, Calasanz instituted that once a week, all the priests should meet and have the resolution of a case of conscience and another of liturgy; thus some would not forget what they have learned and others could learn how to behave and perhaps resolve cases they had and that they did not know how to solve: “See to it that the priests deal with cases of conscience, and once a week deal with the ceremonies of the Mass, so that they learn to say it well, and the clerics and brothers to serve it” (To Fr Costantini, Nursia, EP 1077, 1629).

Nevertheless, the Founder was careful that no one for any reason, unless it was serious, should leave the schools. It happened that many of them, when they reached ordination, were already confident and occupied themselves with other priestly offices, for example, the confession of adults, forgetting to teach. This did not please Calasanz and he denounced it: “As for the confessor, he can excuse himself by saying that I did not want him to confess, because confessions make him not to attend the schools, and he who serves for the school should not get involved in other things” (EP 1334).

For the rest, he was happy when our confreres administered the sacraments to the sick, even if they put their own lives at risk. In this way they clearly showed that what really mattered to them was the spiritual good of their neighbour and not their own health, not even their lives: “I am very happy that Your Reverence is employed in serving the sick

administering the holy sacraments; and if it is necessary not to leave the house except for this administration, do not leave; and if it is necessary to endanger one's bodily life in order to help our neighbour, do so, for in this way you will show that you are truly poor of the Mother of God, who has no affection for anything else but the glory of God and the usefulness of your neighbour" (To Fr Alacchi, in Venice, EP 1601, year 1631).

He drew attention to a practice he had noticed; when some were ordained priests, they no longer wanted to study, even though study was the basis of preparation for the schools: "I wish that Br Charles Anthony, even though he is old enough (to be ordained), would exercise himself in the office of learning and teaching, because once they are priests they no longer bother to study, and since they are not fit for a school, they shun teaching and this causes the ruin of Religion. I say the same of Br Antony of Borzonasca. If there is any priest who does not teach school, so that he may not be idle and cease to deserve, send him to help recite in some class or to catechize the students so that they may know how to confess well and receive communion, and what is necessary to be saved. Let no one hide his talent" (EP 3027).

The elements that deepen the interior life of the religious and of the Institute itself are the ecclesial sensitivity manifested in prayer, concern and dedication to what the Church wants, according to our ministry, as well as the profound experience of the Eucharist. It is necessary that in the Pious Schools we do not lose the ecclesial sensitivity that our Holy Father showed and lived and that we cannot be accused of not taking it into account. We should live it through our own ministry, and this will lead us to make the recipients of our ministry to live it as well. But we must not hide the fact that this ecclesial sensitivity, in its external forms, cannot be the same in all Institutes, because it is intimately related to their own ministry. It is necessary to remember this, especially in our times.

5. Today

- Ecclesial sensitivity is in living the Church.
- Ecclesial sensitivity is manifested in actions, but it must be rooted above all in the heart.
- Ecclesial sensitivity is not measured only by forms, because even these can be deceptive or respond to one's own tastes.

- We have ecclesial sensitivity by exercising the ministry entrusted to us by the Church.
- There is ecclesial sensitivity when the priest places before the Father in the Eucharist all the intentions of the Church.
- There is ecclesial sensitivity when we pray for the Pope and his intentions and when we serve the People that God has entrusted us.
- Ecclesial sensitivity also consists in having an open heart and being consistent in one's actions with the intentions of the Magisterium.
- Ecclesial sensitivity leads to an intimate obedience to what the Church commands.
- Ecclesial sensitivity does not diminish the possibility of criticism against certain positions that the hierarchy may have on a point. Above all, freedom of conscience.
- Ecclesial sensitivity also is the fact that we must obey God rather than men.

CALASANZ, AN EXAMPLE

1. Calasanz and important events during his life

Calasanz did not write any autobiography as other saints did. Neither did he dictate it to anyone to write it as Ignatius of Loyola did. And although he wrote many letters - it is said that he may have written as many as 12,000, of which almost 5,000 have been preserved - he hardly spoke of himself in them. In this he was very reserved. In the many lines he wrote or dictated, his person rarely appears. Not only does he not speak of himself, he also makes no mention of events of his time that undoubtedly had to attract attention at the time. During his lifetime St. Peter's Basilica was being built, and in fact the name of Paul V appears on the façade. He had to see the magnificence of St. Peter's Basilica, but he never mentions it. He must have seen on occasion, at least before being completely devoted to his schools, the beauty of some churches in Rome; or the Porziuncola itself, but he never mentions any of this. The only mention in this sense, although he confesses that he has not yet achieved what he desires, but hopes to do so, is this: "I have desired to see some places of great devotion in Italy, such as the Most Holy House of Loreto, Mount Verna where S. Francis received the wounds, the Cassino and Mount Vergine and others and to return to Rome for the Holy Year and it has not been possible for me until now, I still intend to do it with God's favour" (EP 7). Was he not attracted by what he saw, did he not like the art? Or was he so absorbed in his Work that he did not have time to occupy himself with writing the smallest notice about these realities? In Rome he was interested, of course, in poor children. And he does talk about them, and a lot.

He does not mention religious events. In 1622, there was an important canonization in St. Peter's. The following persons were canonized at the same time by Pope Gregory XV: Isidore the Farmer, Teresa of Jesus,

Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier and Philip Neri. The saint was then in Rome and relatively close to St. Peter, but in his letters there is not the slightest mention of the fact.

On the other hand, the saint cites two facts, almost to contradict what we have said. One was atmospheric and the other involved the Piarists themselves. The first was an extraordinary event that occurred on March 23, which the saint narrates and even in the letter makes a drawing of what he saw. He says: "Last Tuesday at 7 p.m. an extraordinary prodigy appeared in Rome, which consisted of a circle in the air of a size almost as big as the whole of Rome, of a blue colour, or better to say ashy, with four large globes more resplendent than the circle; these four had in the middle an iridescent colour. It lasted nearly an hour and was seen by most of the inhabitants and by almost all those in our schools. I went up to the highest gallery to see it. And around the sun there was another circle of the same colour, but much smaller and did not last as long as the large one, as you will see in the other part of this folio. May the Lord make it a sign of mercy and bless us always" (To Fr Cherubini, Naples, EP 1081).

The other event is the explosion of a powder magazine on a hill near Savona, which destroyed the school and killed six Piarist religious. The saint narrates it this way: "Perhaps you have heard about the tragic event of Savona: the night after the sixth of the present month, about five o'clock at night, a terrible storm fell with thunders, flashes and lightning, one of which fell on the powder magazine of the fortress of St. George where there were a thousand barrels of gunpowder - some say more - which ignited, destroyed not only the fortress but also a third of the city, leaving the rest of the houses in a very bad state. In the part where the greatest disaster occurred was our convent of the Pious Schools, which, together with the other houses, cracked and collapsed to the ground. Marvellous things are recounted. Among them that of Fr Ciriaco, Superior of the Pious Schools of Carcare. He had been in Savona for two or three days, had supper with the Fathers at home and, wanting to leave very early in the morning, went to sleep a mile outside the city and, hearing the great noise of the night, he wanted to enter again to see how our people were. He found the convent destroyed and six priests dead in the catastrophe, among them Fr Jacinth, who had recently arrived from Palermo. The names of the others are: Fr Peter Paul of St. Mary, Superior; Fr John Mary of St. Luke, Fr Bartholomew of Jesus, Fr Joseph of the Assumption, Fr

Octavian of St. Bridget. Are alive only Fr Joseph of St Joaquin, a professed cleric named Agustin and two tertiaries, in serious condition, who were taken to the hospital” (Moncallero, p. 350, letter 105).

Apart from these two external facts, he cites no other. And about his person he says few things and we refer to them in this chapter. The best we can do is to listen to his own words, because it is a pleasure for his sons to be able to read what the Father has said about himself, even if it is so little.

2. Love for others

The saint confesses his esteem and love for the Religion and those who belong to it: “I esteem the honour of the religion and of the particular persons who belong to it more than anything else” (EP 1267). He affirms the same, to love all the Piarists who work for the love of God: “Be sure that I love with all my heart the religious who works for the love of God, and with my poor prayers I commend them to his divine Majesty” (EP 4021).

This love he manifested daily in the letters he wrote, in the concern he had for each of the religious, in the fact that he asked the superiors about each one personally, in the way he received them when they went to talk to him in his room, in the prayers he prayed for them.

These two testimonies of his old age are beautiful. The first is when he affirms: “I, as a poor man of advanced age, do not covet superfluous things. I wish to die poor in earthly goods” (EP 4433). His life had been poor; his death would be poor. But God loves the poor who win his heart.

The second, the last letter in which he could put some letters and his signature and in which he says: “Stand still and you will see the salvation of Yahweh, which will come upon you. This is what we are now asking for you, that you may not grieve, but that your strength may shine forth more brightly in the trial. Because of failing eyesight, I am unable to continue writing. May the Lord bless us all always” (EP 4463).

We still have some later letters, but without even his signature. The last one we know of is dated August 1, 1648, a few days before his death, the day before he went to bed for good, and also the day before his last communion with the children.

3. The ministry

The saint deeply loved to give school to children, to be with them, to help them, and in a special way to the smallest and poorest. This is how the witnesses of his life narrate it. He gave himself totally to the ministry that God had given him and the Church had entrusted to him. But he did not like being General of the Order. He was it for simple and pure obedience. In fact, he thought of putting it in the hands of Glycerius, and God took him away when he was only 30 years old. Then he thought of Father Graziani, and he died at the age of 45. At the end, when he was already an old man, he spoke of it to Father Casani, who refused with all his might. And the saint continued with the charge over his shoulders, although he confessed: "Infinite times I have wished to be a doorkeeper or a nurse in any house rather than to have the charge I have. And God is my witness that it is so. May he, in his mercy, deign not to notice my faults" (EP 1316).

He worked for the children and pointed out how great his joy and happiness was at that time: "I desire and I am very happy to be able to contribute and cooperate everywhere for the health of souls with our Institute" (EP 2029).

He confesses having learned to write in order to teach his sons, and having taught all the subjects that were taught: "I have always occupied myself with various things and I have learned to write perfectly, and also many parts of arithmetic, in order to be able to teach it to our religious. In case of necessity, I have run the school of calligraphy and arithmetic, of reading and grammar, when occasion has arisen through the illness of some teacher or by accident. And for this I have lost nothing of the dignity of the priesthood, nor the reputation of the office" (EP 3673). "Many times I have conducted the school of arithmetic and have taught some of our religious to substitute in that school. And for that I have not lost a shred of priestly dignity. It is a holy thing to be superior general of all the problems of the school" (EP 3672).

A ministry that pleased the people so much that he did nothing but receive requests for a foundation; so many, that he went so far as to exclaim, as we have already indicated above: "Had I ten thousand religious now, I could distribute them all in a month in those places that have asked me for them with great insistence. So that our Religion is not like

many others, which by various means seek to penetrate the cities. For ours is wanted and sought after by many cardinals, bishops, prelates, great lords and principal cities, as I can prove by many letters” (EP 2027).

Because it was a ministry in favour of the poor, and they are God’s favourites, he was convinced of the following: “In spite of what is said about our Religion, you should know that the Lord will always protect it and it will go from good to better, on condition that we put the diligence we should in educating the children, especially the poor, in the holy fear of God” (EP 893).

4. The work

The Founder took care of the Institute, took care of each of the houses, attended to the problems that were presented to him, wrote thousands of letters; but all this did not prevent him from doing simple work like the others - even more than the others.

Like any other brother, he had washed dishes and, like any other religious, he had gone to the bread collection: “I have washed the dishes and worked as much as those in the schools, but also I have gone to the collection of bread, with the saddlebags over my shoulder in Rome, and to accompany the students. And I am ready to repeat it now. For *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent conquer it*” (EP 2757) Also for many years he had been engaged in the vilest services: “At the beginning of the work, for many years, I did all the vilest and lowliest jobs in the house, until worker brothers came and helped me” (EP 1892).

So much work was piled up on him that sometimes he did not manage to do it all: “I am here with so much work and disturbances that I do not have time to do half of the work. Ask the Lord to give me strength and grace to know how to serve him well” (EP 202).

He tells us that when he was more than 80 years old, he went to the schools, and that every superior should do the same: “Being myself more than 80 years old, I go many times to help, sometimes in one school, sometimes in another. And that is what every superior should do, even if he did nothing more than teach ten or twelve pupils at a time, passing through different schools” (EP 3036).

5. Before others

If we ask ourselves what he said about himself in relation to others, here are some elements. He did not write anything that would be hidden from anyone; so his letters are totally transparent: "I do not write anything that everyone cannot read" (EP 1187). He does not want to displease anyone because that is not his character, and his own spirituality prevents him from doing so: "My intention is not to displease anyone" (EP 2443). He always tries to act out of pure charity: "I act out of pure charity, because I desire your health as my own. You should not allow, much less admit such a great temptation, thinking that I play ball with you and I have lost faith in you" (EP 1149), and he desires the perfection of all his sons: "As a spiritual father who desires the perfection of all the sons of the Religion, I would want in them a striving spirit to serve God and to be united with him through charity and love. When this true love exists, there are no private styles, but a great frankness in the service of his divine Majesty" (EP 4028).

He suffered from illnesses, of which he hardly speaks. He says he had a hernia, but it has not taken away his courage to love and serve: "Since last year I had a hernia on one side, and since a few days ago, on both. But that does not mean that I have less courage to serve and suffer for his love whatever is offered, especially in our ministry, which is the education and reform of children" (EP 247). He also suffered from erysipelas as can be seen from some references in the epistolary, although he does not cite the word, but historians indicate so: "If tomorrow I remember I will order six candlesticks to be made for the altar of the Virgin through whose intercession blessed God has deigned to have compassion on me and I have begun to get out of bed and hope to find myself always better" (EP 402). He was short-sighted: "I am shorter-sighted and do not resort to such an expedient" (EP 304). He was referring to the fact that a priest used a candlestick during Mass, against liturgical norms. And we know that the saint once found himself in danger of death: "Three nights ago, Br Peter, believing that he was doing me a great service, brought me a little fire in a brazier around six o'clock when I was going to bed, and having found me asleep, he left the brazier next to the bed and when I woke up I found that everything was spinning in my head, and having called him, I vomited a little and the fainting passed, but I was in great danger" (EP 1228). We know that he also suffered from liver disease, and that at the end of his days he told the doctors: "It is nothing; soon you will do

the autopsy and you will see that the cause of the disease was in the liver” (Bau, St. Joseph Calasanz, p. 376; cf. EP 392).

He acknowledges not rush usually into things, because it is not his character, but he thinks about them for a while; but once a resolution is taken, he does not change it: “You know very well that I usually endure many things, waiting for amendment before taking a resolution. But, once taken, usually I do not change “ (EP 176).

For all that his life was, for all that he went through, he says that he does not like the complaints of some religious in the face of difficulties and that is why the word “affliction” is a word that is not in his jargon: “I dislike the word “affliction” very much, because no one can more rightly than I have affliction, since all kinds of serious afflictions come to me from all sides. But considering that everything comes to me from the hand of God and that whatever I do, I do for his love, since he is such a kind and loving Father, I bear it all with patience, resolved to die rather than abandon the mission, and so I cast out all affliction and melancholy” (EP 1148).

And his ecclesial sensitivity, of which we have already spoken, is manifested in a very simple fact at the end of his life; although he tells that he did not succeed at the time, he finally will do it: “I have made the necessary diligences, and many times, to kiss the foot of His Holiness..., and I was not lucky in so many days as I have gone. Nevertheless, I will persevere as long as I have the opportunity” (EP 4243). When he kissed the Pope’s feet, the Pope addressed consoling words to him. Calasanz did not know that this same Pope was the one who was going to reduce his Order to a Congregation without vows. But he accepted it wholeheartedly, one more manifestation -could there be any greater? - of his ecclesial sensitivity and love.

This was our Founder, beloved Father and indisputable guide of all the Piarists. To whom God granted a long life to make the educational ministry sprout in the Church in favour of the poor; so that he had time to ensure it (even though he had to live the crisis of the reduction of the Order), to make him go through the passion and cross of his Son. He left as a legacy and inheritance to his children these three things: hope, dedication to education and poor children.

Honour and praise to Calasanz. And with him and as he wanted, we say: “We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in all our necessities, but from all kind of dangers, always deliver us. O ever Blessed Virgin!”.

