



Testamentary Letter

Camillo de Cellis

San Camillo

TESTAMENTARY LETTER

Rome, June (various dates: 14, 20, 24, 29) and 10 July 1614

Signature in his own hand. Letter written by Camillus in his own hand about a month before his death. He had a copy made for each house of the Order so that it could be read to the 322 religious. He signed each copy. Camillus commended what he most held dear: he remembered in particular charity towards the sick, perfect poverty, fraternal charity, holiness in life, full parity between fathers and brothers, mercy... He ended by sending a thousand blessings to those, in the present and the future, who would work in the field of corporeal and spiritual charity towards the sick.

***In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, of the glorious Virgin, and the whole of the heavenly Court
Pax Christi***

Very reverend Fathers and Brothers greatly beloved in Christ,

Because without doubt within a few days I will go to another life, given that I am most grave because of my long infirmities, and by now almost constantly condemned by the physicians, it appears to me that I would fail in my duty if, before this life ends, I did not tell you with all simplicity and rectitude what I have heard and hear in me about our holy Order, so that everyone may walk with the rectitude and faithfulness that God wants of us. He asks us that we do not bury the very valuable talent that God has placed in our hands so that we may achieve holiness in life and then in eternal glory. There is also another reason: speaking in conscience and in truth, one can almost say that this foundation was done in a miraculous way with a view to the glory of his Divine Majesty and of such a great good for the souls and bodies of our neighbours. This is a foundation which is of much necessity for Christianity, much in conformity to the holy Gospel and the teaching of Christ our Lord; both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament he underlines this mission, through the example, as well, of his most holy life spent caring for the sick and healing every kind of illness.

I have said that this foundation is an evident miracle of God: in particular that he should have used me, a great sinner, ignorant, full of so many defects and failings, worthy of a thousand infirmities. But God is the master, He can do what He likes and is made infinitely good. Nobody should be surprised that God should have worked with such an instrument, given that it is to His greater glory to do admirable things using a nobody such as myself, or that the devil has never ceased and never ceases now to try to ensure that this poor plant, from which God expects so much glory, is destroyed, eliminated and maltreated in one way or another. If the devil does not succeed under the guise of evil, he tries it under the guise of good, looking for all the routes and all the means possible; in particular he can use some religious of this our own Order by suggesting to them, under the guise of good, to try to deviate or alter the purpose of our holy institute.

Thus everyone should be careful about such a great sacrilege and offence to God, which would provoke the ire of the Almighty, so that it does not fall on them in this life and even more in the other. I thus exhort all present and future religious not to seek to know more than what is necessary but, rather, to walk in holy simplicity in the things established in our Bulls approved by the Apostolic Holy See. I exhort everyone to be their most faithful defenders. Happy will be he who is this and unhappy he who is not!

In recommending faithfulness to our holy vocation I make especial mention of the vow of poverty. On this point I do not want to neglect to tell and remind all those present and future that if, as is right, we wish service to the sick poor in hospitals – our principal purpose – and in the commending of souls to persist and last for ever, we must conserve the purity of our poverty, with all exactness, diligence and good spirit, in the way established by the Bulls of our Order, because it will continue to exist the more where poverty is observed to perfection, that is to say in little things. Thus I exhort everyone to be most faithful defenders of this holy vow of poverty and not to allow in any way it to be altered even to a small extent, nor its purity through its deviation. We should not allow ourselves to be deceived by the devil in the guise of false good, thinking that we cannot live by alms alone, because this is a diabolical

deception to ruin our holy Order. Indeed, there exist in the Church of God very many religious Institutes that profess a poverty greater than our and yet the Lord provides for them in all their needs. Who could doubt, then, that He will not also provide for our Order, given that it engages in such a living work, not only in hospitals but also in the commending of souls? This is a charity that is much greater, pleasing to and accepted by not only God but also our neighbour: if he, so to speak, has bread, he will share it amongst us. Thus in this we must not doubt that we will have what is needed: indeed, with the grace of the Lord, we will have enough to throw away as long as we do our duty.

I do not want to fail to remember union, peace and concord between fathers and brothers, because, in all sincerity, not without a mysterious cause the great Providence of the Lord willed that we should have this name of Ministers of the Sick which includes everyone, fathers and brothers, and our ministry shared by all. We must, however, always allow ourselves to be guided by our second Bull 'Superna dispositione' which gives clear and precise directives both for the fathers priests and for the brothers about what we must do. One should not look at whether other Orders of the Church of God do not walk along this pathway because they do not have, as instead we do, a shared purpose between fathers and brothers. I commend everyone to observe in a true and perfect way the other vows as well. No one should strive, even with any guise of good, to take away from the brothers what the Apostolic Holy See has granted to them.

I exhort everyone, present and future, to walk the pathway of the spirit, that is to say true religious mortification, if we want to be almost certain of our eternal salvation; indeed, our Order requires perfect men who do the will of God and achieve perfection and holiness. These not only do good to themselves but they also build up the holy Church and the whole world. In it great progress and profit will be done through them. In contrary fashion, those who are sensual, of little religious spirit, not mortified, will ruin the Order.

I declare that my will is that the Order is not only founded in the large or less large cities but also in little places where twelve religious can be maintained through alms, and this with the purpose of helping the sick poor who die in those hospitals. Furthermore, I intend that spiritual care should never alone be attended to without corporeal care, according to what is said in our second Bull 'Superna dispositione'.

Lastly, if something remains that I have not clarified in this letter of mine, for the service of God, I commend myself to the Almighty to inspire all present and future fathers and brothers that which is for His glory.

Then, as regards the help to be given to my soul, that is to say the prayers and the sacrifices of my dear fathers and brothers. I know that their charity towards me will not be absent. Indeed, not only will they help me with the usual suffrages that are required by the Constitution when one of us dies, but I hope that in addition they will have for me some other suffrages both with prayer and with the celebration of Masses, because I have more need than others. I ask you this for love of God and the blessed Virgin: help me as soon as possible, as soon as my death is known, allowing as little time to pass as possible.

With this I finish and as far as is granted to me by God our Lord and from Him, I send to everyone a thousand blessings: not only to those of the present but also to those of the future who until the end of the world are members of this holy Order. It would be my wish, indeed will, that this letter is conserved in perpetual memory in the archives where there are the documents of the House, ensuring that it is not lost.

Rome, 10 July 1614

Your servant in the Lord,

Amillo de Cellis

“imparting
to you more
blessing
now
and forever”

Camillo de Lellis

1614-2014
FOURTH CENTENARY OF THE DEATH



EDITED BY THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION OF THE
4TH CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF ST. CAMILLUS