

HOMILY FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST
Inauguration of the Academic Year 2017-2018
The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Foundation of the *Camillianum*

THE SUFFERING THAT BRINGS HOPE TO THE HUMAN HEART AND TO HUMANITY!

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*Distinguished academic community of the Camillianum – President, lecturers, students, other personnel,
Esteemed friends of the Order and the Camillian charism,
Dear participants of the conference to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the
Camillianum,*

A warm and fraternal welcome to everyone in the context of the inauguration of the new academic year 2017-2018!

We are experiencing together, with joy and in fraternity, the opening of this day which for us Camillian religious has a very special significance: to thank the Lord for the thirty years of academic activity that was planned – and has been engaged in – by our International Institute for the Theology of Pastoral Care in Health. Since the year 2012 this Institute has been a part of the Faculty of Sacred Theology of the Pontifical Lateran University.

From the biblical readings that we have just proclaimed and listened to in the liturgy of the Word of today, it seems to me a beam of light has come that offers us clarity and meaning by which to begin and enter into the celebratory and intellectual dimension of this academic day.

I intend to offer a pathway of thoughts and reflections organised around four basic points:

- a. A brief summary of the message of Holy Scripture of today.
- b. Recalling some of the essential elements of the Camillian charism and the Camillian ministry of mercy in the world of suffering.
- c. Some nuances of the ecclesial messages that are contained in the apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* of Pope St. John Paul II (11 February 1984) and in the encyclical letter *Spe Salvi* of Pope Benedict XVI (30 November 2007).
- d. An expression of gratitude to all the protagonists of this history of thirty years of teaching at the *Camillianum*.

Let us open the doors of the *mysterious* world of suffering through what is offered by the biblical-theological insights of today.

1. Biblical-Theological Insights

Let us remember in summarising terms the biblical texts of today's liturgy:

- **First reading** (Rom 8:12-17). St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans (Rom 8:12-17) observes that all those who live '*led by the Spirit of God*' are '*sons of God*'. We have not received a spirit as slaves:

the Spirit makes us adopted Children, and through him we say ‘Abba! Father’. If we are children, then we are also heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him*.

- **Psalm 67.** God in his holy habitation is the Father of orphans and the defender of widows. Day after day He *brings us salvation*. Our God is a *God who saves*; to the Lord belong the doors of death.
- **Gospel (Lk 13:10-17).** Luke, the evangelist physician, narrates to us a fragment of the work of Jesus who takes the initiative and heals a poor woman with a bent back ‘whom a spirit had kept infirm for eighteen years’ on the Sabbath day. Jesus, as an excellent healer, applies the basic recommendations of a good help relationship (‘rites’) and enters the scene: ‘he saw her, called her to him and said to her: woman you are freed of your illness. He laid her hands upon her and immediately she stood upright and gave glory to God’. Jesus was confronted by the head of the synagogue ‘who was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath’! With great determination Jesus offered the absolute priority of the suffering and infirm person (‘this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years’) over the Jewish religious tradition of the Sabbath, freeing her from infirmity – whether a mental illness or diabolical possession. Jesus through his person healed her and freed her from the Evil One! We may imagine how much suffering, how much prostration and how much humiliation this woman went through during those eighteen years of her frailty. We may also imagine the level of freedom and dignity that was offered to her by Jesus’s action which restored her life to her, as well as dignity and health!

In a healthy theology of health, all of us have learnt that there always exists a cry that asks for salvation. One of the principal reasons that leads pilgrims to go to Marian sanctuaries in the world (Lourdes, Fatima, Aparecida, Loreto...) is the simple but deep wish to look for health and for salvation from dangers, illness, pain and suffering in life.

We will now see some essential elements of the Camillian charism and the Camillian ministry of mercy in the world of suffering which can inspire and direct our lives.

2. The Inspiration that Comes from the Camillian Charism and the Camillian Ministry

These biblical texts, in their central meaning, are in deep harmony with the subject of this conference which has been organised for the inauguration of the thirtieth academic year of the *Camillianum*: ‘Pain and Suffering: Interpretations, Meaning and Care’. Over the next two days we are invited to listen to, and to interact with, various experts of the ‘mysterious’ subject of human suffering: theologians who are experts in pastoral care, psychologists, historians, philosophers, experts in ethics and bioethics, anthropologists and pastors of the Church, amongst others. Together we all seek, in a humble way, to offer pathways of meaning so as to draw near to an answer to the question of the meaning of suffering.

We Camillian religious have learnt from our beloved founder St. Camillus de Lellis that when faced with a suffering person we must take off our ‘shoes’ because we are entering sacred ground – a mystery – that requires from us respect, reverence and solidarity.

In our *Constitution* and the *General Statutes*, when our charism and our ministry are discussed, we encounter the following statements:

‘Therefore, the charism which has been granted in a special way to our Order and which establishes its character and mandate, is expressed and realised in our ministry, in the world of health, illness and *suffering*’. (Constitution, n. 10).

‘The specific charism of our Order, professed by the fourth vow, and lived in our ministry, is the commitment to relive and exercise the mercy of Christ towards *those who suffer*’ (Constitution, n. 42).

With respect to our *ministry*, we read:

‘Therefore, we are prepared to undertake every type of service in the world of health, for the building up of the Kingdom and the advancement of man’ (Constitution, n. 43).

‘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’ (Constitution, n. 45).

‘In the light of the Gospel and in ways suited to our times, we help the sick to find an answer to the persistent questions regarding the meaning of life both present and future as well as their interdependence, and *the meaning of pain, evil and death*. We accompany them with our presence and with prayer, especially at moments of darkness and vulnerability, so as to become ourselves a sign of hope for them’ (Constitution, n. 47).

‘We support the chronically ill in their faith, so they may learnt to cope with their limitations with perseverance, *to make the time of suffering fruitful* for the renewal and growth of their Christian lives’ (Constitution, n. 48).

As we can well intuit, our charism and our ministry, to sum up, consist of being and bringing mercy and light, and in being a sign that brings health and salvation into the world of suffering.

We will now consider some points in two documents of the Magisterium: the apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* (Pope John Paul II) and the encyclical letter *Spe Salvi* (Pope Benedict XVI).

3. The message of *Salvifici Doloris* (Pope John Paul II), *Spe Salvi* (Pope Benedict XVI) and the theology of the tears of Pope Francesco

To begin with some observations of an anthropological and theological character.

Saint John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* (hereafter *SD*) observes: ‘Human suffering evokes *compassion*; it also evokes *respect*, and in its own way *it intimidates*. For in suffering is contained the greatness of a specific mystery’ (*SD*, n. 4). And in *Salvifici Doloris* we also read: ‘Within each form of suffering endured by man, and at the same time at the basis of the whole world of suffering, there inevitably arises *the question: why?* It is a question about the cause, the reason, and equally, about the purpose of suffering, and, in brief, a question about its meaning’ (*SD*, n. 9).

The answer about human suffering (*the why*) we encounter in the example-setting parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Lk 10:25-37). A Good Samaritan is a person who sees, who stops, who is ready to help and to alleviate the suffering of another person, whatever the nature of his suffering: ‘The name “Good Samaritan” fits *every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others*, who “is moved” by the misfortune of another’ (*SD*, n. 28). He is a person who truly offers effective help in the face of suffering.

Going in a definitive way beyond a reductionist, ideological or pain-praising vision or solution in relation to suffering, the letter *Salvifica Doloris*, through this gospel parable, reminds all of us that the true response to suffering is love: ‘suffering, which is present under so many different forms in our human world, is also present in order *to unleash love in the human person*, that unselfish gift of one’s “I” on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer’ (*SD*, n. 29).

The encyclical letter *Spe Salvi* (hereafter *SS*, on Christian hope) of Pope Benedict XVI describes suffering (*SS*, nn. 35-40) as one of the settings for learning and exercising hope, together with prayer and the Final Judgement.

Starting with the observation that suffering forms a part of human existence, the document emphasises that ‘Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today’ (*SS*, n. 36). ‘Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering. These are obligations both in justice and in love’. Pope Benedict XVI observes that ‘Great progress has been made in the battle against physical pain; yet the sufferings of the innocent and mental suffering have, if anything, increased in recent decades’ (*SS*, n. 36).

He continues by observing: 'Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power. This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which... is a constant source of suffering. Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history. We know that this God exists, and hence that this power to "take away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29) is present in the world. Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world's healing has emerged in history' (SS, n. 36).

What attitude should man adopt in order to be able to face up to pain and suffering? In the view of *Spe Salvi* 'It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love' (SS, n. 37). This is what the martyrs and saints of the faith understood and experienced and what they now teach us.

'A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through "com-compassion" is a cruel and inhuman society' (SS, n. 38), Pope Benedict XVI observes in this encyclical. Each one of us has an interior task to perform, as the Supreme Pontiff tells us: 'the individual cannot accept another's suffering unless he personally is able to find meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope' (SS, n. 38).

On the campus of the Pontifical University of San Tomas, Manila, Pope Francis on January 18, 2015 met about 30,000 young Filipinos. Gljzelle Palomar, 12 years old, has been approached to ask the Pope why innocent pain, the scandal of scandals, on which philosophers and theologians have been reflected for centuries: "There are so many children refused by their own parents, there are so many who become victims, many terrible things happen to them, such as drugs or prostitution," said Gljzelle. "Why does God allow these things to happen, even if it is not the fault of children? And why are there so few people who help us?" The girl did not finish the question and she burst into tears. The Pope, sitting out of the text, replied: "Today I heard the only question that was not answered was not enough words, it needed tears. At the heart of your question there is no answer: only when we are able to weep over the things you said we are able to answer this question: why do children suffer?"

Then he continued: "When the heart is able to weep we can understand something. There is a worldly compassion that is not useful at all. A compassion that is little more than putting your hand on your handbag and pulling out a coin. If Christ had this compassion, he would have helped three or four people and then return to the Father. Only when Christ was able to weep has understood our drama. Dear young people in today's world lack the ability to cry. The marginalized ones are weeping, the ones who are left apart, mourn the despised ones, but we do not understand much about those people who do not have the need to weep. Only certain realities of life can be seen with eyes clear of tears. I ask everyone to ask: Have I learned to cry?" In the midst of oceanic crowds in the Philippines, Pope Francis's "theology of tears" is enriched with another dagger. "We learn to weep as she (Gljzelle) has taught us today," said Bergoglio to the young. Jesus in the Gospel wept for his dead friend, wept in the heart for the family who had lost his daughter, wept when he saw the poor widow who bury her son, was moved to tears when he saw the multitude without a shepherd. Who can not cry is not a good Christian. Be brave, do not be afraid to cry!"

We may also remember what Cicely Saunders (1918-2005), a British doctor, a pioneer of palliative care and the founder of *St. Christopher's Hospice* in London, said: 'suffering is only unbearable when nobody treats it'! This is the same thinking of Pope Benedict XVI who observed that suffering experienced in compassion, when the presence of the other is a living presence, is penetrated by the light of love: 'The Latin word *con-solatio*, "consolation", expresses this beautifully. It suggests *being with* the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude' (SS, n. 38).

Down history, hundreds of thousands of pages have been written on pain, on suffering and above all else on the tireless search for its meaning and the meaning 'why' and 'for what purpose'!

Today we make a distinction between pain and suffering. The apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* observes: 'It is obvious that pain, especially physical pain, is widespread in the animal world. But only the suffering human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why; and he suffers in a humanly speaking still deeper way if he does not find a satisfactory answer' (SD, n. 9).

Who has never discussed the famous biblical story of Job or never heard phrases of people that speak about 'pain of the soul' or 'pain of the heart': metaphorical phrases about the deepest emotional, interior and spiritual suffering. A great deal of research is currently underway in the world of health, and in particular in medicine, that addresses the questions of human pain and suffering.

I would like to draw your attention to an author, considered a classic author, and an author who is one of my favourites, Eric J. Cassell, who is very much esteemed and respected in the Anglo-Saxon world. He wrote a book entitled *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine* and has also produced about a hundred scholarly articles over the last thirty years. Only to provoke people's appetite to explore the thought of this physician and neurologist from North America, I will here describe his concepts of pain and suffering: 'Only people have a sense of the future and only they can attribute a meaning to it. Bodies do not suffer, only people suffer. This is the crucial truth of suffering. Suffering is a specific preoccupation that comes when people feel their integrity and fullness as human beings threatened or disintegrated, and suffering continues until the threat disappears and integrity or fullness are restored' (Eric J. Cassell, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 217).

For Cassell, pain is more connected to our physical dimension as organisms, to the central nervous system. In this sense, our bodies perceive pain but this is not the case with suffering which, instead, is what a person feels. In order to address and alleviate pain (pain therapy) we have specific medical products, analgesics, and to a great extent the solution to pain is to be found in our pharmacopeia. As regards *suffering*, that is to say what afflicts 'the integrity and the fullness of the person', we have available to us two possibilities when addressing this reality. The search to find its *meaning*, on the one hand, and *transcendence*, which substantiates the dimension of faith, of the spirituality of our lives, on the other.

These two elements can only be 'produced' in the laboratory of 'human interiority'. As an example of someone who looked for a further meaning to suffering we may turn to Victor Frankl. A physician who survived the Nazi concentration camps, Frankl was the founder of a lineage of psychology called logotherapy, that is to say the search for the meaning of life. He observed that 'those who have a "why" for living can bear almost any "how"'. A Brazilian philosopher, Oswaldo Giacoia Jr., declared that 'the unbearable is not pain in itself but the lack of a meaning to pain, and even more pain because of a lack of meaning'.

As regards the search for *meaning*, we could pose ourselves another question: could we not find here, in this search for meaning, the source of that reality that is so spoken about today in the field of the human sciences, and in particular in psychology, that is to say *resilience*? There is increasing agreement about the need to be resilient, to structure resilient organisations and communities, above all in the face of the tragedies of life, the loss of people who are loved, situations of burn-out...

In the field of transcendence we can observe an increasing interest in exploring the connection between spiritual life and health. In the United States of America, the John Templeton Foundation invests every year millions of dollars in scientific research and publications on religion, spirituality, quality of life and health. The WHO (World Health Organisation), finally going beyond a positivistic vision of health, is opening up to a position that values this important dimension of human life: transcendence with its human values connected with spirituality which has such a significant impact on quality of life and the health of a person.

To end this homily, I will formulate some thoughts about our International Institute for the Theology of Pastoral Care in Health – the *Camillianum*.

4. The *Camillianum*: after Thirty Years of Life the Need is Perceived to 'Re-invent it'

I will make only a few rapid references to this given that during the morning we will have an academic session on this subject. The original inspiration of the *Camillianum* was the ‘*nova schola caritatis*’ perceived and created by St. Camillus de Lellis in the far-off sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His cry, ‘Brothers, more heart in those hands’, still today is always of contemporary relevance, as well as being prophetic, in the face of the reality of medical care for man that is increasingly technological in character. This form of care is perhaps more effective in some cases, but it is deeply marked by indifference and dehumanisation. One of the most important reasons for the existence of this Institute is to generate in our contemporary world a new culture for the promotion of health, the prevention of illnesses, the humanisation of health-care institutions, and respect and care for human life that is wounded by illness, by pain and by suffering.

Today the *Camillianum* is called upon to address important challenges so as to be able to assure continuity for its educational activities, for the ‘formation of the heart’ (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 31/a), and thus to be able to form a part of the world of health.

I believe that an important dimension of this mission of ‘re-inventing’ the *Camillianum* has been its academic connection with the Pontifical Lateran University (2012). This choice must continue to generate in us a certain concern about the development of the Institute and the quality of the academic body, the infrastructures, and the presence of students who are an expression of the Camillian geography of the world. This process must continue with the reorganisation of certain internal dynamics connected with the economic and administrative dimension, thereby creating a new culture of university management and the autonomous search for funds that can support the Institute.

I would like to express sincere and keenly felt gratitude to all the protagonists of the ‘first hour’ who worked for the birth and the opening of the Institute. Many of these pioneers are already dead (Fr. Calisto Vendrame, Fr. Francisco Alvarez, Fr. Emidio Spogli, Fr. Domenico Casera, ...): may God grant to all of them the prize of eternal happiness and may they continue to be for us wise sources of inspiration!

To all those pioneers who are still living with us today and who with joy are sharing this moment of *καipός* (grace) – Fr. Angelo Brusco, Fr. Frank Monks, Fr. Renato Salvatore, Fr. Luciano Sandrin, Fr. Eugenio Saponi, Fr. Arnaldo Pangrazzi, Fr. Giuseppe Cinà, and very many others – we express our gratitude on behalf of all the Camillians of the Order.

May the Lord, St. Camillus and Our Lady of Health be able to transform our hearts so that we can be, and to live as, true Samaritan servants of the wisdom of God in managing human scholarly knowledge in the world of health!

Praise be to Jesus Christ!