



Ministri degli Infermi - Camilliani

Il Superiore Generale

Dear brothers, esteemed Camillian sisters, and lay friends who share with us the charism and the passion of St. Camillus for the man who is frail, sick and in need: heartfelt greetings to all of you!

At the beginning of this homily of mine, I would like to express some reflections and feelings that throng my spirit.

They are first and foremost feelings of gratitude towards the Church, whom we feel continuously loves and supports us: Pope Francis, the Congregation of Religious, and the friends of other institutes. During these months we have perceived in a clear way that the maternal heart of the Church has protected the original purity of the ‘little plant’ of our charism and has led us with courage to relaunch the precious gift of merciful charity toward the sick. The heartfelt good wishes that Pope Francis addressed to us yesterday at the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square are fresh in our minds and our hearts. At the end of this jubilee year he invited us ‘to be a sign of the Lord Jesus who, like the Good Samaritan, bent down in front of the wounds of the body and the spirit of suffering humanity, pouring the oil of consolation and the wine of hope...to grow together with all health-care workers, ever more in the charism for charity, nourished by daily contact with the sick’.

We are the recipients and the stewards not only of a past dense in true evangelical glory and worthy of grateful remembering – we are also responsible for now to be lived with joy and passion in our vocation, in order to serve the sick with Samaritan compassion, and in this glorious effort we should also with humility and tenacity establish the best conditions for our future, to be constructed together, following with trust the movements of the Holy Spirit.

I share the privilege of being together with you on this historic day when we are celebrating the four-hundredth anniversary of the going to heaven of our Founder St. Camillus: we belong to that generation of Camillians who – albeit without any merit – has received the grace of living this providential appointment with history.

In this appointment with history we have a strong perception of the passing of time: we, however, do not live in the dimension of *Κρόνος*, of time that passes inexorably and points out to us the shadows and the ineluctable end of every life and of every project. We live in the spirit of *Καιρός*, of opportune time, of the time of providence, of the time of grace which points out to us that the world and history – above all our personal histories and the history of the Order – are going towards not only their dissolution but also their completion.

We are experiencing this feast in this *Church of St. Mary Magdalene* which – already in its name – reminds us of the experience of every man and woman who have felt forgiven and welcomed by the mercy of God. Camillus had such an intimate experience of this that it marked in an indelible way every other choice he made in life. This church and this house are the valuable synthesis of the good performed by so many of our religious brothers down four centuries: lives spent bearing witness in the daily routine of life to God’s love for man; faces and biographies that narrate the passion of God incarnated in a humanity that asks for health, dignity and proximity (cf. Mt 25)!

We therefore feel especially responsible in stewarding and making grow our charismatic heritage which has been deposited in our hearts and our hands.

As a further surprise of the spirit, there begins also today the mandate of co-responsibility, animation and service of the new *general government* of the Order which was elected during the recent Extraordinary General Chapter. This Chapter was experienced by all of us as an authentic experience of fraternity in truth and of communion in diversity, between Camillians, the representatives of the whole of the Order.

We have gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist – an authentic thanksgiving to God – having in common the figure and the spirit of St. Camillus. What has he left to us as his precious legacy, starting from the central event of his conversion which led him to an increasingly wise and realistic knowledge of himself and an increasingly integral knowledge of other people?

Camillus, following the Good Samaritan, steadily learnt to place the person – welcomed with an empathetic and holistic approach – at the centre of his gaze and activity: Camillus never responded solely to an illness but, rather, he welcomed every person wounded by illness in his or her deepest and inalienable dignity.

He lived love for the sick, looked after with maternal and feminine sensitivity, with that care that united ethics with aesthetics: his biographers relate that Camillus often compared care for the sick with a symphony; their insistent and strident cries for his ears were a music of ineffable harmony; he walked carefully and delicately between the beds of sick people as though he was doing dance steps. The Hospital of the Holy Spirit was compared by him to a garden of fruit trees and scented flowers. Camillus introduced into care for the sick the idea of beauty, a band of light, of colour, a note of happiness and of cent.

Camillus lived the spirit ‘doing good well’, according to truth, goodness and beauty. This idea was recently proposed anew by Pope Francis: ‘The Church exists to communicate precisely this: Truth, Goodness and Beauty ‘in person’’. To proclaim the Truth that Jesus is, the Goodness that the service of charity is, and the Beauty of the Christian vocation which ‘must become action, just as the anointing with holy oil must reach the ‘outskirts’. The precious oil that anoints the head of Aaron is not confined to scenting his person but spreads and reaches the ‘outskirts’. The Lord will say this clearly: his unction is for the poor, for prisoners, for the sick and for those who are sad and alone’ (cf. Pope Francis, Homily of 28 March 2013 on the Occasion of the Chrism Mass).

Camillus discovered the existential outskirts of the heart and of relationships, achieving an unconditional welcoming for all those poor and miserable people who did not belong to the elite logic of the great Renaissance. He proposed instead a great ‘plenary humanism’.

Specifically in this activity of his, Camillus achieved in practical terms a *new school of charity* which today we could call a *new school of justice*, given that it is not possible to separate evangelisation from the proclaiming of the year of grace of the Lord. ‘The spirit has led me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people’ (cf. Is 61:1-11; Lk 4:18-19).

For Camillus, the question of man was the question of God! In this sense do we understand better the statement to be found in our Constitution: ‘By the promotion of health, the treatment of disease and the relief of pain, we cooperate in the work of god the creator, we glorify God in the human body and express our faith in the resurrection’ (n. 45). This is the response of proximity, the response of service. Which is always urgent because as Benedict XVI wrote: ‘Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society’ (*Deus caritas est*, 28). Given that ‘The Christian’s programme —the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is “a heart which sees”’ (*Deus caritas est*, 31): this programme should become for we Camillian religious as well a challenge to make ourselves grow and to help those that we encounter to grow in the ‘formation of the heart’.

Faced with a rather banal current meaning of life, we understand the perennial contemporary relevance and the prophetic incisiveness of the message of St. Camillus. For us today it is the living gospel that has to be understood, lived, shared and practised in service to sick people. Everything should be done with serenity, joy, unity, without fear, with that candour and shrewdness that knows how to distinguish between ingenuous holiness and prophetic holiness in order to fall in love again with our charism; with a healthy faithfulness to tradition which commits us to a creative passing from hand to hand that is rich in newness, precisely because faithfulness require intelligent, shared and impassioned change.

Today we are called to be *missionary disciples* in the world of health and health care, contributing to the growth of the culture of encounter in opposition to the culture of indifference, of efficiency at any price and of throwing things away; exiting from our selfishness and nurturing – as St. Augustine reminds us – a holy disquiet of the heart, of searching, and of love (cf. the words of the magisterium of Pope Francis: ‘Be happy...’ to consecrated men and women towards the end of the year dedicated to consecrated life).

I will end with an invitation to pray for all sick people, in particular for our religious brothers who are ill and who during the difficult season of old age or suffering continue to be faithful witnesses to our charism; a prayer to ask the Lord for the gift of holy vocations and the faithful perseverance of all of us and in particular our young religious brothers in formation so that through their contagious enthusiasm we can achieve an authentic renewal of our consecrated lives.

May St. Camillus with his ‘thousand blessings’ and Mary – Health of the Sick and Mother and Queen of the Ministers of the Sick – continue to intercede for us with the Lord!

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