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The bells peal for Easter

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On Easter night hallelujah intermingles with the sound of the bells ringing in order to celebrate. Christ has resuscitated and lives for ever. Year after year, the church dresses up as a bride in order to celebrate its triumphant groom. It knows and painfully recognizes; just a few days are away, a few steps, to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The Christian community celebrates the Easter of the resurrection of the Lord and in this way culminates the celebrations of his life and Death. It is the annual memory of the Easter mystery, central to the liturgical year.

Peoples and institutions' lives, our life and that of our Order are made up of passion and death, success and failure, dispossession and prosperity. We contemplate and worship the mystery of Christ's Easter from the angle of faith, in order to show it as an experience of our own historic itinerary, with the hope that our own experience can reach the same goal. "Life and death enter into a duel, and when one of them dies, he that is life, rises up triumphantly," is sung in the Easter liturgy.

It shouldn't be strange to a Christian, or to a Piarist, that his life and that of the Order's can be marked by the Easter mystery. In some way, we all go down that road. Where should we place today's Order?" Have we arrived to the season of passion and death? If it is so, are we seeing resuscitation?

It has occurred to me that for this *Salutatio*, to think about bringing closer that which is celebrated in the Easter triduum, the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection or the Easter mystery, to that what we as an Order are living. On the other hand, it seemed to me, that all believers were invited to do this or to do similar things when we celebrate Holy week. "Are we afraid to confront the death of the Lord, even when we have the faith that he who was resuscitated is the same as he who died" Of course they are different angles of perception: death belongs to our history, the resurrection- although told historically- goes beyond the threshold of the provable. Therefore, it is normal that death moves us more than the

thought of resuscitation. Even so, the realism of faith allows us to let it enter in our eagerness for life, for its present and for its future. How does the order look in the light of the Mysterious Easter of Christ?

They are just questions that I ask myself, and that I'm trying to share as a brother with all of you. I go back to the question. "In the light of the mystery of death and resurrection where should we place today's Order?" The most immediate vision and the opinion that is most turned to, verifies the decline of the Order, clearly seen in the diminishing number of members in the districts, which in the past had a larger number of followers of the vocation. This is an indisputable piece of data. When I sometimes have to speak to the communities, throughout the whole visit of the Order, I like to encourage and motivate hope. I believe in that. But sometimes, especially when the community is made up of elderly members, with only a few young people, I feel as if the words used to call hope, stay empty on my lips. I think, in these cases, that it would be enough to announce that in the province six or more youngsters have entered to the Novitiate, so that all the exhortations to hope were unnecessary.

Just with this fact I'm sure that hope would become stronger in them, without any special need for exhortations. But this does not depend on my will, or of anyone else's. Neither is hope a result of willingness. Hope is a theological virtue that is what theology has always shown us; this means, that it is motivated by and for God. However, we should always be prepared to give explanations about it. (cfr. 1 Pe 3 15)

So, let's accept that the Order has to go through a moment of suffering and passion. Don't be afraid, even to speak about death. Maybe, to speak about death will wake us up and liberate us of some kind of determinism that takes over us, or of the hidden unconsciousness when we clearly realize the situation.

I would not be speaking truly if I said that all the Orders' situations are like this. There are places where the Order grows, and grows strongly. I would also say that, even where the Order decreases in members, the institutions and projects have great energy, they take pleasure in their good image and accomplish their mission in an exemplary way. In some cases, the paradox arises, that the amount of Work grows, even if the amount of people diminishes. What all this indicates is that we have to be cautious at the moment of diagnosing situations. A definitive trial can not take place by just taking into account one factor. The most immediate concerns are those that are growing with greater vocational strength. However, we are still entering a time of consolidation rather than one of lift-off. But it is a reality that resituates the other one in terms of hope and the announcement of resurrection. The last General Chapter did not speak in vain of the restructuring of the Order, but with three words; unification, consolidation and expansion. The three words give us the most perfect

image of the situation of the Order. We are trying to work on these three dimensions, which impulse the life and mission of the Order. We will have to unify, to consolidate and let's start to think about expansion too.

Actually, the Order lives this triple situation. They are not empty words used in order to sweeten the bitter reality, which fade away and dwindle. We know statistics can hide a concrete reality, due to the fact that they take averages. For a district whose global and theoretical average is of 5 novices, having some novices or not having any, either above or below average, does not have the same significance. It is comforting to know, and it is also true, that the average of 5 novices that one district should but do not have, other districts do have, without doubt even more, so that the statistics tally.

Let's leave the contemptible calculations behind and return to the contemplative elevation of the *Mystery* with which I started this *Salutatio*. The Order is living in Passion and death, but also in resurrection. If someone emphasizes the first, I'll invite him to do it while thinking about the second. Jesus' death was a death that brought about transformation in the resurrection; the mystery of his pain, did not end in his destruction, but, like a seed that rots in the earth in order to give way to a new plant, that is how his death brought about life, a life transformed, different from the first.

Pain is without doubt, getting older, without seeing young reserves behind, pain is guessing risks for everything that you have done and have given your life with so many visible fruits; pain is not being able to foresee the future with certainty; pain is so many things that happen to us in the Order's life. But not everything ends here. Joy there is in the new that emerges with strength; joy there is in the youth that continue, although we would like a larger amount; Joy there is seeing how the Order changes and diversifies its face and color, letting in people who come from new countries and cultures; Joy there is watching that we are not alone, but that we share goals and charisma with laymen; Joy there is in the projects that keep on being vigorous and creative, accomplishing the commended mission; Joy there is even in suffering, whether for new difficulties that have arisen, for sickness or the passing of years; joy there is in the members, that are old or sick, with ailments or with limited activity, who live the mystique of the Piarist mission, with their life integrity, the most frequent and prolonged prayer, the subsidiary help that they give, the encouragement that they communicate to those most committed to the mission. Not all of us can, nor should we, nor can we do everything. But all together we do everything that we are commended to do; the Piarist mission is still active and fruitful. Also, the passion in us is the alb of resurrection.

The pealing of the Bells today is not calling the dead to the Pious schools, but they are ringing for Easter. Then, sheathed, with Happiness of the Resurrection morning: the bells, one more year, peal to Easter. If Christ has resuscitated, we resuscitate with him. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Amen. I send you all greetings, as always, Full of Easter Joy, warmth, closeness and affection.