

**MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
AND THE CONSULTORS OF THE ORDER**

Rome, 14 July 2014 – the Fourth Centenary of the Death of St. Camillus

**FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF RECEIVED AND GIVEN MERCY,
WHY THE *HEART* SHOULD CONTINUE
TO BEAT IN OUR *HANDS***

*“Medicines are not enough to heal the sick,
that is to say the high temperature of the soul.
Fever against fever, spirit against flesh.
That is what **St. Camillus** did”.*
(G. Papini)

Esteemed Camillian Brothers,

Greetings of peace, of communion and of fraternity to you, to your communities, to those who work with you, and to the sick whom together you serve and look after!

With these feelings of hope and of trust – which we experienced intensely during the recent General Chapter – we address you at the beginning of our mandate at the service of the government of the Order, during this very important appointment of the fourth centenary of the death of our Founder, St. Camillus. We begin our journey with the firm commitment to go on taking care of the ‘small little plant’ of the Institute, with serene trust in God and the humble awareness that the good to which we are all called ‘is not our work but the work of the Lord’.

We wish to thank the Superior Generals and the Consultors who have preceded us in these positions, in particular the outgoing Consultors, and all those who have supported us and accompanied us with sympathy, friendship, trust and prayer: grateful for such beneficial nearness, we are confident that such support for us will not fade in the future, above all during the inevitable moments of difficulty. We express our gratitude to all our religious brothers for the trust that they demonstrated in us through their delegates at the recent General Chapter.

We thank the members of the General Chapter, the representatives of the whole of the Camillian Order at this special historic moment, for their trust in us. We will try to meet this great responsibility with humble awareness of faith in the work of the grace of God in our hearts, with intelligence, with joint-responsibility of fraternal support, and with trust in the prayers of everyone.

The date of *14 July*, which this year we are celebrating with greater involvement, invites us to feel grateful for the riches of the four hundred years of the heritage of our charism for the benefit of the Church and the whole of mankind, but it also places us in front of a demanding responsibility to the present and pushes us towards more audacious planning for the future.

Cultivating the Dynamic Sense of a Grateful Memory to Live the Perennial Contemporary Relevance of the Charism and the Spirituality of St. Camillus

As a wounded man, St. Camillus perceived how all human wounds need not only ‘*treatment*’ but also ‘*maternal care*’, just as the wounded, the sick, the sorrowful and the poor need men and women who take care of them as people and thus who give of themselves to them. And, while it is true that it is a feature of saints not only to perceive what meets the needs of their time but also to anticipate the time, it is also true that the insight and the charism of Camillus conserves today an extraordinary relevance in responding to what, without fear of exaggeration, we can consider as an ‘emergency’, an ‘anthropological emergency’, the question of what is man. All our missions will fail if man, every man, loses his centrality! Thus: ‘what is man?’

Camillus based himself on the spirit of Biblical wisdom, reminding us that the measure of the dignity of man is not the yardstick by which things are measured, or the results of our actions, but, rather, it is similar to the style with which the Creator permanently contemplates His Creature: “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ... God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good*”. (Gen 1:27-31). Camillus as well – within the culture of his time where the poor man without prestige and power, and much more the sick or in bad condition are not given attention, – discovered ‘*this man*’, indeed he sought him out, he discovered that he was a man of an equal dignity to every other man. After his conversion Camillus wanted to serve God specifically in ‘*this man*’ and to dedicate himself to ‘*the whole man*’ in the awareness, prefiguring modernity (holistic medicine, the rights of sick people...), that a sick man enters a hospital with the whole of himself: a poor man brings his four rags but also his free and immortal spirit.

The ardour of Camillus for *works and charity* was born in the discovery of the dignity of man, above all after seeing ‘in the very person of a sick man...the pupil and heart of God...his Lord and Master’. These principles Camillus dictated to the society and the culture of his time: not from a pulpit or from a university teaching chair but from a hospital, from that hospital of his epoch which he, too, entered as an ‘*incurable*’ person.

Yes, dear friends: Camillus asked the Lord ‘what is man?’: for him, the question of man was the question of God! In this sense we can understand better the provision from our Constitution: ‘By the promotion of health, the treatment of disease and the relief of pain, we cooperate in the work of God the creator, we glorify God in the human body and express our faith in the resurrection’ (n. 45).

This is a question that bubbles up from every human heart, in particular from the heart of the *existential peripheries* where the sick, the abandoned and the rejected are encountered; in those *peripheries* of the world of health and health care characterised by an absence of access to medicines and to basic health-care services – a question that involves fundamental human rights and thus calls upon the prophetic dimension of our being Camillian religious. It is a question that requires the evangelisation of human pain, of all suffering: to which we are called.

Camillus, to an elitist man of the Renaissance which excluded many men from progress and from the benefits of culture and of health, offered the answer of *dignity*, which decisively combats that ‘*culture of waste*’ denounced, still today, in very clear terms by Pope Francis.

It is the answer of care that does not surrender and does not stop but, rather, which always finds a way of offering support and comfort. It is the answer of *proximity*, the answer of service, which is always urgent because, as Benedict XVI wrote, ‘Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society’ (cf. *Deus caritas est*, n. 28). Given that ‘The Christian’s programme – the programme of the Good Samaritan the programme of Jesus – is “heart which sees”’ (cf. *Deus caritas est*, n. 31), this programme becomes for us Camillian religious a challenge to make ourselves grow and to help our collaborators to grow in the ‘formation of hearts’.

This was something that Camillus perceived in concrete and prophetic terms when serving to the sick. And it is nice to think that it was precisely that ‘service’ that educated him, matured him, and prepared him to accept the conversion that the Lord through suffering awakened him, transforming suffering into a journey to holiness.

It is the ‘anthropological conversion’; it is the proposal of a ‘plenary humanism’ which engages man to his fullness and which asks us to pass from the ‘law’ to the ‘heart’, from the ‘heart’ to the ‘hands’, and from ‘doing’ to ‘self-giving’: a move that leads us to an authentic service, as service to life: ‘the whole of life and the lives of everyone’. Thus conversion becomes an internal revolution and, as was the case with Camillus, it can deeply revolutionise our environment and the world, bringing the only revolution that is necessary, which Jesus pointed out and taught and for which we must increasingly learn to fight: ‘*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...Love your neighbour as you love yourself*’ (Mt 22:37-9).

This is the revolution of love. May St. Camillus help us to win it by putting it into practice!

Living our Camillian Vocation with Passion and Joy so as to Serve with Samaritan Compassion

The LVIII Extraordinary General Chapter has just concluded and we are invited by authoritative representatives of the Church to live it, despite the historical contingent sufferings that religious are experiencing, as a *καιρός*, an opportune time of grace and “*a locus theologicus*” – joyful, paschal, ecclesial – to reappropriate the original spiritual heritage of our Founder, St. Camillus, in order to inflect this mystery in our personal biographies for the benefit of the Institute and the whole Church: asking about and conjugating the evangelical and paradigmatic meaning of the Camillian charism in the emergencies of history, towards the future.

Continuing to draw upon the *mysteric fire* of the charism seems to be the superior way to read, in truth, the events that culminated in the resignation of Fr. R. Salvatore from his office as Superior General and to set in motion a pathway of greater comprehension of the malaise experienced by our religious confreres. The revitalisation of the Order requires a pathway of healing that should be lived in the logic of *wounded healers*, in order to develop the necessary *resilience*: to grow in the capacity to reconstruct ourselves; remaining sensitive to the positive opportunities that life offers, without losing our humanity; and committed with words and choices, with the decisions mostly shared and with a new style of fraternity, to recover personal and interpersonal trust (self-esteem founded on our identity, charism and spirituality) and social credibility (the public image of the Order).

With this renewed approach, all of us and each one of us, as individuals and as communities, will be able with serenity, trust and awareness to live service to the sick people that are entrusted to us with that Samaritan compassion which catalysed the best human and spiritual resources of Camillus and so many of our religious confreres who heroically lived charity and mercy unto martyrdom during the four centuries of our history.

This pathway of reconciliation and greater awareness will also allow us to purify the deep reasons for our Camillian vocation in order to decide and achieve a ‘good done well’ and not only done with an apparent façade of good. Thus with Christ in our hearts and solidly faithful to the truth of history, ‘we will be ready to answer anyone who asks us to explain the hope we have in us’ (1 Pt 3:15), with a *healthy conscience* (the truth of reality), *meekness* (humanity), and, lastly, with *respect* (dignity) (cf. 1 Pt 3:16).

Today we are called to be ‘missionary disciples’ in the world of health and health care, contributing to the growth of the culture of encounter against the culture of efficiency at all costs and of waste, to build bridges and not walls, moving from our selfishness, nourishing – as we are reminded by St. Augustine – a holy discomfort of the heart, searching and loving (cf. the words of the magisterium of Pope Francis ‘be joyful’ *to consecrated men and women towards the end of the year dedicated to consecrated life*).

The first and fundamental testimony to this conversion is expressed and nourished in the unity and fraternity of our communities: whereas in the recent past, unity was synonymous to uniformity, today we are called to meet the challenge of edifying diversity in charity. This renewed prospective of fraternal life is the one that is most respectful to the original identity of each one of us, being called as we are with our talents and resources, resistance and limitations, to construct a new style of relating where a brother looks after his brother in community!

During the Chapter we discussed topics that you in your local communities have already reflected upon. A *revitalisation of the Order* that passes through renewed dynamics of transparency and vigilance in

the management of goods, of competence, of prudence and of intelligence, in working with lay people as well as, for the development of the potentials of the works that Providence entrusts to us for the good of those in need; greater synergy in the field of formation in order to offer young men a style of human growth and vocational discernment that is more involving and a witnessing to religious life that is more authentic; a renewed impetus in the implementation of the Camillian Project which inevitably requires involvement and interest on the part of all the local communities and all religious. Thus, we are appealing to all and to each one of us for a renewed impetus in the concrete implementation of this Project.

The Great Hope that Nourishes Faith in the Providence of the Lord

The Blessed Cardinal J.J. Newman with great wisdom and realism reminded us that ‘the heart of man is struck much more by the testimony of facts, by history, than by intellectual arguments and reasoning. We are influenced by a person, fascinated by a voice, won over by a life that is lived, inflamed by an action’. The future should not be improvised but, rather, it should be strategically planned, according to the values of our charism and our spirituality. Profound confidence in the providential presence of God in history does not exonerate us from committing our intelligence and our wisdom to cooperating responsibly for the advent of the kingdom of God amongst us.

As the Capitulars shared their wishes, concerns, expectations and hopes, we want to transform it for us into a project and an operational programme, especially in those areas of the lives of our communities which should be more, and more urgently, revitalised.

The guidelines for the new pathway of the central economy of the Order can be synthesized around certain initiatives to achieve a more effective economic organisation which urgently remedies the critical issues of the generalate house and what is relevant to it, but they should also testify to a real commitment – in order to reacquire the trust of our confreres and our collaborators – to vigilance and transparency in dealing with economic-financial problems and in our relationships with our lay collaborators – to whom we ask even ‘ethical’ expertise in the process of economic discernment – and to a systematic and regular accounting by the administration and management of our institutions. Trust in the economic sector must always be demonstrated, attested, and checked.

There is a request for the reactivation of the *Central Economic Committee*, appointed by the General Consulta, composed of religious and competent lay people; the *General Economo* should be assisted by an *economic body* composed of persons which guarantee regular consultations and a feasible and continuous collaboration. In the annual meeting of the General Consulta and the Major Superiors the budgets and an annual accounting of the generalate house and the affiliated sectors will be presented in a precise way and be sent ahead of time to facilitate study of its details.

These initiatives of a technical nature must not, however, dispense us as individual religious and as communities from adopting a simple lifestyle which bears witness to our choice of consecration in poverty (cf. *Testament Letter of St. Camillus*) and facilitates real sharing with the poor people whom we encounter every day. We cannot ignore the provisional character of the current time and the culture of the immediate which knead our criteria of assessment. It is not enough to be just, good, charitable and supportive. We must protect ourselves against the negative mentality of the world: injustice, compromise, selfishness and pessimism. St. Camillus in his *Testament Letter*, manifesting the theological vision of his epoch, invited his followers to cast out the *Devil* who appears beneath the appearance of good. This is an invitation to cultivate a healthy discernment between *ingenuous holiness* and *prophetic holiness* which allows us to understand the signs of the times, the signs of God in our history.

Another great and urgent challenge is the reality of *formation*, which is organised through formation programs more respectful to and interactive with, the specificities of the cultures and the religious and spiritual sensibilities of the many countries where our Order is founded.

The Chapter agreed on the need to give concrete plans regarding the matters proposed: greater attention and care of the initial formation for the human and spiritual dimension of candidates (cf. to quote Pope Francis, so as not to generate ‘little monsters’) in a renewed educational climate but also a coherent witnessing to consecrated life; perseverance and planning of a collaborative effort in formation between linguistic areas; support to young religious in transition from the houses of formation to their first ministerial experience; the offering of solid programmes for ongoing formation, through inter-religious cooperation as well; the need to plan with care and incisiveness the promotion of vocations which involves personal witnessing to our charism, a structured animation by those who are full time responsible, and the promotion of our Order and its many activities for sick people, through the use of the mass media.

The four hundred years of history that precede us are interwoven by the great examples of witnessing to charity and mercy: this heritage, an extraordinary witness to the benevolence of the Lord towards our Order, should be a stimulus and an encouragement to purify our present – with its lights and shadows – and to reactivate a virtuous circle of hope and trust in the future. In the christian faith perspective, God accompanies and supports with His light our personal histories and the history of our Order, even in those moments that we’ve experienced the *shadows* which generate fear and slow down our journey towards the future. In the light of God, negative experiences appear as opportunities to confess our poverty and fragility: we can journey in peace and serenity when we agree to be illumined by Christ. May this light penetrate our hearts, our communities, Delegations and Provinces!

May *faithful God* continue to support us with good in our lives, with healthy and fraternal relationships in our communities and with the valuable gift of health and dignity for those poor people and people in need that have lost it!

In front of us there is a radical choice: to cultivate pessimism or to discern and nourish the seeds of hope. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), a physician, missionary, philosopher, musician and profound man of faith, dedicated the whole of his life to finding a ‘cure’ for the disease that had afflicted the whole of humanity – pessimism – but never giving way to the sad and difficult situation in which modern man lived: ‘The tragedy of life is what dies inside a man, whereas he is still alive’. Journeying in hope is not an easy and immediate pathway, but the hope that nourishes faith can make the difference and highlight the newness of a humanity renewed in God.

Cordial greetings to our sick and/or elderly Camillian confreres who, in the difficult period of old age or illness, continue to be faithful witnesses to our charism; greetings to our young brothers in formation: may they with their enthusiasm be infectious so that there can be an authentic renewal of our consecrated life!

Trusting steadfastly in the support of your friendship and in the strength of your prayers, we greet you!

May St. Camillus with his ‘thousand blessings’ for the Camillians of his time but also for future Camillians, and Mary Mother of Health and Mother and Queen of the Ministers of the Sick, continue to intercede for us with the Lord!

Fr. Leocir Pessini, Superior General

Fr. Laurent Zoungrana

Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla Sáez

Fr. Aristelo Miranda

Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon