



p. Aris Miranda
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Dear Fr. Paul, esteemed religious brothers of the Provincial Council, all our religious brothers of the Vice-Province of Burkina Faso, in your country and abroad,

At the beginning of this message of ours, we wish to call on you very strongly, providing a framework for a sharing of our perceptions and our suggestions for your personal and community discernment.

The first suggestion comes from the *logo* and the *motto* that you have chosen for the Jubilee Year of Mercy but at a specific level to commemorate and celebrate the arrival in Burkina Faso of the first Camillian religious fifty years ago: **‘Witnesses to Mercy. Set out into deep Water’** (*Duc in Altum*)’ (Lk 5:4).

To set out into deep water means having the courage to let go the ropes of the ship so as to leave the presumed safety of a port where we berthed the ship convinced that we were safe against the waves of the sea. It means having the courage set our sails with the force of a wind that is not always easily controlled. It also means having the courage to run the risk of the open sea and fleeing from the temptation of a safer and more comfortable ‘sailing on sight’ along usual seaways which are already known. And, lastly, it means having the courage to sail new routes which have not yet been explored and thus having the courage to trust in Him (*the Lord Jesus*) who invites us to throw out our nets even if we often feel that we are more capable and expert fishermen than he is.

If we do not live these experience of ‘setting out into deep water’ we will fall victims to boredom, to the repetitiveness of choices which in themselves are good but which by now are without the vigour and the passion that are needed to create a future and reanimate the present!

The second suggestion arrives with a triple invitation from Pope Benedict XVI on the feast day of the Presentation of the Lord on the occasion of the seventeenth World Day of Consecrated Life (2 February 2013):¹ ‘I invite you in the first place to nourish a **faith** that can illuminate your vocation. For this I urge you to treasure, as on an inner pilgrimage, the memory of the **“first love”** with which the Lord Jesus Christ warmed your hearts, not out of nostalgia but in order to feed that flame. And for this it is necessary to be with him, in the silence of adoration; and thereby reawaken the wish to share — and the joy of sharing — in his life, his decisions, the obedience of faith, the blessedness of the poor and the radical nature of love. Starting ever anew from this encounter of love, you leave everything to be with him and like him, to put yourselves at the service of God and your brothers and sisters (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 1).

¹ Cf. ***Homily of the Holy Father Benedict XVI*** at the Holy Mass with members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on the feast day of the Presentation of the Lord on the occasion of the seventeenth Day of Consecrated Life, *Saturday, 2 February 2013*: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/homilies/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20130202_vita-consacrata.html

In the second place I invite you to have a faith that can recognize the **wisdom of weakness**. In the joys and afflictions of the present time, when the harshness and weight of the cross make themselves felt, do not doubt that the *kenosis* of Christ is already a paschal victory. Precisely in our limitations and weaknesses as human beings we are called to live conformation with Christ in an all-encompassing commitment which anticipates the eschatological perfection, to the extent that this is possible in time (*ibid.*, n. 16). In a society of efficiency and success, your life, marked by the “humility” and frailty of the lowly, of empathy with those who have no voice, becomes an evangelical sign of contradiction.

Lastly, I invite you to renew the faith that makes you **pilgrims bound for the future**. By its nature the consecrated life is a pilgrimage of the spirit in quest of a Face that is sometimes revealed and sometimes veiled: “*Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*” (Ps 27[26]:8). May this be the constant yearning of your heart, the fundamental criterion that guides you on your journey, both in small daily steps and in the most important decisions. Do not join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light — as St Paul urged (cf. Rom 13:11-14) — keeping awake and watchful’.

In mercy, religious and communities can encounter the road of reconciliation, of forgiveness and of a life that is truly fraternal. Mercy makes us rediscover the meaning of why we are together as consecrated men; it makes us rediscover the Eucharist as a symbol of community and mission.

Mercy helps us to express with sincerity and humility what we think, to share the journey that is being travelled, the difficulties that are encountered, and the deepest wishes of our hearts.

A ‘perfect community’ does not exist but a community can exist where Mercy reigns rather than the complaints of those who take for granted that the community does not function, cannot function, and for this reason a separate world comes to be constructed with some compensations that are not good and many accusations. Mercy helps us to unmask and overcome three temptations: that of accusing God of being responsible for the difficulties that are encountered, as the Israelites did during the Exodus; that of creating a group of ‘discontented religious’ to give one support where one limits oneself to speaking about change without changing oneself; and lastly that of discouragement, similar to the discouragement of Moses: ‘I cannot bear this burden on my own...if you have to treat me like that, make me die instead’.

In the mercy of the Father, mission is filled with the joy of the Gospel. Mercy is the source of solidarity and the basis of that continuous renewal of ‘beliefs and attitudes’ that prevents the *sclerosis* of every institution.

During a jubilee, by tradition, one enters by the Holy Door, but an ‘outgoing’ Church, such as Pope Francis wants, is called to learn to cross the threshold in the opposite direction, like pilgrims, witnesses to mercy.

Consecrated life must be in the first row, with keenness and a readiness to help. The Superiors who lead the ‘pilgrimage’ of consecrated life are called to take responsibility for their flocks, who are at times lazy, who do not journey willingly, who prefer to stay in comfortable positions, who whine about everything and everybody, and who are not committed to opening themselves to new and different horizons. ***A pilgrimage is not going where each person wants, like stray dogs.*** On a pilgrimage a religious trusts to the promises of the Lord; he loves the place towards which he is moving.

In consecrated life, lived as a pilgrimage, one walks forward not to make a career, which is a water boiler of dreams and a trap involving jealousy and envy. One works in humility, not with a desire for success to show other people who we are, without individualistic approaches or removed feelings of inferiority. We can be helped in our reflections and our future decisions by the words that Pope Francis spoke to the Dehonian religious² and which apply to the whole of consecrated life and also to ourselves: ‘As religious men, you are called to be *merciful*. This means first and foremost to live in profound communion with God in prayer, in meditation on Sacred Scripture, in the celebration of the Eucharist, so that all of our life may be a journey of growing in the mercy of God. As we render ourselves aware of the Lord’s freely

² *Speech of the Holy Father Francis to those taking part in the General Chapter of the priests of the Sacred Hermitage of Jesus del Santo Padre Francesco* (Dehonians) – Friday, 5 June 2015.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/june/documents/papa-francesco_20150605_dehoniani.html

given love and we welcome it in ourselves, thus our tenderness, our understanding and our goodwill toward the people beside us grows in the same measure. From here must also start the strength of renewal of your Institute and of your mission’.

‘In the experience of God’s mercy and his love you will also find the point of harmonization of your *communities*. This entails the commitment to savour ever more the mercy which the confreres apply to you and to give them the wealth of your mercy. In all of this the testimony of your Founder, the great Apostle of the Sacred Heart, is an example and a help to you’.

‘Mercy is the composite of the Gospel, we might say it is the “face” of Christ, that face that He showed when He went to meet everyone, when He healed the sick, when He sat at the table with sinners, and especially when, nailed to the Cross, He forgave: there we have the face of divine mercy’.

The Lord calls you to be “channels” of this love in the first place toward *the last, the poorest*, who are privileged in His eyes. Allow yourselves continuously to question the situations of fragility and poverty with which you come into contact, and seek to offer in appropriate ways the witness of the charity which the Spirit pours into your hearts. The way of mercy allows you to open yourselves readily to current needs to be present industriously in new Areopaguses of evangelization, privileging, even if it should have entailed sacrifices, openness toward those circumstances of extreme need that reveal themselves as symptoms of today’s society.

We were with you for some days from 4 to 10 June of this year and this offered an opportunity for individual listening to each one of you, experiencing the fraternity and the welcome of your Camillian communities in Burkina Faso. On returning to Italy we dedicated the whole of 15 June to a meeting with our religious brothers of Burkina Faso who live and work in Rome and Viterbo. On 16 June we moved to Florence to listen and talk to our religious brothers who live in that city.

We would also like to observe that all the members of the General Consulta have been present amongst you, visiting Burkina Faso, some of us even two times, over the last two years of this general government.

Our recent visit was determined by two specific motivations. The first was linked to your imminent canonical move from a Vice-Province to the status of a Province (October 2016) and as such was connected with the wish of the general government of the Order to verify the solidity and maturity of certain elements that are required for your imminent journey (spiritual life, community life, institutions and activities involving formation, leadership, and your commitment to, and programmes for, economic self-sustainability...). The second was linked to the contingency of recent critical elements which ran the risk of destabilising relations between the employees and the management of the *Hôpital Saint Camille* of Ouagadougou – events, fortunately, that are being resolved in a positive way – with the additional factor of your awareness that you have to improve the quality of the management and the organisation of that institution.

In addition, this short visit of ours also formed a part of the journey of the whole of the Church: in the Year of Mercy we are called upon to live the mercy of God so that it can generate in us compassion, reconciliation and a renewed spirit of hope, in order to begin to live our ‘wounds’ as ‘windows’ onto the world, in order to bring light to our areas off darkness!

We were immediately able to observe the notable and creative potential of your personal ‘charisms’, of the consolidated dynamics of your communities, and of the happy heritage that has consolidated a history made up of fifty years of Camillian presence in your country. We appreciated your trust in us and your esteem for us: we perceived this above all in your spirit of sincere openness and honest dialogue, in your intelligent diagnosis of the realities of your consecrated Camillian lives amidst lights and shadows, and in the personal conversations that we had with you.

You shared with us your strong and sincere wish to be able to consolidate the basic structure of the Camillian religious Province of Burkina Faso: fraternal life lived according to the spirit of a FAMILY.

Your great dynamism in ministerial life and service is also borne witness to by your creativity in the field of pastoral care and evangelisation, as well as in studies in the nursing and medical sciences, research, formation and public health, caring for poor people and the sick without distinctions of a social, economic or religious character, and the supply of the best forms of diagnosis and therapy.

Worthy of emphasis is the great – *ad extra* – investment of human and economic resources that you are making in receiving, accompanying and caring for the poor in your institutions and your ministry, without neglecting – *ad intra* – intellectual and technical investments that involve many religious – especially young

religious – being strongly involved in studies and the acquiring of technical skills and expertise in the specialist sectors of medicine, nursing, management, economics, agrarian science.

Your houses of formation – *juvenat*, for postulants, the novitiate and scholastic – immediately bring to the eye an enormous human wealth of young men and this highlights the good quality of your style and commitment in the promotion of vocations which over the last fifty years of your history has been constantly growing and has not appeared to undergo a crisis or moments of decline.

Also convincing is your full-scale commitment to the economic self-sustainability of the Vice-Province, which will certainly continue to require of you prudence, determination, honesty and transparency; the involvement of all of the communities and all religious in order to continue in the fraternal logic of parsimony in personal and community expenditure; and discernment as regards the priorities of investment and the sharing of money, the income from your jobs and ministry and material possession, for the good of everyone.

As we well know, every coin has two sides: one that it is shining and one that is more opaque and has some scratches and which requires action, improvement, revision and greater consolidation. . .

In our view, this is also present in your Camillian consecrated lives. We invite you first and foremost to reflect on some points that could equally represent works in progress for you and your communities over the next months, looking forward to the next local Chapters which you will hold, looking forward, in turn, to the Provincial Chapter that you will celebrated in the year 2017.

Consecrated Life: Fraternity, Spirituality and Mission

1. Reconciliation: before the formal canonical move from being a Vice-Province to being a Province, we would like to share the request made by many of you and draw up a pathway of ‘reconciliation’, of mutual pacification. This is a pathway that should not only be an event of a celebratory and/or liturgical nature. It should also involve, in stages, with various timetables, beyond October 2016 as well (going on until it becomes a defining element for your preparations for the Provincial Chapter of 2017) and at various levels, all of the religious of the Vice-Province.
2. We suggest that you assess the possibility of taking advantage of the help, the coordination and the stimulus of a ‘facilitator’, a ‘third’ person in relation to the Camillians, an expert in group dynamics who can help you to ‘call by their name’ certain incrustations that are slowing down – as with a raft – some of your relationships. If you think that this is advisable, the secretariat of the Union of Superior Generals of Rome could provide you with some recommendations when choosing this ‘mediator’ who should be respectful of your language and culture.
3. This commitment corresponds to the spirit of the Jubilee Year (a year when new relationships begin again and one begins to breathe in new, clean, air. . .) and also to the spirit of Religious Life which finds concrete expression in the truth of life in the humility of what is offered and the welcoming of forgiveness. In our view, this meets a need which, perhaps, is not formally and externally so evident, but which arises from the need to clean and disinfect the wounds of hearts. . .so as to reactivate trust, a feeling of confidence, of mutual belonging, of esteem, and the ‘family’ dimension.
4. Fraternal life and spiritual life: to return continuously to the sources of our life choices, with a daily lifestyle that should be consistent with the motivations that made us fall in love with our ‘religious life’ (prayer, spiritual formation, communal liturgical life; the offering of personal time for the life of the community. . .). ‘Jesus said to them “let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone and you can rest for a while”. There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn’t even have time to eat’ (Mk 6:31).

Faced with many commitments, all of which are directed towards the wellbeing of our brothers, the risk of allowing ourselves to be taken over by activism or by pragmatic responses is always latent. Nourishing with precision and passion our interior lives will allow us to ‘set out into deep water’ but with clearer ideas about where to direct our boat. ‘**No wind is favourable for a sailor who does not know which port to aim for**’, we were warned by Seneca!

5. Implementing a commitment to an increasing impetus towards openness to missionary activity, moved by the need to read, and dialogue with, the signs of the times in way that involves proposals, and to respond with passion to the invitation of the Church to go to the outskirts.

Why not think of the reorganisation of some of your numerous communities so as to give space to new projects for mission (in other areas and/or dioceses of Burkina Faso and in neighbouring countries) in order to allow individual religious to acquire new experiences of putting themselves to the test with their own human and religious resources?

6. Growing in the awareness that we are religious not for a Province but for an Order: this will enable us not only to have a greater breadth of horizons as regards projects but also a more sensitive and generous readiness to help when we are asked to 'set out into deep water' and to cooperate with the specific initiatives of the Order.

Formation, Development and Organisation

1. Cultivating this overall vision of the Province, with a very rapid development of the number of religious, will require 'ongoing full-time organisation' by the leadership, a large investment of time in listening to the religious and in verifying the implementation of community projects and personal commitments entrusted to individual religious.
2. The formation of those providing formation in order to communicate and transmit in an increasingly better way to young people, and also to the even younger, the basic structures of our *Camillian religious identity*: continuing to implement that pathway that has been begun. You have very large houses for formation, with a high number of candidates who certainly require time, competence and dedication to achieve an increasingly prudent discernment.
3. As regards professional training for the acquisition of new skills and expertise by our religious, we invite you to place this fruitful pathway in a wider project of the Province that is detailed and convincing.

It is always important to clarify from the outset, and to continue to do this subsequently, that specialisations are directed towards the human growth of the talents of the individual, but they should then be performed concretely within the existences of the consecrated and not the contrary: that is say bending one's own religious and community identity to specific technical-professional aptitudes.

4. Paying more attention to changes and to the move of religious from one job to another, from one community to another, and to replacements in various ministerial activities: this very rapid interchange, although, on the one hand, it highlights a certain generous readiness to help and cooperation on the part of individual religious, on the other means the community suffers from projects and services that are constantly suspended or recommenced, highlighting – perhaps – the strategy of responding only to urgent needs, without taking into due account a more overall planning of the Province.
5. Implementing internal organisation and strengthening the procedures and the statutes of health-care works (hospitals, health-care centres...: your works have grown well and very rapidly in size in terms of the numbers they can take in and the care they provide. It is now a matter of defining internal norms and procedures, of establishing according to the legislation in force in the country relationships with those who work with you and professionals, as well as defining with precision the organisation of roles within the institutions.

Without absolutely wanting to 'minimise' the difficulties and the tensions that you are going through, we exhort you, on the other hand, not to 'make them gigantic': it is a part of our human and religious maturity to give the right weight – through personal and community discernment – to all the forms of resistance and all the problems and the contradictions that we encounter, looking for the deep reasons for malaise, calling by name, with humility, the responsibilities of each person and...at times also learning to live with them!

The Vice-Province has a great resource: the young religious who are engaged, trained, well received, and aware that they are in a family, with a great wish to establish spiritual and religious life in a good way.

This 'new pathway' (reconciliation and fraternal consolidation) is a gift of God, an opportunity for

growth (a moment of grace) and at the same a great responsibility starting with the individual members and the whole of your great family. The success of this journey will be an important fact not only for your Vice-Province but for the Order as a whole.

***With gratitude for the friendship that you demonstrated towards us;
with appreciation for the passion for the Camillian charism that we saw in your hands;
with esteem for the beauty of fraternity that we experienced with you;
with trust in your potential for human and fraternal growth in forgiveness and reconciliation;
with prayers to God the Father of Mercy and to St. Camillus our Father and perennial source of inspiration,
we send to you our most cordial greetings!***

Roma, 21 June 2016

Memorial of St. Aloysius Gonzaga SJ – saint of charity who worked for the plague-stricken