

The Crucifix and Mercy

The Spiritual Experience of Camillus de Lellis

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Following the footsteps of the spiritual experience of St. Camillus from the event of his conversion until the steady emergence of the special vocation of the Camillian charism, we can observe the constant presence of the Crucified Christ: the revelation of the call of God, the event of the experience of a love that surprised and caused upheaval with its incomprehensibility, and an energy that led Camillus and his companions to make their own lives a gift in the image of Jesus.

Let us go back to some fundamental moments of the spiritual experience of Camillus, reading them anew from the dual (but in reality single) perspective of the revealed mercy of the Crucified Christ. For the most part we will listen to the testimonies of the saint (when possible) and his companions, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to us about Jesus through the experience of these men. We will ask them to open our minds and our hearts, and to make us understand the will of God on that part of the journey which each one of us is now travelling. In particular, we will ask him to make us love the gift of mercy which he pours into us, and through the charism given to our father Camillus as well.

1. The Apparitions of the Crucified Christ

It is probably the case that the accounts of the two visions of the Crucified Christ that Camillus had at the beginning of his adventure are known about. As often happens in relation to the things of God, that holy inspiration in the night of the Assumed Virgin of 1582 to 'institute a Company of pious and good men who not for gain but willingly and for love of God would serve Him with that charity and lovingness that mothers usually have for their sick children' (*Vita Manoscritta*=Vms 52) was contradicted by the development of events: everything seemed to go against what Camillus had in his heart and – as he was discovering – was not the wish of his heart alone.

It was during this initial stage of uncertainty with the thronging of questions that did not meet with answers, and in difficulties and in incomprehension – at times felt by the very people who were thought to be 'nearest' to him: it was specifically during the darkness of this trial that Camillus began to experience being a follower of the crucified Jesus: 'My child, if you are going to serve the Lord, be prepared for times when you will be put to the test' (Sir 2:1).

The words spoken by the crucified Christ are known: 'What's wrong with you pusillanimous one? Follow this undertaking and I will help you, given that this work is mine and not yours' (Cicatelli 1620,28).

The starting situation, I have emphasised by now on a number of occasions, is that of 'pusillanimity', that of the heart of a child who is too small, frail, weak and vulnerable to resist the impact of the power of the Spirit and the terrible trial of the gratuitousness of the gift.

The words of the crucifix were words that made him – according to the words of his biographer – 'the most contented and comforted man in the world' (Vms 55). And it also necessary that at the beginning, as we have seen, there is an experience of a great love, of an unlimited mercy that

purifies and recreates so that our hearts can begin to beat again according to the heart beats of God and can continue to do so even when God seems to be hidden or to have abandoned us.

It is not my intention to enter the nature of these events, even though they had a decisive importance for Camillus and his vocation. Nor does it seem to me to be necessary to attempt – albeit in the form of a draft – to formulate proposals as to how these should be interpreted. What it seems important to emphasise is, rather, the ‘provisional’ character – at this point in the adventure of Camillus – of his experience of the cross. For Camillus, who was wandering in the darkness of a divine will that was still uncertain, the cross of Jesus was experienced at that moment as a ‘consolation, a sign of certainty in the uncertainty of the mystery of God, a testimony of the presence of He who does not forget us, in situations which proclaimed instead a distance, or at the least the silence of a heaven that did not speak’. Here Camillus is faced, if we can express the point so, with the fundamental words of the cross, the action of God who comes to man and recreates him (as we have seen). Although he communicated with a ‘heart that is still too small’ (pusillanimous), God decided for Camillus, He drew near to him in the only way that He knows: as mercy.

Almost as a commentary on the words of the crucified Christ, Camillus later wrote: ‘one can almost say that this foundation was done miraculously...I have said that this miracle was manifested in this foundation of ours and in particular in this serving of myself, a miserable sinner, ignorant, and full of many defects, and failings, and worthy of a thousand hells. But God is the master, and can do as He wishes, and it is infinitely well done. Nobody should admire himself because of such an instrument that God has worked, it being His greater glory and no other’s wonder’ (*Scritti*, 454 - 455).

The ‘provisional’ I said. Indeed, at this point Camillus saw the mystery of crucified love, but he was still on its threshold. He had still not entered it, or rather he had still not allowed himself to traverse it. Indeed, Camillus’ experience of the cross had already begun with the mystery of the trial that preceded the apparitions and then continued for the whole of his life in the discipleship of the crucified Christ and mercy for the sick.

Even though Camillus was a child of his time (in fact the religious climate of the Italy in which he lived was deeply marked by devotion to the passion of the Lord – ‘*the cross*, it has been written, *held sovereign sway over it*’, the emphasis that was in fact placed on the apparitions (one may think of a certain iconography, including the banner placed in the basilica of the Vatican on the occasion of his canonisation in 1747) had positive but also universal effects – its merit was to have identified in the centrality of the cross the unifying and summarising element of the entire spiritual experience of this saint.

On the other hand the partial (and not universal) aspect was above all connected with the implicit message that was after a certain fashion channelled, namely that saintliness coincided with the extraordinary, with the wonderful, with what, whatever the case, could only be reduced with difficulty to a ‘normal and ordinary’ spiritual experience.

In reality, the extraordinary character of the wonderful is not substantial as regards saintliness, which in definitive terms is union with God in the giving of oneself, as was the case with Jesus. But it is specifically the extraordinary character of love that is the essence of the ordinary in the Christian life (see the *magis* – the ‘more’ of the sermon on the mount).

Our task will be to see how this aspect was embodied in the experience of Camillus and above all to see how it took on the ‘maternal’ face of mercy.

PART II

2) *Discipleship and the Cross*

His biographer seemed in some way aware of the potential danger of not understanding the nature of the response of Divine Grace because he wrote: 'All his contemplations, ecstasies, transports and visions consisted of staying for almost of the whole night gazing above some dead or dying body or another destroyed sick pauper. And in these so extenuated and emaciated bodies he saw the extreme misery of human life...And in such spectacles of horror he learnt to live to die, and those were always his books and his schools where he learnt to despise the world and love his neighbour' (Vms, 251).

In this text we find a phrase that points out to us a precise approach to Camillus' experience of the cross and mercy: service to the sick for him was the place where he 'learnt to live to die'. If for that matter we go to the so-termed 'Formula of Life' of 1599 in which the saint summarised the essence of the Camillian charism, we find a phrase that apparently (at least from a literal point of view) is in contrast to this first phrase: a minister of the sick must learn to 'die to live'. Let us read the text: 'If someone inspired by the Lord God wishes to exercise works of mercy, corporal and spiritual, according to our Institute, he should know that he must be dead to all the things of this world, that is to say relatives, friends, possessions, and to himself, and live only for the Crucified Christ'. I believe that in these two phrases one can happily summarise Camillus' experience of the cross: the whole of his life was 'learning (NB!) to live to die and to die to live', at the school of the crucifix. Let us now see what this really meant for Camillus.

a) *The cross as a 'fire of charity'*

In the formula of profession that was in use before the Institute was erected into a Religious Order – which was when the red cross was entrusted – a *proposito* ('resolution') was declared: 'Almighty God, my creator, my mercy, father of my Lord Jesus Christ, I give you infinite thanks because through your goodness you have deigned to call me to your holy service. And I for love of you...with all the affection of my heart and my soul propose to observe chastity, poverty and obedience and to serve the sick poor, your children and my brothers, for all the time of my life, with the greatest charity of which I am capable, helped by your divine grace...Thus...I beseech you for the love with which you sent your Son to the world to die for the human generation (who told us that he came to set the earth on fire and that he wanted nothing else but to burn) that you will always keep my heart lit by the fire of this love without ever going out, so that I may persevere in this holy Work' (Vms, 78-8).

'With all the affection of my heart'. Allusion is certainly not made here to the varyingly ambiguous style of sentimentalism, nor to the great (but equally equivocal) deeds which at times we manage to do with the impetus of an easy and ephemeral enthusiasm. Here we are dealing with something very different, something much more stable and above all that is central to our lives. We spoke about this at our first meeting when we reflected on the nature of the spiritual experience and conversion. One is dealing with that 'love with which you sent your Son to the world to die for the human generation', which has become so important for my life, to the point that my best energies, my strengths, the best that I have, I throw them there, because by now the deepest meaning of my life itself is there! It is at one and the same time an act of faith, of hope and of supreme love which, to use the words of Pascal, makes me able to 'stake my life on God'.

And we further learn: ‘When that oath was over Camillus placed those crosses, with the other fathers and brothers singing the words of Jesus Christ. If someone wants to follow me he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me (Mt 16:24)’.

Learning to die in order to live, self-giving, therefore, for Camillus has its determining condition in divine Grace revealed on the cross.

The response to such a love, for its part, consists essentially of ensuring that this ‘fire of charity’ remains lit and does not go out. In other words, supporting the movements of Grace with trusting abandonment to God in the image of Jesus so that God himself can love in man.

b) The fruit of contemplation of the cross

Continuing our research into the face of mercy as we are able perceive it in the life of Camillus, we encounter two privileged moments which are personal and ‘intimate’ and which are both connected with the experience of being in front of the crucified God in prayer. They express the unique mystery of the divine fire of the cross: the Eucharist and meditation on the Passion.

‘In his prayers he did not go for certain overly subtle or speculative points but closing everything up in the Most Holy Chest of the Crucified Christ he asked for graces, he discovered his needs, and had high and divine conversations with his beloved Lord’ (Vms, 248).

Camillus lived the cross first and foremost as a sacrifice for sinners, as the manifestation of divine mercy that saves. Indeed in another text we read: ‘In his mental morning prayers and again at Holy Mass, many time rivulets of tears were seen to fall from his eyes. He prayed at times with his arms fully open at the feet of the Most Holy Crucified Christ, to whose image he was greatly devoted. He used to offer often to the eternal Father the most bitter passion of His only Son for the sins of the whole world’ (Vms, 247-248).

The tears of Camillus in front of the cross can bring us to a fundamental coordinate of the attitude of a believer to the mystery of God: only by ‘staying’ in front of crucified love (we saw this last time) can we ‘discover our needs’. Only there do we see ourselves for what we are, with all the potentialities with which God has endowed us, and with that inevitable negativity (from sin to weakness and on to various forms of immaturity and infantilism) which is an integral part of our lives but which often needs to be integrated. In front of the cross, man, like Camillus, finds that *he is in need of mercy*.

Here we are at the roots of mercy. Indeed, only before the absolute and incomprehensible gratuitousness of crucified love can we learn to have mercy for ourselves. There is no other way! Only there can we understand how little there is that is lovable inside us and take upon ourselves without feeling that it is an offence to our personal esteem. Only in this way will we be regenerated by the experience of mercy and will we become mercy, defeating thereby our pusillanimity. And for that matter only those who feel in need of mercy can listen to the same need in the other and respond to it according to the unique requests that it takes on in that specific brother. Only in this way do we become capable of ‘works of mercy’. Otherwise we would always confine ourselves to providing mere *services*, perhaps professionally impeccable ones but ones condemned to the sterility of a ‘heart that is still too small’.

c) Following Christ

Camillus’ experience of the cross, therefore, is the experience of the ‘fire on the earth’ of divine passion for man, revealed and experienced in the form of mercy. When reading again the salient events (that we know about) of his life, we could say that Camillus was first of all ‘touched and

healed by mercy' (the process of the so-termed conversion). Contemporaneously Camillus was also 'filled with mercy' through beholding the divine fire and through constant union with Him. Lastly, there was service to the sick which took up most of his life and by which Camillus gave himself in mercy. From beholding sprang his following of Christ; from gift came gift; and from his experience of Grace came mercy.

Camillus, as his biographer observes, prayed 'not to already feel the taste and the sweetness of heaven but rather to regain his strength in his hard work and in the securing of the health of souls' (Vms, 248). Contemplation was not an end in itself or to put it better directed towards itself but, rather, was directed only towards the particular form of following Christ of Camillus which was expressed in service to the sick.

Thus it was that the man who in front of the cross discovered that he was only a '*peccatoraccio*' (a 'miserable sinner'), in vital communion with the crucifix (that is to say in living the invitation of St. Paul – 'the attitude that you should have is the one of Jesus Christ', Phil 2:5), became in his turn a gift of mercy for those in need of mercy.

'My brothers do not me amazed – he said – if I repeat to you so many times that you should have pity and be merciful because I am made like some ordinary priests who it is said by the common people do not know how to read other books than their missals, so I do not know how to speak of anything else but of this' (Cic. 1615, 172).

We have thus come to the central coordinates of the spirituality of the cross of Camillus: the crucifix and the sick. Jesus crucified on the cross and the sick crucified by indifference. Camillus placed at the centre of his ideal of following Christ the 'very sweet words of Jesus: I was sick and you visited me' (Mt 25:36), and to such an extent, as is known, in his Rules of 1584 he wrote: 'Everyone should look at the poor as he looks at the person of the Lord'.

The following of the cross is thus translated in practical terms into service to sick people: they are the most immediate service, the place of encounter to the utmost with the Crucified God of mercy.

'He saw most strongly in them the person of Christ, and often when he put food in their mouths (imagining that they were his Christs) he whispered to them thanks and asked forgiveness for his sins; being so reverently in their presence as though he was in the presence of Christ, giving them food very often hatless and on his knees...When he took some of them in his arms to change their sheets he did this with so much affection and diligence that he appeared to handle the very person of Jesus Christ. And even if that sick man was the most contagious and leprous of the hospital, he no less took him in his arms very closely, drawing his face near to his head as though it was the sacred head of the Lord' (Vms, 228).

This faith in the incarnation of the crucified Christ in the sick person was so strong that Camillus reached an almost 'unconventional' attitude, for example – obviously when this was a matter of necessity – he even left a Holy Mass so that he could 'give all service to the sick' (Reg. XXVI, Scritti, 66) . Indeed, it is known that 'he did not like that sort of union that removed arms from charity. And that it was the utmost perfection when it was time to do good to the sick by helping them to leave God, for there would be no lack to time to behold Him in heaven' (Vms, 248).

Total self-giving to the sick thus became for Camillus the certain criterion for discernment of the experience of faith because it was essentially experience of mercy and the cross.

In looking for God, indeed, perhaps one looks for only an idol or oneself; and such is certainly the case if the desire and search for God do not observe the law of the creation and the incarnation which invoke respect for the mediations and the love of the other. Indeed, the divine, given that it was made man in Jesus, wants and must make itself measured by the human: 'if somebody says "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar' (1 Jn 4:20-21; 2:9-11).

At a juridical-institutional level, following the cross found its truest practical expression in the fourth vow of the Ministers of the Sick. 'The 'living only for the crucified Christ', for he who in the cross gave everything, revealing a God who continually gives all of Himself in his Son, becomes such only in a willingness and a wish to 'die for the crucified Christ', to give one's life for him. Total and unconditional dedication to God – living only for the crucified Christ – is then achieved in 'service for the poor sick, even those who are plague-stricken'.

But this self-giving, and this should be noted well, has to be total, it must, that is to say, include not only the mind and the will but also all the dimensions of the person, starting with the potentiality of his affections. What Camillus called the 'precious pearl of charity' has, indeed, to be nourished by the same charity full of affection and care that was demonstrated by the Father in Jesus.

Something has always stuck me about Camillus, above all after learning about his personal history and the description of the harshness of his character: that one and the same man could have written – but above all else lived out – the Rule of Service that he prescribed: 'First each one should ask grace of the Lord so that he may give maternal affection to his neighbour so that he can serve him with all charity of the soul as of the body because we wish with the grace of God to serve all of the sick with that affection which a loving mother usually shows towards her only sick child' (Reg. XXVII, Scritti, 67).

d) 'For true love of God'

How can we, and how must we, understand the phrases of this Rule which are an invitation to serve the sick with 'all Charity' or 'with that affection that a loving mother usually shows'? I believe that once again the 'normative' text of the 'Formula of Life' points out to us the direction that we should follow. Indeed, when Camillus comes to list the only and fundamental reason for engaging in 'works of mercy', in dying to oneself and living only for the crucified Christ, employing a sober but extremely clear formula he states: 'which he will do for true love of God'.

Here one touches the most important – and often ignored – core of the experience of faith which is able to make mercy authentic. Camillus invites us to go beyond appearances, to look at ourselves (and not only at what we do) in front of the cross, and allow ourselves to be placed in the truth of his words. The emphasis placed upon the adjective 'true' seems to refer to the possibility (which as has already been seen is much more than a possibility being rather an ordinary situation!) of a love of God that is not 'true', of a mercy for the sick that is a 'façade'. Near as he was to the spirituality of St. Ignatius, Camillus knew the distinction that this saint made in the second week of his spiritual exercises, between (true) 'real good' and 'apparent good' (not true good), between what I assess as a value, a good in itself, and what in some way is solely something that is important for me.

As is the case with other aspects of our life of faith, and perhaps even more, in works of mercy what is at stake is the possibility that we have of making a sincere gift (which does not always coincide with good intentions, which, indeed certainly move us) of ourselves to other people. The appeal to true love places us in front of the urgency of questions such as: *what am I really looking for in my service to the sick that I perform? For whom am I doing what I am doing? What makes me do what I am doing? To whom am I in fact giving this part of my time, of my energy, of my life...that I believe I am giving?*

If, in an attempt at honesty towards ourselves in front of crucified love, the answers that we manage to give ourselves (perhaps for the first time in our lives) are not able to go beyond the appearance of that 'good' (which is often 'clearly visible' to other people so that they do not ignore it!)...; if we are not able to reveal that 'true good' by which we have been gripped and on which we

have decided to stake the meaning of our lives...; if behind the flow and counter-flow of gratifications that inevitably sustain and motivate our daily choices, including our small and large moment of 'self-giving'...then we are deceiving ourselves (and with greater difficulty other people!).

If the answer (certainly not the oral answer but the existential one which takes practical shape in lifestyles, in the small, ordinary and often banal choices on which our days are based) is not for 'Crucified Christ', inevitably – whether we want to recognise this fact or not – it will always be an answer that can be traced back to 'for myself'!...I will discover that there are always (and perhaps that there have always been and we have never had the honesty or the courage to call them by their real name) spaces, situations, relationships, probably even moments of service...exclusively reserved to myself, in which I can 'be and live only for myself' and bend to this everything that surrounds me. In not discovering these spaces 'in a penumbra' of inconsistency with the ideal that we would like to live ('for Jesus'), when, that is to say, we live a Christian life that is not unified by the single reason of 'gift for true love', we will inevitably end up by binding ourselves to (and in the end becoming) the roles that we have, our service will always be after a certain fashion bound to the return that we obtain from it. An act of faith will lose its force of being trusting abandonment under the blows of the economic law of profit. And gift will gradually but inexorably become a service that should, whatever the case, assure me a form of gratification.

e) 'The true sign of love'

Can 'great suffering' be 'mercy of the Lord'? This is a question which at this point Camillus forces us to take into consideration. Indeed, he used to speak about suffering and illness as 'mercy of the Lord'. Bearing in mind the question about the sincerity and the truth of our mercy that Camillus obliged us to ask previously, perhaps we are led to spontaneously to ask ourselves: 'But how (or even 'if') is it possible to live the gratuitousness of love?'

In my opinion, the Formula of Life offers us an important indication as regards discernment of our faithfulness to the (Camillian) charism of mercy and in definitive terms as regards discernment of the very quality of our faith. Camillus observed: 'everything dead to the world, everything should be given to doing the will of God...and one should obtain a great reward dying for the crucified Jesus Christ Our Lord...and renewed in this way one should prepare to suffer a great deal for the glory of God, and the health of one's soul and the Souls of our Neighbours' (Formula of Life, 1599).

Camillus tells us that those who walk the way of mercy 'for true love of God' will certainly be tested by suffering. One does not in any way want to establish an equation between following Christ and illness. If one wants to establish at any cost such an equation, the terms should be more 'true love' and 'pain'! This is what I referred to in essential terms at the outset when I was talking about Camillus' initial experience of the cross (the visions).

But pain, weakness, trial, limitations...are the ordinary condition which, after a certain fashion, is presented to us when we allow the 'word of the cross' to traverse our lives. This is not only and principally a 'pragmatic' question. Here the 'suffering a great deal for God' is 'simply' the sign of the purity of the gift – in definitive terms the 'true test of love'. What, indeed, has been said hitherto about the physical suffering of Camillus can only apply more specifically to the 'great deal of suffering' that inevitably characterises discipleship of the crucified Christ.

Camillus believed that suffering 'was sent to him by the Lord' 'so that he was directed to serving him without any kind of delight but rather as a high suffering, and corporeal affliction, which he said was the true sign of love, as he then with greater constancy and fortitude had to serve God,

when his soul felt not only oppressed by pains and corporeal infirmities but was still arid and deprived of any zeal, and spiritual consolation: which nearly always was the case with him' (Cic. 1624, 165-166).

To understand matters well, we all have to pass through a time of desolation and trial because it is at that time when we are tested as to our 'resistance', the substance of our ideals, and the truth of our love.

All of us have to pass through an inevitable sense of frustration, as takes place when we are not able to be up to the level of the ideals that we would like to live, and above all when it is difficult for us to measure the efficacy and the appreciation of the service that we are providing. But at the moment of frustration, the moment when we are at the limit of de-motivation, the moment when we no longer have any other reason to continue with that service, if it not be the original (when not forgotten) 'for Jesus', this is that moment when I can, perhaps for the first time in my life, begin to be a true disciple of Jesus because I no longer have the gratifications that I had previously. The trial of the 'great deal of suffering' is then closely connected with the truth and the freedom of the relationship that we have with God, with its gratuitousness, which appears more or less in all its splendour when all the gratifications that obfuscate it disappear. This, in essential terms, is the mystery that we behold in the Crucified Jesus; this is the way of following him. Each one of us has our own 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7): weaknesses, immaturity and tendencies to close in on ourselves, a need to be recognised and appreciated for what we do..., 'thorns' that perhaps with difficulty we are prepared to admit that we have to ourselves (imagine to others!), but which whatever the case should be recognised and taken on as ours. Each one of us has these aspects which we usually tend to assess as negative, which we would not like to have and from which, perhaps, exactly like St. Paul, we pray to be freed (Rom 12:8). A prayer that the Lord is careful to answer! Indeed, He leaves us our weaknesses. He leaves us that thorn that makes us 'suffer a great deal', as an antidote to our vanity, 'so that we do not swell up with pride' (1 Tim 3:6) because of the good that we do, and so that subject to the impetus of the spasmodic search for gratification we do not buy again everything that we sold previously 'in order to acquire the precious pearl of charity'!

The Lord certainly hears us but according to the will of the Father and certainly not according to the wishes of our hearts which are perhaps still too small to wish the wishes of God. But in doing this he transforms our hearts and our minds, bringing into existence the new man, that man who allows the power of God to manifest itself in the weakness of what he is. A man, perhaps, who is a 'miserable sinner, ignorant and full of many defects and failings', like Camillus – who precisely in that weakness was able to find a new presence of God. When I discover that Someone has taken upon His shoulders my sin and my weakness, and not only has used mercy but has also given me to use the same mercy towards myself and not to curse my weakness, then – recreated by this mercy – I can become a true gift of mercy, I can share this same mercy, I can draw near to the weakness and the suffering of others with the same delicacy, the same attention and the same surprising gratuitousness, which the crucified Christ used towards me.

Then, in a life transformed by the total giving of oneself, even in the most incomprehensible situations (those, that is to say, where God seems to contradict the promise of salvation pronounced on the cross), such an experience of suffering and death becomes, paradoxically, an opportunity to continue self-giving until the end 'for love of Jesus'.

In essential terms this is the treasure that Camillus placed in our hands. In his spiritual Testament he wrote: 'I promise to bear, and to have patience in, every adverse thing for love of He who on a cross wanted to die for me, and I want not only to bear lack of appetite in eating and sleeping badly, and bad words, I also want to obey those who govern me for love of God and with patience I intend to bear every bitter medicine, every painful remedy and every annoyance until the Agony of death itself for love of Jesus, for He suffered a greater death for me, indeed I myself when

I suffer any tribulation and pain in my body, intend to suffer it voluntarily for love of my sweet Jesus' (Scritti, 483).

Paper of Giovanni Terenghi to the members of the Lay Camillist Family given in S. Giuliano (Verona) on 2 April 2000. The fourth paper of the 1999/2000 programme 'The Spiritual Experience of Camillus de Lellis'.

'I WILL HELP YOU AND I WILL BE WITH YOU'

That evening Camillus went to bed full of regret about the above-mentioned prohibition, and after spending a good part of the night in those troublesome thoughts, in the end tired about thinking about it he went to sleep.

In his sleep he seemed to see the very same Most Holy Christ on the Cross of the Oratory taken that evening to his room move his most holy head and encourage him, comforting him and confirming him in his good proposal to institute the Company. It seemed to him that he said: do not be afraid pusillanimous one, walk forward for I will help you and I will be with you, and you will gain great fruit from this prohibition, and having said this the apparition disappeared.

After this he felt happier and a comforted man of the world with such a steady intention as to remain firm in the undertaking which had already been begun, and it seemed to him that the whole of hell could not divert him from it.

After then making infinite thanks to H.D.Mty who had comforted him in that way, that morning he himself went to comfort and confirm his frightened companions, who even though they were still new soldiers in the militia of Christ it seemed that because of the prohibition that had been made they were all disheartened and lost.

All of them being heartened by the divine promise began again to gather together not openly in some particular oratory but hidden inside the small Church of St. James, the keys to which Fr. Francesco Profeta kept as the chaplain of that church. In that place hidden, (like the ancient Christians of the early Church when they were fleeing from the persecutions), they offered up their prayers. And when all the others of the house were asleep, and were resting, they in the place of sleep and rest said the litanies and pursued their discipline.

But in addition to the above-mentioned vision given to him by the most holy Christ on the Crucifix, our Father stated that he was on another occasion consoled and comforted by him. When he was undergoing another very great tribulation because of the infinite difficulties that he seemed to have ahead of him in bringing about this beginning, turning to prayer and to the same most holy Image, persevering with tears and sighs, he saw that the very same most holy Christ on the Crucifix, after detaching his hands from the Cross, comforted him and animated him, saying to him: tell me what is afflicting you pusillanimous one. Follow your undertaking for I will help you, given that this is my work not yours.

Because of what had taken place, which further grew in him his devotion towards the most holy Christ on the Crucifix, he took it to every place he lived in and after finally taking it to the Church of St. Mary Magdalene he placed it above the architrave of that church and each time that he went to it or came back after being outside, always looking in the church, and first engaging in deep reverence for the most holy Sacrament, then raising up his eyes, he looked lovingly at this his most devoted Christ on the Crucifix, greeting his loving wounds, in which he used to say he always found again grace and mercy' [*Vms. pp. 55; 297*]

THE RESOLUTION AND OATH OF THE FIRST 'SERVANTS OF THE SICK' IN RECEIVING THE RED CROSS

Rome 1586 - Text Camillus

Pope Sixtus V granted to the religious the wearing as a symbol and sign a red cross of cloth on their chests The Brief was of the year 1586, 20 June ('Cum Nos nuper'). The formulations of the resolution and the oath were used from 1586 to 1591.

The candidate, in line with a liturgy invented by Camillus, after taking part in a celebration of the Eucharist knelt in front of the altar and pronounced the two formulas. The red cross was then put on his chest while his religious brothers sung: 'he who wants to follow me should take up his cross and follow me' and 'As for me there is no other boast than in the cross of the Our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Almighty God, my creator, my mercy, father of my Lord Jesus Christ, I give infinite thanks to you because through your goodness you have deigned to call me to your holy service. And I for love of you, here in the presence of your divine majesty and all the heavenly Court, with all the affection of my heart and my soul propose to observe chastity, poverty and obedience and to serve the sick poor, your children and my brothers, for all the time of my life, with the greatest charity of which I am capable, helped by your divine grace. Thus, for the love that led you to send your son into the world to die for mankind (and he said that he had come to bring fire to the earth and wanted nothing else but that this was already lit), I beseech you to keep my heart lit by such love without it ever going out so that I can persevere in this holy work and, in persevering, reach heavenly glory, so that I can enjoy and praise in eternity with your chosen ones. Amen.

My Lord Jesus, because of the very great wish that I have to observe this most holy resolution, and to arm myself against future temptations, in your divine presence and in front of all the Court of Heaven I swear on the holy Gospel that every time that I think of leaving the Congregation (something that God should never allow!), before drawing away I will retire to a room for some days according to the time that my superior grants to me. Here I will commend myself to your divine Majesty and then I will do everything that I think best for the salvation of my soul. May the Lord and these holy Gospels of Jesus Christ help me!