

**MESSAGE of the SUPERIOR GENERAL
at the End of the PASTORAL VISIT
to the PROVINCE OF SICILY AND NAPLES**

15-28 September 2016

‘Our founders and foundresses shared in Jesus’ own compassion when he saw the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. Like Jesus, who compassionately spoke his gracious word, healed the sick, gave bread to the hungry and offered his own life in sacrifice, so our founders and foundresses sought in different ways to be the service of all those to whom the Spirit sent them. They did so by their prayers of intercession, their preaching of the Gospel, their works of catechesis, education, their service to the poor and the infirm... The creativity of charity is boundless; it is able to find countless new ways of bringing the newness of the Gospel to every culture and every corner of society... Are our ministries, our works and our presence consonant with what the Spirit asked of our founders and foundresses? Are they suitable for carrying out today, in society and the Church, those same ministries and works? Do we have the same passion for our people, are we close to them to the point of sharing in their joys and sorrows, thus truly understanding their needs and helping to respond to them?’

Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father Francis to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, 28.11.2014, n. 2.

‘Mother Teresa, in all aspects of her life, was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her welcome and defence of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded.... She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity; she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime – the crimes! – of poverty they created. For Mother Teresa, mercy was the “salt” which gave flavour to her work, it was the “light” which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering’.

Pope Francis, Homily for the Holy Mass and Canonisation of the Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, 4 December 2016.

Rev. Fr. Rosario Mauriello,

Provincial Superior of the Province of Sicily and Naples

Members of the Provincial Council and Fellow Camillian Religious

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

As was envisaged, planned and awaited, we engaged in a pastoral, fraternal and canonical visit to the Province of Sicily and Naples on 15-28 September 2016. I visited the Camillian communities and met the religious, together with Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla, the member of the General Consulta who is responsible for financial administration and missions.

As an introduction to this message we would like to remind you that for this six-year period (2014-2020) our Order adopted the Camillian project for the revitalisation of our consecrated lives which was approved by the General Chapter of 2013 and confirmed by the extraordinary General Chapter of 2014. This project identified three priorities: a) the organisation of the economics of the Order, starting with the generalate house and these religious Provinces that most suffer from economic tensions; b) the promotion of vocations and initial and ongoing formation – this is a sector that is essential if we want to assure the continuity and the future of the Order by counterbalancing ageing and deaths with new members; and c) intense communication as an essential means by which to achieve fraternity, communion and community.

We have been experiencing an ecclesial context of hope with the election of Pope Francis and his magisterium. He is a Jesuit religious who knows very well the lights and shadows of consecrated life of the season that we are now living through. It should come as no surprise that he convoked the

Year of Consecrated Life (2015), with numerous initiatives throughout the world for the revitalisation of consecrated life through events and publications that were accompanied by incredible prophetic gestures which edified some people and scandalised others! As has happened with prophetic figures, now, with Pope Francis as well, things could not have gone differently.

The extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015-2016) was also promulgated. This happy ecclesial insight has been a valuable opportunity to explore our charism and our Camillian spirituality: as an Order we have received from the Church, through our Founder St. Camillus, the charism of mercy to be lived in corporal and spiritual works for the sick, as our Constitution makes clear.

The opportunities that are offered to us for growth are many in number and are to be found at all levels of our 'Camillian being'. We must be vigilant to ensure that we are not distracted and waste our time and are serene with ourselves so as not to lose the rhythm of history. Let us not forget that until the last breath of our lives we are stimulated to grow and always to learn something new.

As regards your Province of Sicily and Naples, we would like to point out that the central government of the Order (2014-2020) had already visited your Province and met a number of your religious, in particular in Naples. The first visits involved your Provincial Council and the Superiors and focused on the 'critical' economic situation of the *Santa Maria della Pietà* Hospital in Casoria. During the last visit of a (canonical) pastoral character, we stayed in all the communities of the Province, meeting the religious, either as a community and/or personally, and also took part in pastoral activities in various localities.

The visits from 2014 to 2016, in chronological order, were as follows:

1. 16-17 October 2014 in Naples: a meeting with the Provincial Superior and his council. The Superior General, Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla, the member of the General Consulta responsible for missions and the general financial administrator, and Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, the General Secretary.
2. 28 November 2014 in Naples: Fr. Laurent Zoungrana, the Vicar General and the member of the General Consulta responsible for formation, led a retreat on the role of the mission of a Superior according to the Camillian Constitution, offering it to the local Superiors and to the Provincial Council at the house of San Giorgio in Cremano.
3. 25-27 February 2015: the Superior General visited the Camillian community of Macchia di Monte Sant'Angelo in Manfredonia-San Giovanni Rotondo, places that are especially evocative of the conversion of St. Camillus. On that occasion, I offered a talk as a part of the course on pastoral care in health of the diocese of Manfredonia and I also met the Ordinary Bishop, Msgr. Michele Castoro.
4. 9-10 March 2015 in Naples: the Superior General, Fr. Leocir Pessini, and Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla, took part in the general assembly of the Camillian religious Province at San Giorgio in Cremano.
5. 8-10 May 2015: Fr. Leocir Pessini visited the Camillian community of Macchia di Monte di Sant'Angelo (Manfredonia-San Giovanni Rotondo). On that occasion the Superior General visited: San Giovanni Rotondo, the land of St. Padre Pio, and went to the religious house of the Capuchins where St. Camillus himself, on 1 February 1575, slept in cell n. 5; the *Valle dell'Inferno*, the place of the conversion of St. Camillus; the ancient religious house of the Capuchins where St. Camillus worked as a young labourer and which today is near to the local cemetery; and the Church of San Domenico in whose cemetery St. Camillus, no longer possessing anything, stretched out his hands, much ashamed, to ask for alms.
6. 20-21 July 2015 in Naples: the Superior General and Fr. Aris Miranda, the member of the General Consulta responsible for ministry, took part in the assembly of the Province and the celebrations for the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the *Santa Maria della Pietà* Hospital in Casoria.

7. 15-28 September 2016: a pastoral visit to the Province of Sicily and Naples by the Superior General and Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla. We met every Camillian community of the Province, the works of the Province, and those public hospitals where there is a Camillian ministerial presence.

The visit followed an itinerary that had been prepared and agreed upon previously. That itinerary was as follow: the Monaldi and Pascale Hospitals of Naples (15-16 September); the New Polyclinic of Naples (17 September); the community of San Giorgio in Cremano (18 September); the *Santa Maria della Pietà* Hospital in Casoria (19 September); the community of Macchia di Monte Sant'Angelo (20-21 September); the communities of Acireale and Mangano, at the foot of Mont Etna (22-23 September); the St. Camillus parish-community and the clinic in Messina (24-25 September); the community and the rectory Church of 'S. Ninfa ai Crociferi (26-27 September); and San Giorgio in Cremano for the Provincial Assembly (28 September).

In the context of the Year of Consecrated Life (2015), Pope Francis in his message to all consecrated people, when referring to the post-synodal exhortation *Vita consecrata* (n. 110), offered us important thoughts on the historical dimension of consecrated life: religious do not only have a glorious history to narrate and remember, they also, with the help of the Holy Spirit, have a great history to construct. Looking to the past, we need to cultivate an approach of gratitude so as to live the present with passion – for Camillians through a service animated by Samaritan compassion – and to embrace the future with hope.

We have contextualised in this historical perspective the reflections that follow, wishing to foster the involvement, the responsibility and the commitment of all the members of the Camillian Province of Sicily and Naples at this moment in the history of our life as an Order. We are animated by questions about, and reflection upon, the future and the history that we want to build, so as to live in the present 'with passion', seeing ourselves as instruments of unity and serving with the compassion of the Samaritan, as Camillians.

Looking at the Past with Gratitude **A rich history of four centuries: a short excursus!**

To know the history of the presence of the Camillians in the South of Italy, and more specifically in Naples and the region of Sicily, means to go over many events of the life of our Founder saint, returning to the beginnings of the expansion of the Order of the Camillians outside Rome, after 1586, which was the year of its foundation.

St. Camillus was in Naples on various occasions, both before and after his conversion. On 28 October 1574, before his conversion, he landed in Naples after a very tumultuous and dangerous sea crossing when there was a storm between Palermo and Naples. All of his biographers remember precisely that in Naples Camillus lost – because of his liking for gambling at cards – everything that he had, including his shirt! At the place narrated by this anecdote, a small commemorative inscription was placed which resisted until the beginning of the twentieth century. It read as follows: '*Qui die* Camillo sua camicia al gioco. Ed ora si adora nello stesso loco' ('Here Camillus gave away his shirt gambling. And now worship takes place in the same place').¹

After founding the Camillian Order in Rome, Camillus returned to Naples on 28 October 1588, after fourteen years, together with twelve religious, and established the first Camillian community outside the city at the Hospital of the *Annunziata* which had been chosen as a place for the exercise of ministry for poor sick people, in line with the style of 'complete service' – an approach which St. Camillus wished to achieve and which he tried to convince other people to adopt. The Camillians in Naples were also present at the Refuge of San Gennaro, at the Military Hospital of St. James (of the Spaniards), and at the Hospital of St. Mary of the People of the Incurables. At this

¹ C. C. MARTINDALE, *San Camillo de Lellis* (Castelvecchi Editore, Rome, 2014), p. 26.

special historical moment the Order was going through a stage of growth and institutionalisation thanks to the support of Pius V who had approved it on 18 March 1586. The first provisional Rules were being drawn up and the seat of the Congregation was being established in Rome at the present complex of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene.

On 21 September 1591, Pope Gregory XI by his Bull *Illius qui pro gregis* raised the Company to the status of an Order. The first conflict within the Order arose in Naples because of the question of the hospitals that Camillus was taking on according to the very demanding criterion of 'complete service'. This style of leadership, which was so much desired by Camillus, witnessed strong opposition from Fr. Biagio Oppertis and thirty-six Neapolitan professed. The question led to the convocation of the first Chapter of the Order (1599) and to the intervention of Pope Clement VIII through the Bull *Superna dispositione* (1600) which excluded from Camillian ministry the heaviest forms of manual labour. The specific tasks of priests and of brothers were also clarified in this document.

The appearance of plagues which decimated the population were very common at that time throughout Italy and also in the Naples area. Historians have observed that the population of Naples, including the outskirts, oscillated in the 1590s between 238,000 and 275,000 inhabitants. Over forty Camillian religious died of the plague while looking after the sick. Amongst them were the Provincial Fr. Voltabio and the Superiors of the three houses of Naples: Fr. Alberti, Fr. Capaldo and Fr. De Leonardis. Ottavio de Lellis, the nephew of St. Camillus, who had already done his novitiate in Naples, died of the plague 'because of the great love with which he served the sick and the plague-stricken'. Bringing forward his profession, he died in a holy way, accompanied by the 'many tears of Father Camillus'.

We should also remember the Servant of God Pietro Suardi who from 1620 onwards worked at the Hospital of the *Annunciata* and died in 1656. His body is kept at the Church of Divine Love in the centre of Naples. During the first outbreaks of plague no less than forty-six Camillian religious died providing care to the plague-stricken. Many other Camillians died during this mission. They are listed amongst the 'martyrs of charity' whose liturgical memorial is celebrated every year on 25 May. The exact number of these 'martyrs of charity' has not been established. In rough terms, more than three hundred religious gave their lives providing care to the plague-stricken.

At this initial moment of the Order, a major growth in the number of religious took pace. They had become very popular and loved by the people in Sicily and were given the name of '*Crociferi*' ('Cross-Bearers') because of the red cross that they wore on their fronts. The Camillian community in Naples became, with its eighty professed religious, the most numerous in the Order. The religious Province of Naples had 103 religious out of a total of 274 who belonged to the whole Institute.

Belonging to the period before the final closing down of the religious Orders by the State, we should remember the figure of Fr. Raffaele Danise who was appointed Bishop of Caiazzo. After engaging in his episcopal mandate, for love of the Camillian charism he returned to living inside the Camillian Order and settled at the community of the Church of Divine Love in the centre of Naples. The Province of Sicily and Naples at the present time is renewing this historic site in order to organise a Camillian community as soon as possible.

After Naples, Camillus began to cultivate the idea of founding a community in Palermo. Camillus had already spent an adventurous time in Palermo in 1574 and had sad memories of the place, memories which he wished to redeem through works of mercy. In 1599 he sent by sea two religious in order to begin a foundation in Palermo but a violent storm forced them to interrupt their journey and to halt at Messina. These two religious stayed at the local hospital where the admiration of the people for their devotion to the sick was so great that they did not want them to leave. Thus it was that the first Sicilian community was not created in Palermo, as Camillus had envisaged, but, instead, in Messina.

In Sicily, with the passing of the years, the Camillians increased in numbers and organised communities, the postulante, the novitiate, and the house for higher studies. During the period of

greatest splendour, the presence of the Camillians in Sicily, known as the ‘*Crociferi*’, amounted to sixteen communities.

Camillus visited Sicily at least three times. The first time was in 1574 as a mercenary soldier, before his conversion. The second time was in the year 1601 when he was 51, in his capacity as the founder of a religious Order. He visited the community of Messina (which had been founded in 1599) and the community of Palermo, erected in 1600, also laying the first ‘stone’ for the construction of the historic Church of ‘*Santa Ninfa ai Crociferi*’. He arrived for the third time in 1603. When he was visiting Messina, on his voyage he met some young men who wanted to enter the Order. Camillus wrote to his religious in Rome: ‘Here I have found many people who want to enter, and I think that there are more than about thirty, amongst whom there are some who are very good’. Some historical documents exist that support the thesis that Camillus visited Messina seven times, assuring on many occasions his physical presence at these young nascent communities. In the year 1605, the community of the ‘*Padri Crociferi*’ of Messina had thirty-two members, counting both professed and novices.

Whereas in Naples the followers of Camillus served the sick in hospitals, in Sicily they were principally concerned with providing spiritual assistance to the sick in their homes, and this to the point of being known as the ‘fathers of the good death’, winning the respect and the affection of the people. The Archbishop of Palermo wrote to the Provincial Superior Fr. Burgio during the cholera epidemic of 1837 and observed that the ‘*Crociferi* deserve all esteem and recognition because they have devoted themselves to helping the sick in the military hospital and in houses infected with cholera, both in the city and in the outskirts’. Although many religious Orders were dissolved (in 1866) by King Charles III, the Bourbon King of Naples, by a royal decree which prohibited the foundation of new religious Orders in his kingdom, curiously this document added that the ‘*Crociferi* fathers were expressly excluded, instead he wanted them to be in every part of the land’.²

Camillus during his twenty-four years of government of the Order, which included sixteen as Superior General, founded sixteen houses (in the South of Italy one may remember those in Naples, Palermo, Messina and Caltagirone) and organised service to the sick in nine hospitals. He admitted to religious profession 311 religious, of whom sixteen died ‘on active service’. Of the 242 professed, 88 were priests and of the rest over a half were candidates for the priesthood. There were also over 80 novices. After the foundation of the Order about 170 religious died – a striking death rate and one that was unprecedented when we consider other religious Orders. This was certainly the result of the dedication that the Camillian religious displayed towards the plague-stricken.³

Some Important Personalities and Facts of this Part of our Camillian History

Amongst the personalities of this early stage of the Province four can be identified who stood out on the historical horizon for their role and their positions of responsibility, which they held from the start of the history of the Order. Fr. Biagio Oppertis and Fr. Sanzio Ciatelli were companions of Camillus and later also Superior Generals of the Order; Fr. Andrea Scicli and Fr. Goldobeo Carami were the first religious to found communities outside Europe – in the New World, in Lima, Peru.

Fr. Biagio Oppertis (who was Superior General from 1607 to 1613), a native of Syracuse, was elected Superior General of the Order at the age of forty-seven as the first successor to St. Camillus. Fr. Oppertis was the founder of the religious community of Naples and the first Provincial of the then Province of Naples. In May 1622, he left Rome and returned to his beloved city of Naples because of his precarious state of health. He dedicated himself in particular to caring for the sick and the

² Cf. E. MENOZZI, *I Camilliani in Sicilia. Tre secoli di storia. Dall'inizio del Seicento alla fine dell'Ottocento* (Edizioni Camilliane, Turin, 2003).

³ Cf. P. SANNAZZARO, *Storia dell'Ordine Camilliano (1550-1699)* (Edizioni Camilliane, Turin, 1986, p. 71. We thank Fr. Rosario Messina and Fr. Antonio Puca for the historical information that they provided us with through their writings and historical research on St. Camillus and the history of the Province of Sicily and Naples.

formation of candidates as master of novices. He died ten years after St. Camillus. Fr. Oppertis showed that he was a person of great cultural breadth and depth, and was even capable, with ardour, of arguments with St. Camillus (without them ever becoming enemies) about the subject of 'complete service' in religious hospitals. He applied papal orders to the Order with great diligence.

Fr. Sanzio Cicatelli, a Neapolitan, was the first and perhaps the best historian of the Order and he had had an opportunity to live for a long time with the Founder. We have through him a detailed knowledge of the life and the work of St. Camillus and of the 'very human' details of his personality. Thanks to his privileged position as an eyewitness, they were perhaps not ones that were 'overly holy' for some people, but they were certainly full of truth and quintessentially human, without mystifications or 'excessive sanctifications'. We all know about the great historical value of his famous *Vita Manoscritta di p. Camillo de Lellis* ('Manuscript Life of Fr. Camillus de Lellis'). Fr. Sanzio Cicatelli was Superior General of the Order from 1619 to 1625. He was elected during the seventh General Chapter which was celebrated in May 1619.

Another two important personalities of the beginnings of the Order, connected with its expansion in America and who came from your Province, were Fr. Andrea Scicli (1613-1694) and Fr. Goldobeo Carami (1671-1733).

These two religious left the Camillian community of S. Ninfa in Palermo and ventured across the seas of Central and South America to look for gold and silver to facilitate the process of beatification of St. Camillus which was celebrated in the year 1742, and the process of canonisation which was celebrated in 1746 by Pope Benedict XIV who greatly esteemed our Founder.

At the beginning of the discovery of the Americas, the myth of Eldorado became widespread and it influenced the history of Latin America from the outset. Many adventurers braved the seas in order to find Eldorado with its wealth of gold and silver. A chronicler relates that two 'Crociferi' (Camillians), Fr. Andrea Scicli and Fr. Goldobeo Carami, engaged in this adventure 'animated simply by the goal of collecting funds to accelerate the beatification of Camillus de Lellis and to assess the possibility of founding a Camillian mission in Lima, Peru. The twenty-two years that Fr. Scicli spent on this mission and the almost thirty years that were spent by Fr. Carami, obtained the result that had been hoped for. They arrived in Rome with abundant resources for the beatification of St. Camillus and in the meantime the Camillian mission in Lima had been founded.

Fr. Scicli returned to Italy in the year 1688. In 1704 Fr. Carami began a new voyage to the New World. He arrived in Lima in 1707 where he developed an intense missionary activity of evangelisation that was greatly appreciated by people. He built a small oratory, starting with the religious house *de la Buena Muerte* dedicated to the Virgin Mary who was venerated with the title *Madonna della Buenamuerte or del Transito*. On 14 August 1712, the Bishop of Lima enthroned the effigy of *Madonna della Buenamuerte* in the oratory. Fr. Golbodeo Carami died on 30 January 1733. His passing provoked great feeling in Lima. Thus was born the first Camillian foundation in the Americas, outside Europe, in 1709, in Lima, the then capital city of the *New Spain*. The Province of Naples, in response to pressure applied by the central government, was dissolved by a decree of the General Consulta on 30 August 1885.

The Valuable Relic of the Heart of St. Camillus **Some fragments of history**

This relic has a valuable spiritual meaning and a profound historical symbolism which refer directly to 'Camillian humanism': 'more heart in those hands, brother'. At the present time, this heart is kept at the *cubiculum* in the generalate house of Rome and it has been there since the year 1925, the time of the generalate of Fr. Pio Holzer (1923-1929). This famous relic was in Naples for almost three centuries before the Superiors of the Province of Sicily and Naples gave it to the Order.

Fr. Giovanni Califano, a Neapolitan who had accompanied St. Camillus during the last hours of his life and who felt great affection for the Founder, on the same day as his death, accompanied by two medical doctors from the Hospital of the Holy Spirit – Dr. Girolamo Bianchi and Dr. Michele

Ercolini – authorised an autopsy on the body of the saint to investigate the causes of his death. In this context the idea was developed of taking out the heart in order to preserve it ‘in secret’ as a ‘living memory’ which would then be sent to the community of Naples.

Fr. Califano, who later moved to Messina, did not want to be separated from the relic of his beloved Founder, but at the same time he did not want to deprive the community of Naples of this relic. With the authorisation of the Superior General, he therefore took the decision to remove a part of the heart, the left lobe, and created a second relic of the heart which was taken to Messina between March and April 1616 by Fr. Califano himself, who was appointed Superior of the community (1616-1617). This relic has been kept in a very good state until today at the Parish of St. Camillus de Lellis.

This relic remained in the Church of St. Camillus until 1866 when by a royal decree the religious Orders were dissolved, including the ‘*Crociferi*’. The building was confiscated and then demolished. Many of the holy possessions of this church, amongst which the relic of a part of the heart of St. Camillus, were gathered together by Fr. Giuseppe Sollima, put in a chest and kept by two of his fellow religious for a number of years until 1890. During that epoch, the history of the heart of St. Camillus was intertwined in a providential way with the life of St. Hannibal Mary of France (1851-1927). He came from Messina, was the founder of the Rogationists, was greatly devoted to St. Camillus and was very close to the ‘*Crociferi*’ fathers. It was specifically this saint who saved the relic of the heart, retrieving it from amongst the ruins of the cathedral of Messina after the devastating earthquake of 1905 and then handing it back to the ‘*Crociferi*’.

On the occasion of the third centenary of the death of St. Camillus, invited by the Camillians to animate a novena in his honour on 17 July 1914, the then priest Hannibal Mary of France spoke as follows in his sermon: ‘O Camillus! O singular hero of charity! O comforting and saving angel of the sick and the dying! We prostrate ourselves at your feet, and through you thank the Infinite Goodness that created you and predestined you to raise to an institution the great charity of religious assistance for the poor and the dying...And we thank you, who gave us your sons twice: first when you were still a pilgrim on this earth and then in our time after their total disappearance. And how could we worthily thank you for giving us your most beloved heart, divided between Naples and Messina?’

With the dissolution of the religious Orders by the royal Italian government, including the ‘*Crociferi*’, in 1890, Fr. Hannibal drew up a supplication to the Heart of Jesus for the return of the Order of the ‘*Crociferi*’ fathers to Messina. For twenty-five years, on the eighteenth day of each month (the date of the liturgical feast day of St. Camillus before the reform of the Second Vatican Council), he prayed and led the people with the following words: ‘We beseech you to deign in your infinite charity to raise up these Ministers of the Sick and to send to this city true sons of St. Camillus, with the zeal, charity, humility and all the virtues of their holy Founder, so that through their ministry many souls can be saved and comfort your Divine Heart’. The Camillians returned to Messina in the year 1905. The Camillian community (*Crociferi*) of Messina was founded in 1599. St. Camillus visited Messina as many as seven times, and so often as to be acclaimed the joint patron saint of the city.

From the day of the death of St. Camillus onwards, the relic of his heart, moved from Rome to Naples, remained in the latter city until the year 1925. For almost a century it was kept by the Holy Inquisition at the archives of the local curia. Given that the cult of a person before the publication of his or her heroic virtues was severely prohibited and punished by the Inquisition, the ecclesiastical authorities, after certain denunciations of the public cult of the heart of St. Camillus – who was already seen as a saint by the people –, sequestered the precious relic of the Camillians and placed it in the diocesan archives. For ninety-three years the relic remained ‘hidden and lost’ in that place (1649-1742). On the occasion of the preparations for the beatification of St. Camillus on 7 April 1742 by Pope Benedict XIV, the Camillians acted to recover the relic and received it as a gift the same year.

But how could its authenticity be guaranteed after so much time given that it had been placed in the archives amongst many other sacred objects and in the meantime there had been a profitable trade in relics and counterfeiting was very common? Surprisingly, one of the decisive factors in demonstrating its authenticity was, providentially, the tear caused by the piece of the heart conserved

in Messina. After an inspection of the case, Cardinal Spinelli, the Archbishop of Naples, certified the authenticity of the relic which was then returned to the Camillians of Naples on 15 November 1742. It remained there until the year 1925 when it was moved to Rome and placed under the protection of the generalate house.⁴

Living the Present with Passion and Serving with Samaritan Compassion The Province of Sicily and Naples: from the Restoration (1935) until Today

By a decree of 4 October 1935, the Superior General Fr. Florindo Rubini (1888-1961) and the General Consulta re-established the Province of Sicily and Naples. The two ancient Provinces, that of Naples and that of Sicily, were fused to create a single body. Fr. Rubini had been Provincial Superior of the Province of Lombardy and Veneto (1929-1935) and after finishing his term of office he joined the Province of Sicily and Naples, going to live in Sicily. With time, he was again appointed Provincial Superior, became master of novices, and when his strength began to fade as a chaplain he visited the patients of the Monaldi Hospital of Naples where he stayed until his death.

The Province of Sicily and Naples, when it celebrated the first twenty-five years of its (contemporary) history in 1960, had 43 fathers, 11 professed clerics, 11 professed brothers, 3 novices, 2 postulants, 80 aspirants, 10 communities and 13 houses (chaplancies with the presence of at least one religious). In the year 2000, the Province had 32 members, of whom 27 were priests and 5 were brothers

During our pastoral visit (which took place on 15-28 September 2016), the Province had 27 religious with perpetual vows (3 in an *extra-domum* situation: Fr. A. Marzullo, Fr. M. Rocca and Fr. A. Russo), 24 priests, 3 brothers, and 3 religious with temporary vows. The average age is high: 71.5 years.

In the early 1970s (4 March 1973), the experience of mission in Africa was begun, in Benin-Togo, with the sending out of the first three Italian missionaries: Fr. Gino Cisternino, Fr. Vincenzo Di Blasi, and Br. Antonio Pintabona.

Today the Province of Sicily and Naples can rely upon the presence and the ministerial activities of fifteen religious from the Vice-Province of Benin-Togo. These religious are involved in ministry on a number of fronts: chaplaincy, formation and the coordination of communities as Superiors.

Despite the endemic fall in the number of vocations, the Province is cultivating some hopes at a vocational level: some young men are studying theology in Rome and they live with the students of the Province of Rome. A fundamental belief should be deepened: if we want to exist in the future, we have to invest in this sector in order to develop new Camillian forces. The current situation, which we also discussed with the Provincial Council, is a reason for deep concern: there are young men who wish to experience the Camillian charism; they are ready to engage in a pathway of discernment with us but we do not have the providers of formation to accompany them!

The Vice-Province of Benin-Togo has 2 novices, 10 temporary professed, 1 perpetual professed, 7 brothers who are religious and 65 priests who are religious, making up a total of 85 members. These elements constitute real and potential opportunities to create a new Province of the Order over the next few years.

⁴ F. RUFFINI, *Il 'cuore' di San Camillo* (Camilliani 'Villa Sacra Famiglia', Rome, 2009); G. ZONA, *I Ministri degli Infermi a Messina: una presenza lunga quattro Secoli* (Camilliani, Messina, 2013).

The Promotion and Conservation of the Evocative Places of the Conversion of St. Camillus: Manfredonia and San Giovanni Rotondo

In 2004, the first Camillian community of the Province of Sicily and Naples was opened in Macchia di Monte Sant'Angelo, a rural area dominated by olive trees and located on the outskirts of San Giovanni Rotondo. The Camillians took responsibility for the provision of pastoral care in the parish dedicated to *Santa Maria della Libera* (500 parishioners) and the coordination of pastoral care in health of the diocese, undertaking to visit the sick in their homes and in the local hospitals. They also began to promote and stimulate appreciation of the places connected with the conversion of St. Camillus. Fr. Leocir Pessini has visited this community on three occasions.⁵

The place of the conversion of St. Camillus, 'strangely' called the *Valle dell'Inferno*, is located between San Giovanni Rotondo and Manfredonia. This site was literally forgotten about by the Order of Camillians for centuries. Only at the end of the 1970s was there a gradual increase in interest in it, the result not of an initiative of the Camillians but of a layman, the engineer Pietro Gasparri, an ardent Christian who worked for the administration of the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza*, which had been created by Padre Pio da Pietrelcina.

This member of the laity, after reading about the life of St. Camillus, became very devoted to this saint and began to be interested in the place of his conversion which is located in the local area of the commune of San Giovanni Rotondo. This area, known commonly as the *Valle dell'Inferno*, the *way of Damascus* for St. Camillus, had never provoked attention or devotion in the past, to the point of not even attracting pilgrims. As a result of an initiative of Pietro Gasparri, that terrain was purchased and donated on behalf of the Province of Sicily and Naples. A monument was built, a large altar of a triangular shape, with a red cross on it that is about thirty metres in height.

Pietro Gasparri died on 14 October 2009. To carry on his work, on 15 June 2010 the St. Camillus Association was formed, whose president, Antonio Cappucci, has accompanied the projects for the maintenance of, and the improvements to, infrastructures for the valuing and appreciation of the *Valle dell'Inferno*.

This association has worked to create greater synergies between the town council of Bucchianico, the birthplace of St. Camillus, and the town council of San Giovanni Rotondo, the place of the conversion of the saint. On the occasion of the principal events to commemorate St. Camillus, the mayors and the authorities of these towns often hold meetings. During the days of our pastoral visit to the Camillian community of Macchia we celebrated the Eucharist in the parish Church of S. Onofrio in San Giovanni Rotondo, with the presence of the precious relic of the heart of St. Camillus (which was kept for centuries in the Parish of St. Camillus in Messina). At this celebration, presided over by the Bishop of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo, Msgr. Michele Castoro, the two mayors of the two towns were also present.

On 2 February 2015, the anniversary of the conversion of St. Camillus, a very fine park dedicated to St. Camillus was inaugurated. This park is located in the most recent area of the town of San Giovanni Rotondo. On the day of the inauguration, representing the general government of the Order, Fr. Laurent Zoungrana, the Vicar General, was also present. A large red cross has been placed in the middle of this park and around it there is a small amphitheatre for artistic performances.

The goal and the project is to greatly improve the area where the conversion of St. Camillus took place: to redo the road that leads to the site and surround the whole of the area with small walls in local stone, thereby creating a sort of rudimentary amphitheatre, in order to receive pilgrims and hold special celebrations. The original dream of Antonio Gasparri included the idea of being able to create a 'religious house'. Naturally enough, this project still remains a very controversial dream for Camillian religious, but this is not the case for the devoted followers of the Association of St. Camillus who want to put this dream into effect.

⁵ Cf. Message of the Superior General to the Camillian Community of Macchia di Monte Sant'Angelo, 8-10 May 2015.

Embracing the Future with Hope **Camillian Ministry and the Health-Care Works of the Province**

The Province lives and conserves the classic form of Camillian ministry: various chaplaincies in various public hospitals (the Monaldi Hospital, the Pascale Hospital and the New Polyclinic of Naples, as well as others), in particular in Naples, with the help of young Camillian religious from Benin-Togo. The Camillians are present, for example, in Palermo at the chaplaincy of the 'Villa Sofia' Hospital Centre and at the Church of St. Camillus and the Church of San Giuseppe Moscati. In addition, there is the pastoral ministry involving care for sick people at home which is organised from the Church of St. Camillus in Acireale, in Palermo, and the historic parish dedicated to St. Camillus in Messina.

An important initiative because of its innovative character, in the context of parish ministry, is the 'Camillian parish mission'. This forms a part of evangelisation in parishes but it also seeks to indicate the priorities of the ministry of health and visiting sick people in their homes, with liturgical celebrations involving the ministration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. This initiative arose from a valuable insight of Fr. Bartolomeo D'Arienzo who has celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of his priestly ordination but who is nonetheless still active in these parish missions. At the present time this activity has been officially embraced by the Province through the coordinator for ministry, Fr. Vincenzo Capozza (the community of S. Ninfa and the community of St. Camillus in Palermo). At the next international meeting of 'Camillian' parishes, which is envisaged for April 2017 and will be held in San Paolo (Brazil), this experience should be presented and certainly many people will be inspired by this methodology of Camillian evangelisation in parishes.

During the course of our pastoral visit, we observed with pleasure that the Province in its various fields of ministry and institutional activity works with many lay people active as volunteers and in prayer groups, some as members of the Lay Camillian Family, as expressions of secular service experienced in synergy with religious. 'How many hearts have been comforted by volunteers! How many hands they have held; how many tears they have wiped away; how much love has been poured out in hidden, humble and selfless service! This praiseworthy service gives voice to the faith and expresses the mercy of the Father, who draws near to those in need'.⁶

This secular dimension of our charism is slowly acquiring greater visibility and importance in all the sectors of our Camillian presence in society and in the Church. Even when there are no religious, St. Camillus, his charism and his spirituality, can be well known about and disseminated in the Christian community and society by zealous and impassioned lay men and women.

In a society that is becoming increasingly secularised, as, for example, is the case in Europe, a challenge for the future is the 'de-clericalisation of the Camillian charism', even though historically we are a clerical Order! We are not the owners of St. Camillus, of his charism and of his spirituality: they are a gift of God for humanity and for the whole of the Christian community. We are instruments and witnesses. In this sense, we have a very great historic responsibility.

One particular case is a source of concern for the present and the future. Near to Naples in Casoria, the Province possesses and manages the St. Mary of Pity Hospital which in the year 2015 celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of its presence and activity. This institution needs rigorous administrative care and has continued to generate concerns about its future after taking on rather high debts following incompetent and unscrupulous management which, unfortunately, damaged this work, with an undue removal of about ten million euros at the end of 2013.

An ambiguous action by the previous general government of the Order generated a general feeling of resentment in the Province. The intention was correct, given that the idea was to help to

⁶Pope Francis, *Homily for the Holy Mass and Canonisation of the Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Peter's Square, Sunday, 4 December 2016.*

save this institution which was suffering from grave financial problems, but unfortunately its future was seriously compromised and a feeling of suffering was aggravated throughout the Province.

Serious administrative measures have already been adopted and continue to be put into practice in order to achieve a financial restructuring of this institution which should be achieved over a number of years (reference is made to ten years) if everything goes well! Here we cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Instead, we should be for one another: united and determined to move out of this situation! The general government of the Order is accompanying this process with great concern – and things could not be otherwise. But there should be greater cooperation through the central commission of the Order in order to help you meet this challenge.

We perceived that without a suitable restructuring of works (debts) you run the risk of not having the serenity and the peace for good fraternal coexistence. Our ‘spiritual problems and challenges’, the way we ‘feel’, the thermometer of our state of mind in fraternal life, are always deeply linked to the ‘material reality of facts’. There is no getting away from this!

In Sicily, at Acireale and at Mangano, where the presence of the Camillians goes back to the year 1743, there is a centre to help the homeless; the St. Camillus Care Centre; the St. Camillus Tent in Mangano for people with HIV/AIDS; and the John XXIII Psychological-Pedagogic Institute for the mentally disabled. At Messina the Province has another health-care institution – the St. Camillus Nursing Home, a traditional institution of the region which has never generated major concerns at the level of administration. It provides an excellent service to the local community and enjoys a high reputation.

During the period of our visit, the talks and contacts with a religious Congregation for women were concluded. The project is to receive back, after twenty-five years, the Church of Divine Love and its connected buildings and services in the centre of Naples. This is a church which during the course of history has always had the presence of a Camillian community. The possibility of establishing a community there is currently being assessed, with the renting of the property of San Giorgio in Cremano starting in the year 2017. The commitment to cut costs and maximise results is directed towards supporting the financial commitments that the Province must honour towards its health-care institutions.

This change in the function of the property of San Giorgio in Cremano has generated a great deal of debate and produced a strong sense of loss in some members of the Province. Down the years this site has been the location of a seminary, the curia of the Province (which it is today), meetings and community retreats, and a house to accommodate many missionary religious from the Vice-Province of Benin-Togo. These are some of the reasons why this house has a profound importance in the hearts of many local religious. Unfortunately, its upkeep has become very expensive and the unexpected payment of debts to the local authority forced the government of the Province, with the agreement of the religious who made up an assembly, to rent out this property.

With the renting out of the House of San Giorgio in Cremano, a point of reference and a meeting place for the Province disappeared. It is hoped that the new (in reality it is a very old site) Church of Divine Love can also be a place where the religious of the Province can meet in Naples. We hope that it can be, and become, a family area, a point of reference to meet each other, to celebrate and experience important moments of community.

We hope that a place will be arranged which is suitable for the official seat of the Province – this could be the John XXIII Institute of Mangano which already has a large number of services that are currently underused. In Naples, in agreement with the archdiocese, could not such a proposal be put into effect?

Because of the financial crisis which has afflicted the hospitals, and more specifically the work of Casoria, according to some voices it appears that the Province has been concerned only with economics, forgetting about other important elements of our consecrated lives and levelling down to a one-dimensional approach. In reality, we must react rapidly and with competence to respond to this critical situation! As we heard, unless Providence ‘surprises us with a wonderful miracle, with a benefactor who has at least forty million euros. This could certainly restore us’. But...that would be

a miracle! Even if this does not happen, the miracle is hard work to engage in a management that is marked by persistent, competent, intelligent and wise activity!

The next Provincial Chapter, which you will celebrate in a few months' time, at the beginning of 2017, will certainly be a very important opportunity to discuss these questions and to re-define the priorities of the Province with greater clarity, with the commitment of everyone. We cannot escape this historic responsibility and we must commit ourselves to being for each other and not against each other.

We may cultivate different ideas and different points of view or perspectives in the search for the truth of the Province, but we can never neglect a unity of hearts with each other. Pope Francis, in his apostolic letter to consecrated people, warns us: 'Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love'.

At the end of this message we would like to thank you for the wonderful fraternal welcome that you gave us in the communities that we visited: rich and fraternal being together, together with an excellent cuisine which never failed to offer abundant pasta and very tasty Neapolitan pizza...

We were especially edified by your determination on your pathway to solve the economic question. If you are not able to solve these financial problems, with difficulty will you have the serenity that is needed to walk forward in peace in the present in order to cultivate a promising future. We cannot be slaves to institution and economics! Were this the case, we would lose the joy of living and serving.

To have been with you during those days also offered us the grace and the unique opportunity to visit holy places, to listen to thrilling stories, and to receive heroic lessons about the history of Camillians who animated the origins of our beloved Order which experienced its first stage of expansion specifically in Naples, with the first community of the 'Crociferi', as the Camillians were called because of their heroic service to the plague-stricken (the 'martyrs of charity'). We visited the places that are a symbol of the conversion of St. Camillus in Manfredonia and in San Giovanni Rotondo and we listened with emotion to the history of the precious relic of the heart of St. Camillus, in particular that piece of his heart that is kept and venerated in the Parish of St. Camillus in Messina.

I have already observed that the next Provincial Chapter will be an opportunity to re-define your priorities and that includes the three questions which for us are of vital importance for the future of your Province:

1. The promotion of vocations and formation: commit yourselves to creating a team of people who provide formation, to organising places that are suited to formation and ministry, and to facilitating the growth of young Camillians who are candidates for consecrated life. Here our capacity to survive in the future is certainly at stake.
2. The economics and the financial situation of the Province (social, health-care and hospital works). Be vigilant about the transparency of numbers, seek complete economic relationships, and organise periodic meetings every two months for assessment and planning. All the religious should be informed about the 'numbers', and above all the 'numbers' should correspond to what is 'true'. Develop a strategy for the payment or restructuring of debts for the next years (five years? Ten years?) with the help of experts in the field if this is possible.
3. The need for a headquarters for the Province. This reference point is very important in conserving, in a visible sense as well, the unity of the Province, so that it can be a meeting place for the religious, through the ongoing presence of the Superior as well, who as a priority dedicates himself to the animation of the Province. It is difficult to keep a family together when it does not have a home that is a point of reference.

Everything has a meaning in life; nothing is without meaning; a simple smile at times makes a great difference in the lives of people...Pope Francis offers us a shining example: ‘Mother Teresa! May this tireless worker of mercy help us increasingly to understand that our only criterion for action is gratuitous love, free from every ideology and all obligations, offered freely to everyone without distinction of language, culture, race or religion. Mother Teresa loved to say, “Perhaps I don’t speak their language, but I can smile”’.⁷

May God, revealed by Jesus, our merciful Father and the Lord of our lives, with the protection of St. Camillus and Our Lady of Health, protect you always, in your mission of being and serving with Samaritan compassion and divine mercy, and caring for the humblest human beings in the world of pain, of illness and of human suffering!

Rome, 4 October 2016

St. Francis of Assisi – the Patron Saint of Italy

Fr. Leocir Pessini
Superior General

Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla
Member of the General Consulta for Missions
General Financial Administrator

⁷Pope Francis, *Homily for the Holy Mass and Canonisation of the Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, 4 December 2016.*