



CADIS
CAMILLIAN DISASTER SERVICE
INTERNATIONAL

Codice Fiscale 978 719 505

A CALL TO COMMEMORATE THE FEAST OF THE CAMILLIAN MARTYRS OF CHARITY MAY 25, 2018

Dear Confreres and Friends,

Health and peace!

On February 2, 1994, the Order of the Ministers of the Infirm had officially instituted May 25 as the **Day of the Camillian Religious Martyrs of Charity**. The day also commemorates the birth of St. Camillus de Lellis (May 25, 1550).

The **Day of the Camillian Religious Martyrs of Charity** is a commemoration of the heroic life of more than 300 Camillians (seminarians, oblates, novices, brothers, and priests) who died in serving the victims of plagues in Italy, Spain, Hungary and Croatia during the first four centuries of the life of the Order. This is an exemplary witnessing of the “*fourth vow of the Camillians*,” that is, service to the sick “*even in danger to my own life*”.

Significant facts of the Camillian heroic history and tradition

During the plagues, the Order of the Ministers of the Infirm gave ample and touching proof of their capabilities, skills, and readiness to serve the victims open and conscious to the risk it entails. “In such exceptional circumstances, the community began to appreciate how well the fourth vow had prepared its members for the task ahead. Indeed, starting with the major superiors who were the first to offer their services to those suffering from the plague, the members competed with the other to be the first to be chosen and sent to where the needs and dangers were greatest.”¹ The fourth vow serves as the guiding star and source of joy and great satisfaction to their vocation and ministry.

Of the more than 300 martyrs of charity, only 222 of them have names on the record with the corresponding circumstances of their deaths, the places where they served and the type of plague that contaminated them. All the others remained anonymous for the reason of particular difficulty in gathering facts and evidence due to the tragic condition when the event happened.

We remember Father Pietro Pelliccioni from Milan who entered the Camillian Order in 1595. Father Pietro twice became the provincial superior and nominated as general

¹ SPOGLI E. , *The Diakonia of Charity of the Camillian Order*, St. Camillus Study House, p. 208

consultor and secretary general of the Order. In fact, Camillus has indicated him to be the successor of Father Oppertis as general superior, but he renounced it several times. He went to Genoa to look after the Spanish soldiers who had been quarantined due to a highly contagious type of typhoid. In a few months, Father Pietro was contaminated with the disease and died at the age of 46 in 1625. We also remember Brother Giacomo Giacometti who met Camillus and the Camillians while doing an internship in medicine and surgery at the Holy Spirit Hospital. He joined the Camillians in 1612 and chose brotherhood as a way witnessing the Camillian charism. In 1630, he worked at the leprosarium and later assigned to Genoa (Pammatone Hospital) where he demonstrated his ability to care for the sick *“like a mother caring for her only sick child.”* He was then nominated to the General Council. When a plague struck Genoa, he asked to be freed from his duty and went back to Genoa to serve the plague victims. In 1657, he was contaminated with the disease that caused his death on July 14 at the age of 65. We remember Onofrio de Lellis, the nephew of Camillus, a novice who died in 1606 while assisting the sick at the Holy Annunciation Hospital of Naples.²

In 1594, a pestilence struck Milan, and as soon as the request of Archbishop Visconti reached to his ears, he immediately ordered his religious to embark to Milan from Genoa. They left Genoa with their hearts burning with the desire to become a martyr of charity. While approaching the border of Milan, the mule driver begged not to oblige him to proceed to Milan for fear of violating the warning. Camillus rent another mule and in some parts of the journey proceeded on foot towards the city. On the road, he met some farmers who warned them sternly not to proceed to Milan. Camillus exclaimed at them saying, “It is for this reason that we are going.” As soon as they arrived in Milan, they went to the leprosarium of St. Gregory and saw their confreres untiringly serving the affected people.³

Among those who died offering their lives in service to the plague-stricken people, beginning with St. Camillus de Lellis (*though he didn't die because of the plague, but he was the first to demonstrate an authentic love and care to the plague-stricken people*), eleven of them were provincial superiors, five general consultors, and several local superiors. They manifest their great conviction and fidelity to our charism in times of plagues and wars to the fourth vow, which became an exemplary testimony of these leaders that made the rest of the members inspired to follow their footsteps. They kept the last testimony of St. Camillus at his deathbed: “[...] *being called to serve the sick is a precious gift, a talent which must unfailingly be put to good use.*” (Cf. Last Letter of St. Camillus).

² REALE G., *Religiosi Camilliani Straordinari Testimoni della Carità verso gli Infermi*, Camilliani, (33), pp. 84-90.

³ MESCHINI E., San Camillo de Lellis, il Santo della Croce Rossa, Edizioni Fiaccola della Carità, 1978, p. 78

The main purpose of celebrating the Day of the Camillian Martyrs of Charity

The very purpose of celebrating this Day - in re-echoing the official declaration of the General Government in 1994 - is to **remember** which means to know, investigate, learn, create a connection, and apply in the present the lessons of the past. In harmony with the Christian martyrs, our celebration of the Camillian Martyrs is an act which strives to give meaning to the very words of Jesus in the Gospel in our present context and needs. "This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15,12-13)

In our search for our charismatic identity and belongingness, remembrance of this heroic tradition is an essential aspect of our prophetic heritage. The heroic act, enthusiasm, and readiness of our confreres to accept death in serving the sick in the Lord's name, MUST influence our way of witnessing today to the world of health and in the Church more relevantly the love of Jesus toward the suffering humanity as Camillians in the footsteps of Saint Camillus. That is one of the main reasons that point out to the need to nurture it to make our witnessing more credible and meaningful to the Church and the society.

Secondly, we want to **celebrate** which means to highlight the values of the real heroic action, of the person, and of a historical event. It highlights the values of solidarity, commitment, generosity, self-denial, fraternal love and an option for the poor. These values run through the "veins and nerves" of our ministry that sustain its vitality, radicalness, and relevance amidst the fast-changing social conditions. Lastly, we want to **imitate** which means to espouse ourselves to the learnings and values which will help us to live our witnessing of the merciful love of Christ more accurate, relevant and meaningful.

Though the present situation does not guarantee ample opportunities to exercise our fourth vow today as the martyrs of charity did, the invitation to live in fidelity to our fourth vow remains. As Pope Francis says, "Certainly the heroic offering of life, inspired and sustained by charity, expresses a true, complete and exemplary imitation of Christ [...]." (Motu Proprio: *Maiorem Hac Dilectionem*, 2017). Furthermore, "in the life of a Minister of the Sick, the fourth vow is neither an adjunct nor defense. It is a substantive vow. His life, his religious life cannot be concretized without it. It is from this base that the task in hand, even if it has to be pursued to a heroic degree, is to be seen as a total response to the love of God, who has given himself to the Minister."⁴

⁴ SPOGLI E., *"The Formula of Life, the Basic Document of the Order of the Minister of the Sick"*, The Constitution of the Order of the Ministers of the Sick (A Commentary), ed. Angelo Brusco, Edizione Camilliane, 1998, p. 43.

Join and promote the mission of the Camillian Disaster Service (CADIS) International Foundation

Given the above exposition, the **General Government of the Order** through the **Camillian Disaster Service International Foundation (CADIS)**, the humanitarian organization of the Order, is recommending to all the provinces, delegations, and communities to celebrate creatively this feast of the Martyrs of Charity every May 25. The commemoration will highlight a special celebration of the Holy Eucharist, a novena prayer and a weekly recitation of the prayer in times of disasters. CADIS will send soon an electronic copy of the liturgical guide to all of you.

Another important highlight of this commemoration is the Emergency Fund Campaign. This will allow CADIS and its member organizations to conduct relief intervention at the very onset of an event. From 2005 to 2014, a total of 0.7 million people were killed by disasters, and about 1.7 billion people were affected. The top 5 countries that were impacted by the disasters are China, USA, Philippines, India, and Indonesia. (Cf. UNISDR). All these countries have a Camillian mission. Thus, their cries should not be left unheard. CADIS will also provide a separate mechanics of the campaign.

Fraternally yours,



Fr. Leocir Pessini
General Superior



Superiore Generale
Superior General



Fr. Aristelo D. Miranda
Director, CADIS

Rome, March 30, 2018