

GIOVANNI AQUARO
Camillian Priest

Dearest Confreres,

On 20 November 2016 I crossed the threshold of time and entered the ultimate dimension, awaiting *a new heaven and a new earth*. I would have liked to remain a little more time with you. We know, however, that the plans of God are different from the plans of men.

When the call to the *last journey* reached me I found that I was much more frail than I could have imagined. And yet during my forty years of priestly ministry amongst the sick, how many times have I comforted, supported, and accompanied my brethren during the difficult season of illness! Now, dear Giovanni, I repeated to myself, your time has come. Now and only now did *the words* that I addressed to other people with so much spiritual emphasis and pastoral certainty find their truthfulness. Now *I have to get ready for the final landing*. Albeit with interior turmoil, from my heart and my lips came the words of the Psalter: *Lord before you is every wish of mine for my good and for healing. In you I hope! Do not abandon me, do not be distant from me*: I cannot and I do not want to be consumed in a rebellion or a flight – I want to complete this poor life of mine inside a *Yes*, already said, always confirmed, never annulled. Despite the dark sides. Thus a ‘yes’ of gratitude: for the gift of life, received by a *Yes* of my parents; for the gift of faith – nourishment and support for my days; for calling me, without any merit on my part, to follow him to dispense his mercy and his grace amongst the sick, who are an image of him. I hope – as St. Camillus blessed us – that at least one tear of those poor people can accompany me in front of the Eternal.

The second of four children, I was born in Martina Franca (TA) on 11 June 1945, to my father Giuseppe and my mother Mola Maria. After finishing primary school they found that I had a problem with my lungs and thus I had to be admitted to one of the very many preventoriums that had been created in Italy during the years after the Second World War. The place assigned to me was *Villa Buon Respiro* in the mountains of Cimini (VT), managed by the ‘*Camillini*’ (sic!)

This admission changed my life: there I met my new family – the *Camillians*. After getting better, and with the consent of my parents, of my parish priest and even of the bishop (all in written form), there I was at *Villa Sacra Famiglia* (Rome). The date was 19 August 1959. I began my novitiate in the year 1963, in part in Loreto and then in Costalpino (SI), a land where ‘Yes’ sounds out. I made my first profession in October 1964 and returned to Rome where I studied philosophy and theology at the Gregorian University. A good *Camillino* – the emphasis is of that time – was required to be capable of crafts and trades. The motto was ‘*oportet haec facere et illa non omittere*’. Where *o-mittere...to one side*, there was study. So with here and there providing a haircut, a place to paint, a performance to put on, and a *quick look* at books, I got to my perpetual profession: the date was 19 March 1971. I became a deacon on 8 December of the same year and was ordained a priest on 20 MAY 1972. I spent a few days at the Hospital of St. John in Rome – a chaplain. The Hospital of St. John – I learnt later – was, and still is, the community with the greatest continuity over time of a pastoral presence of the Camillians; a community embellished by the passage of the Blessed Luigi Tezza and defined by Vanti as a community of gold. Two years at the Hospital of St. John were followed by twenty-one years at the Hospital of St. James, and then another twenty-one at the Hospital of St. John (with a short break at the Parish of St. Camillus). A lifelong chaplain. Happy. Yes, really happy that I spent my life in this ministry. I loved it, supported by extraordinary confreres, who were at times true teachers. The *weather conditions of the community* at times witnessed strong winds with some stormy upheavals, but before every sunset the calm returned.

I had an opportunity to travel a great deal. With the Clergy of Rome we *were pilgrims* throughout the Middle East – those were unforgettable biblical experiences. ‘Pastoral support experiences’ were also valuable, in countries such as Chile, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Indonesia. Taking the Heart of St. Camillus to Peru was an extraordinary journey: an honour and a grace.

Another journey, planned by *He who moves the sun and the other stars*, was on the horizon. The date was 28 December 2010: cancer of the prostate with lymph nodes in other parts of my body. Today, in 2016, I am still here. Will I be given more time? Who knows!

So far I have followed a course of therapy that has been complex and stressing: endless blood tests, chemotherapy, scans, TAC, RMN, PET, scintigraphy, and so

many drugs and medicines, so many, and expensive, some of them very expensive, although they did not have prescription charges. Everything to keep at bay lymph nodes which had gone crazy. They go down and hope increases; then they increase and silence falls. A very capricious PSA without many petals follows dancing lymph nodes which have gone crazy. The dance of the lymph nodes by Giovanni Aquaro. A fine title; appealing and attractive. Lymph nodes of the side of the cervix, of the neck vessels, of the lumbar vessels; pelvic, paracaval, inguinal lymph nodes

It's enchanting to watch them move with elegance and harmony. It seems that they are dancing, and singing with me:

What will remain of me, of us?

A lark's song

up up...

Towards the high silences

Where our looks

Will meet each other

to continue

to dance

To the rhythm of eternity!

P.S. Thank you for loving me so much.

Giovanni Aquaro