

Salutatio January and February 2010

“WELCOME THESE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT”

In the *Acts of the Apostles* (Acts 15,31) there is a lovely reference to the way in which the community at Antioch received a letter from the Apostles and elders of the Church, which concerned certain concrete questions about the style of Christian life. We are told that they welcomed it as “a word of encouragement”. I should like to ask you all to welcome the texts and proposals of our last General Chapter in the same way. In the extraordinary January and February number of the *Ephemerides Calasanciane*, we are including all the documents regarding this important event in the life of the Order. The Declarations and Directives are currently being published and will arrive at all communities during the coming weeks.

This is the reason why I have decided to write this “salutatio”, in which I invite all of you to welcome the work of the General Chapter as a “*word of encouragement*” for your lives and to help you to carry out our and your Piarist mission.

What does “welcome” our Chapter mean? This is a question which we must all ask ourselves in one way or another. Welcoming the Chapter means that we hope that something good will come of it; it means that we wish to clearly understand the objectives and the documents which have been approved by it, the choices agreed upon, and the decisions taken. Welcoming the Chapter means providing a chance for it to produce fruit, and in abundance. During the last few months, while I have been visiting the Order for the first time, I have realized that wherever I go people are interested in what we did at Peralta, and they have new questions about what was decided there. But, dear brethren, this is not enough! Welcoming does not only mean “understanding”, “knowing” or “questioning”. Above all, it means receiving what was done at Peralta in such a way that it brings fruit to the life of the Order. Thus we welcome the Chapter as a “*word of encouragement*”.

What methods should we choose to help us to welcome the General Chapter?

Amongst all those possible, I propose three, which are fairly simple and are concrete:

- a) The first might be called “*being informed*”. It is important to read the documents, to ask Chapter members about the subjects which interest us most, to know what the various proposals which have been approved mean, as also for those which were not given approval. It is necessary that Superior Majors give adequate information about the essential points and about the interpretation of the Demarcation Congregations concerning the Chapter, in the light of the Order and of their own Demarcations. We have to ask for, to provide and to work for this kind of information. It is only by so doing that we shall avoid concentrating on superficial points or those which seem to strike us most. Thus we shall be able to overcome this sort of temptation, which often arises and consists in wanting to know only the anecdotes, or gossip about those moments in which, on the other

hand, discretion is especially needed. Information is fundamental, and it must be wholeheartedly complete, transparent and faithful.

- b) The second method might be called "*reflecting personally and as a community*". After knowledge comes reflection, dialogue, deeper thought and discussion about those aspects which may be more important for the Order or one's own Demarcation or community. We must all ask ourselves questions. For example, we must ask ourselves what we can do to put into practice that which the Chapter documents require of us. We are invited to *discern, clarify, understand, answer question*; to try to read the documents so that we recognize them as *sources for renewal* of our lives; to try to write texts which will *enrich our plans* or our *meetings for formation*. All of this is important. Let me give you an example which may help you understand what I mean. In some places (more than one) I have been asked whether the approval of a "Declaration" on "*non-formal education*" means that the Order does not give priority to the formal education provided by our colleges and schools, and whether it is thus choosing a new kind of educational strategy. The question is important and it leads me to think that not everything is understood immediately or even well. I want to affirm that the Order maintains and, where needed, reinforces its work for colleges and schools as the preferred method of fulfilling its mission to provide an integral education for children and young people, especially the poor. However, as an institution we are opening to new methods and strategies to serve children. After the General Chapter, "*non-formal education*" becomes, in a certain sense, "*of age*" in our Order and this is good news, but *never at the expense of nor in place of the other* in our colleges. This is only one example to explain the importance of information and of reflecting upon what we did in Peralta.
- c) Finally, the third method regards "*our choices*". After discernment (personal, community and provincial...), we must start to take decisions, approve new steps to be taken, improve our plans: in a nutshell, we must make sure that those things approved by the 46th General Chapter may be harvested as new life. Here is a simple and concrete example: we approved the central importance of our Pastoral for Vocations in the lives of our Provinces and in Piarist life as a whole. *What does this mean for our Province? What does this mean for our Pastoral team or for our college?* "Central" does not mean that the Pastoral for Vocations becomes our over-riding priority (this would be a serious mistake), but that it needs to be considered, understood and planned for as the fundamental key to understanding all that we are and do. Furthermore, this must translate into making decisions. What do we have to change in our methodology so that we can say that our Pastoral for Vocations is a central point for us? How must we change so that our Province is able to induce, propose, help and welcome new Piarist vocations?

What are the choices which have to be made in order for us to welcome the General Chapter?

I think that in order to help us welcome and understand our General Chapter, we should receive it from a *central standpoint*, a firm belief that clearly places us in the present life of the Order. It is certainly the basic way in which we should interpret this Chapter, but I would like to put it in a more concrete way: let us receive the Chapter as a way to “**build Pious Schools**”. At Peralta we spoke about new life, growth in the Order, reorganization, a pastoral for vocations which is central for us, renewal in Primary Formation, about our ministry, which should be experienced with a greater feeling for our identity and for quality, about new challenges for the Piarist laity, etc. All this requires us to understand ourselves as people who are dedicated to and co-responsible for building Pious Schools which have more life in them, which are more missionary, more faithful and able to provide answers for new circumstances. We do not invite young people to follow the models we provide, rather, we ask them to build *with* us, contributing their own ideas and feelings. We do not propose Primary Formation without a horizon, rather we aim for a more meaningful Piarist life. We do not work with and for the laity so that they only collaborate with us, but so that they build with us, in a co-responsible way, according to their own personal vocations. We have proposed a plan for growth in our Order because it is a part of our identity to make ourselves available where we are needed. We have spoken about reorganizing the Order because we have realized that some changes are necessary in order to continue to serve, convinced that by sharing our lives, work and structures in a new way, we shall be able to encourage growth in our charismatic identity and in our mission. All this should make us understand our Order as work in progress, and ourselves as humble laborers in this fertile work, which is the work of us all. We are workers by vocation.

Let us “cleanse” our risks and let us benefit from the chances we are offered.

The documents given to us by the General Chapter provide us all with *risks and opportunities*. We have to overcome the risks and benefit from the opportunities. Here are some of the risks we face: a temptation to *remain indifferent* (I'm not keen on this, this is irrelevant to my own daily life and to my own needs); to look at all in a *popularizing* way (more documents, as always); to *simplify* (what is really important in the chapter is the election, the rest always collects dust on the shelves of the archives); to *manipulate* (bring grist to our own mill instead of thinking about what may truly be changed); to *reduce everything to a provincial level* (let's see what this Chapter gives our Province, instead of what does the Chapter ask our Province to do for the Order); to *ignore* (I don't need to read it since I know what's in it already and have more important things to do). We could provide many examples, but do not need to do so, because the essential thing is to be aware that we all run such risks when we receive something like this, because the reception depends upon the receiver, and these risks are not easily avoided.

But we also have many opportunities. And it will be good if we know how to take advantage of them. Here are some simple suggestions: *always remember that we are an Order*, and try to understand what our real mission and work is; *reinforce and put into practice how we understand some of the points which are central to our charisma*,

about which there are many interesting documents for us to read; *accept some small movements in the permanence of our lifestyles* as we think about how we can face the common challenges of the Pious Schools; organize an excellent *formation project* in the communities, in which we reflect upon certain Chapter documents; or organize a community retreat based upon what the Chapter's motto means for us as we reflect upon "*docere audio*".

Those who receive and welcome.

Now let's move our attention from the Chapter documents and concentrate on the recipients. I think that this Chapter must be heard in all the *diverse environments* in which we Piarists live. There are three fundamental ones: the *Province, the community and local Piarist organizations and each and every one of us*. In the Provinces, the people and teams responsible, such as the councils of rectors or secretariats, need to encourage all to read and understand the fundamental themes of the Chapter, which concern them most closely, and then to draw conclusions from this. On a local level this should be done within communities and by the teams responsible for the work. And then, personally, every one of us needs to make an effort to read and to reflect, and try to find ways which help us to live our vocations well. These three points are complementary and cannot be disregarded. On our side, i.e. that of the General Congregation, we shall try to contribute all we can to provide helpful information which reaches all.

The harvest we may hope for.

This is the beginning of a new year and we trust that it will be a year of hope for all. This year will also be a "Chapter Year". Our institutional calendar places us firmly within the period of capitulary work and before long we shall be newly asked to work upon the situations of our Provinces, so as to understand what is best for our lives and mission. I join the general Congregation in looking forward to those 2009 priorities and decisions made in Peralta becoming a part of the dynamics of your own Piarist lives in your local and Provincial Chapters. This is the reason why we should like to be present during your work, with some *proposals and consultation*, which will reach you at the appropriate time. In the harvest that we hope to reap from the General Chapter, there is one simple and concrete desire we have: that each Demarcation should follow its path according to the guidelines of the Order, and each Province should be co-responsible for any decisions concerning building the Pious Schools, our shared home. We ask for, hope for and work for a new dynamism in our Order, which will be shared and co-responsible.

I end by wishing that this 2010 which is just beginning will be for you all a year full of hope, experienced with faith in our vocation, with joy and with courage.

My fraternal greetings and best wishes to all.

Pedro Aguado

FATHER GENERAL.