

## A LETTER TO OUR BRETHERN

### Discernment in the light of the Constitution and of the words of Calasanz

My dear Brethren,

I greet you affectionately, wishing for all of you that this beginning of Advent may mean a real encounter with the Lord for each and every one of us, a meeting for which we have been waiting because we need it to fulfill our hopes. Advent pushes us to think deeply about our faith, because it helps us to understand who we really are: *people searching for fulfillment and needing the presence of God*. I hope that you will experience these weeks as a journey in faith, and know, both personally and as communities, how to receive God who becomes a child who, in his smallness, helps us to understand God.

In this monthly letter I write to you I would like to present a *small project* which we in the General Congregation have prepared as a simple contribution to the path of faith which we Piarists travel. I think we need the support and the resources which help us to grow in our vocations and which aid our personal and community formation. I shall briefly explain the plan and take this opportunity to ask you for your suggestions.

We should like to make certain publications available, in which *we can reflect upon the fundamental challenges which face us as Piarists, and to illuminate them with the Constitutions of the Order and through the writings of St. Joseph Calasanz*. We want to begin by reading our present Constitutions and those written by Calasanz, but starting from certain basic questions which, as Piarist religious, we have to ask ourselves.

Thus we are talking about a project which seeks to join two paths forward. On the one hand we wish to identify some of the principle challenges we have to meet. On the other, we wish to decisively stimulate the reading of and reflection upon our Constitutions, because they contain within them the aim of our lives. Simultaneously, we wish to encourage the study and knowledge of the writings of Calasanz, whose treasures continue to enrich our daily lives. We wish to look for replies to our questions starting from the life we have chosen for ourselves.

If all goes according to plan, every year you will receive a leaflet in which you will find a challenge illustrated, upon which we shall try to throw some light through a study of the Constitutions. As I have already said, this is but a small contribution, but we think it is important and I should like to tell you why.

- a) Above all, this project reminds us that we are living in a world and context which sets us challenges and asks us questions. We must know how to recognize these, identify them, describe them and make them the subject of our discernment. This is work which may help us to realize that we cannot go on living "in automatic

pilot mode", without being able to understand the movements of life around us, the questions which are asked of us or the challenges which are set us. Therefore, my brethren, let us open our ears and listen carefully to that voice we hear within us.

- b) Secondly, we wish to encourage people to read our Constitutions, which constantly help us to experience our religious life more deeply. I think that we need to make more effort to let the Constitutions become an integral part of our inner lives, so that we may live according to what they say, and this is why we shall study them from the point of view of the life we are actually living now.
- c) Finally, we want to be able to *join the two paths*: throw light upon what we are yearning to live and experience, beginning with the original project for our vocations. By thus doing, I am sure we shall be able to travel our way with greater faith and more ability.

For us, this has meant fulfilling a task of discernment concerning some of the fundamental challenges we face and which are probably common to Religious Life as a whole. But our process of illumination starts from Calasanz. These are the challenges we have chosen:

- a life in ongoing fidelity to our vocation
- centered in Jesus Christ
- passion for our mission
- the meaning of our life
- prayer which concentrates and strengthens
- breathing new life into our Order

There are certainly many fields of our lives and mission on which we need to reflect. We invite you all to do so, convinced as we are that in this way we shall be able to help each other. However, we have drawn up a project for this coming six years and that is why we have chosen six topics. Naturally our own analysis of our situation is implicit in our choices. I shall outline what I understand by each of these challenges.

**"A life in ongoing fidelity to our vocation"** Over the past few months I have spoken to many religious, many of them are young and are beginning their path through life. Together with them I should like to reflect upon one of the keys to the Piarists in which I deeply believe: it is one thing to have the unconditional gift of our first choice in life, but quite another is our day-by-day faithfulness to our vocation, even though both aspects share the same root. How can we live our daily lives with the fullness and generosity with which we made our first profession? We are called to live in an ongoing process of faithfulness. This is the secret of permanent formation and, even more so, it is that of the renewal of our Order: *"I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last"* (Jn. 15, 16).

**"Centered in Jesus Christ"**. This is our first and our definitive choice: we are followers of Jesus. We shall continue to be so as long as we make Him the centre of our lives. Either he is our only Lord, or we are without a centre. This is why *"we follow Him so*

*that we do the only thing necessary" (C 16). What are those things that we have to do in order to be real followers of Jesus and only of Him? We must never forget that we can be like that disciple who sincerely said: "I will follow you wherever you go" and received as a reply, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk. 9, 57-58).*

**"Passion for our mission"**. There can be no doubt about the fact that the Pious Schools are a mission. We were created for the mission and we are permanently sent out for it. But this tenet can be experienced, and we do experience and live it, in many different ways. We want you to experience it and make it incarnate with real devotion, real discernment and enthusiasm, even in those moments when it may be less easy than others to do so. We have to investigate the basis of this conviction of ours and speak of it amongst ourselves. *"In fact, preaching the gospel gives me nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion and I should be in trouble if I failed to do it" (I Cor. 9, 16).*

**"The meaning of our life"**. We all know that, above all, religious life is concerned with the dimension of the sign. We must all be transparent signs of the message of Jesus. But frequently we do not know how to continue, how to go on, and to describe that which we need in order to be really credible signs of a New Life. We wish to offer certain reflections which will help us to perform this duty. Even we may need to take significant life-changing decisions, just like the woman who thought that *"If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved" (Mk. 5, 21-34).*

**"Prayer which concentrates and strengthens"**. It is clear that this is one of the sides of our lives upon which Calasanz insists more than on some others and about which we Piarists have to spend some time in reflection. We must learn to speak about our spiritual experiences, of personal and community prayer, of the times and spaces that we create for ourselves to experience and experiment this prayer transforming and strengthening prayer. Taking care of our prayer means taking care of our vocation authentically and as a whole. *"When you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Matt. 6,6).*

**"Breathing new life into our Order"**. Our General Chapter has chosen this topic as the guiding thread for the current situation in our Order. What does renovating our life and mission mean for us? What does Calasanz have to say to us to help us along our way. How is this yearning for greater faith and for a Piarist life understood and aided by our Constitutions? *"New wine into fresh skins" (Mk. 2, 22).*

In a few months you will receive the first leaflet that we are preparing. Here and now I should like to thank all those who will help us edit this and also all of you, for having welcomed us and for all the work you have done and do. We trust we shall continue to live, ever replying to those questions we ask ourselves and ever looking for the answers in Him who made us.

I send you all my fraternal embrace and I trust that this Advent that we start together will be for all of us a path of conversion in which we meet God.

**Pedro Aguado**

*Father General*