

Manopello (Pescara), 27 giugno 2026
 Intervento di Padre Gianfranco Lunardon, Vicario generale dell'Ordine dei ministri degli infermi
 in occasione della translatio delle reliquie di San Camillo (26-28 giugno 2026)

The Healing Gaze

The Face of God and the Face of Man. Saint Camillus: the face of the Samaritan woman and the face of the Samaritan man. Through the Face of Jesus to the Sick. The Healing Gaze. First, however, we must heal our gaze!

Introduction. What is a face? The face of Jesus is the flesh of man.

The face is always an Epiphany of the other—of the fact that there is something else beyond myself. An Epiphany, first and foremost, of the non-self. It is not a mirror—as we too often try to make it—which is ultimately a way to erase this otherness that unsettles us. If anything, the face is a question: I am not-you, and who are you?

Faced with a “you,” even the “I” perceives itself differently; it is forced to see itself from another perspective, to step outside of itself. It is also the manifestation of the uniqueness of the unrepeatable singularity of concreteness, which upends every abstract category, rendering it inadequate and impoverished—functional only to certain aspects of life but certainly not to the most precious ones: relationship and communication.

The face is a story: it bears traces, wounds, and scars. Every face is a map that reveals age, suffering, and joy, openness or defense. Physical features and expressions, genetic makeup, and the way we have made them our own are always intertwined, inseparable.

The face is not an isolated fragment, a mask, but is in itself the sign of a whole (the whole person) and of its connection to a totality (the human family): every face bears the traces of other faces; the similarities speak of kinship and brotherhood.

The face is the most human thing we possess: we can have an organ transplanted—perhaps even the heart—and remain ourselves, but not the face.

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This is why disfiguring someone is tantamount to depriving them of their identity, as well as their dignity. This is why, in the past, conditions such as cleft lip were so stigmatized: because they “ate away” at the face.

In the life of St. Camillus de Lellis (1550–1614), we can distinguish two major phases. The great turning point is marked by the event of his conversion, which we recall from his biography as having taken place on February 2, 1575.

Thus, we can distinguish a first phase from his birth in 1550 to his conversion in 1575. This is the experience of a pre-Camillian Saint Camillus, in which the emphasis on suffering, illness, and the care of the sick, the poor, and the vulnerable is essentially relative and secondary to what emerges during this first period of his life: the face of Christ, the face of the power of His mercy and forgiveness.

It is this face of Christ that emerges, particularly powerfully, when Saint Camillus, in the valley of the shadow of death, falls to the ground and, recalling his sin, invokes God's mercy and forgiveness: this experience introduces an exquisitely mystical and deeply spiritual dimension into the life of Saint Camillus.

On an iconographic level, we could speak of the face of Christ reflected in the face of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, with whom Saint Camillus can be perfectly identified.

Beginning with his experience of conversion and, above all, with his experience of illness—I am not referring exclusively to the famous sore on the instep of his right foot, which opened and closed in an almost providential way at the important turning points in the saint's life—we can identify another aspect of the face of Christ that is revealed to Camillus and that Camillus continually reinterprets: it is the face of Christ reflected in the faces of the sick; that face of Christ which takes on the image of the Good Samaritan, but at the same time is the face of Christ that also takes on the image of the stricken person whom the Good Samaritan will care for and take responsibility for.

In this second phase of his life, Camillus fully embodies the image of

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Christ serving the sick, but Camillus, just as radically, contemplates the face of Christ in the face of the sick person he serves.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well. The Face of Christ and the Power of Forgiveness. The Education of the Heart and the Gaze: From Orthodoxy to Orthopathy

Authentic Growth and Formation in Desire

Jesus arrives at his meeting with the Samaritan woman tired from his journey, alone, sweaty, hungry, and thirsty. It is noon: some like to think that the encounter was in some way prepared and intended by Jesus.

There's no doubt: every encounter with the Master springs from an infinite love that precedes us and of which He is the guardian and living source. But I also like to think that it's a chance encounter with Life, one that can happen at the most unexpected and ordinary moment of our day.

Jesus arrives and stops. No rush, nothing special. He is a man touched by weakness, like the woman of Samaria, like us. What makes the difference right away, however, is his approach to the solitary woman seeking water.

Jesus chooses an unexpected place: the road, the deserted well, the place of everyday life and work. And he chooses a special way: the personal encounter, the one-on-one relationship, intimacy.

The premise is very simple: we must not be afraid of the other! The other person must be perceived as an **opportunity for life**, not as a threat.

Then something wonderful happens. Jesus takes the woman by the hand—and with her, anyone who is willing to let themselves be led on a fascinating journey within themselves. It is the path of love, which seeks its natural home: **desire**.

Here is Jesus' strategy for evangelization: to nurture desire! For the woman, it will be an unprecedented journey—uncertain and unclear at first, but ultimately exhilarating and revolutionary. Surprise, fear, resistance, embarrassment, but also wonder, joy, and passion: the woman agrees to let herself be guided and cared for. It will not be the same for the disciples, who are too caught up in their material concerns. And what about us?

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Let's look at the steps of their dialogue, which is both gentle and firmly pedagogical.

They are marked by four verbs, four actions that Jesus performs.

1. First: **Jesus asks** (cf. vv. 7–9). He, the Teacher, places himself in a position of need, and his first approach to the woman is to ask for help: “Give me a drink.”

Jesus presents himself as one who is thirsty. Jesus expresses his desire—a material desire for water to quench his physical thirst—but this desire conceals a deeper longing for relationship. Jesus is alone, and he desires to encounter the woman, going beyond conventions and superficiality. It is moving: the Son of God, the Messiah, the Teacher, presents himself as a beggar, one in need, one who is thirsty and needs to be quenched. There is no air of prestige or superiority: on the contrary, Jesus truly seems to step down from his royal throne to place himself at the woman's feet and give her the chance to discover her own importance and wealth—enough to be able to give Him, the poor one, something to drink.

Other moments in Jesus' earthly life immediately come to mind: his face bent over the apostles' feet as he washes them with the water of humble service; and his final words on the Cross, when his ultimate offering of love is once again a whisper of longing: “I am thirsty.” And the woman agrees to let herself be drawn into this mutual exchange of longing. The search begins.

1. **Jesus invites** (cf. vv. 10–15). Now Jesus can move on to the second step. Jesus invites the woman to discover that within her there is a need deeper than that for water from the well. He invites her to let Jesus' gaze penetrate her, so that she may recognize within herself the longing for God.

How many times must she have walked the path from her home to Jacob's field, thinking that her life was marked solely by the need to bring water back to her family, only to then prepare a meal and maintain a precarious relationship with yet another man in her life.

How many times must her outlook on life have been limited to physical survival and enduring a relationship she deluded herself into believing could satisfy her need for love! And how often does our own hope boil down to just making it to the end of the month—if not just the end of the

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day—snuffing out the dreams and expectations of a truer future, one that is built by digging deep within ourselves, rather than poring over weather forecasts or the illusions of horoscopes!

Jesus, drawing from the woman's very concrete experience and her contact with the life-giving element of water, hints at a new possibility: "Within you," he suggests to her, "there is so much more! You are made for something greater! You are of great value in God's eyes, and perhaps today he has something new to tell you and to give you!"

Jesus seeks to awaken in the woman's heart the most authentic desire to go beyond mediocrity and routine. And the woman, shaken yet eager, even as she resists the dizziness she senses, does not flee but remains on the path toward the infinite!

2. Here, then, is the third moment: **Jesus challenges her** (cf. vv. 16–20). And he does so with a command that touches the woman's real life. Only after preparing the ground of love—by sharing with her an intense experience of the eternal that she perceives with her heart, even if she does not yet understand it with her mind—only then does Jesus gently yet decisively touch the concrete life of the woman he is speaking to.

For God's gift is not truly real until it makes a difference in ordinary choices, in the concrete story of the person. She does not hide herself. She could have withdrawn, frightened or embarrassed.

But a connection has been made; the woman felt welcomed and not judged, seen from a new perspective. So she agrees to take a chance, albeit with trepidation. In Jesus, the model evangelizer, there is no condemnation—only loving truth.

The woman understands that something great is at stake, of which her own story is but a marvelous fragment. And Someone can free her from her chains...

3. Thus the fourth and final step takes place. **Jesus reveals Himself** (cf. vv. 21–26). Jesus reveals His identity, not only as the Messiah who fulfills the expectations of the peoples, but as the Son of God. "I am"—that is the name of God. It is striking: Jesus explicitly reveals Himself to a Samaritan woman—a heretic and a sinner.

Not to the perfect, but to those who are willing to enter into a mysterious and provocative dialogue of love with Him, where He is the one who sets

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the tone. The woman is still caught up in the religious conventions of her people; her mind tries to mount a defense; but love overflows, and cannot be contained. Jesus' revelation puts truth first: and truth is capable of burning even her weaknesses—and even her sins—with love. And ours as well. Before orthodoxy, Jesus gives us the experience of orthopathy: a divinely authentic sense of forgiveness.

The journey leads to the most unexpected outcome: the woman forgets her need for water, **leaves the jug behind**, and, refreshed by the Spring in her deepest longing for God, becomes a missionary. She proclaims the Good News, drawing from her own experience, from her very personal encounter with Jesus.

Of course, she must have returned to her daily routine: work, home, relationships. But what has changed is her heart. There, the horizon of love that makes all things true has finally opened up.

And from religion—as a prison of bonds that divide—she has moved on to faith, a relationship that sets life free.

The Conversion – February 2, 1575.

God's gaze that heals Camillo's life and soul

We can define a person's spiritual experience as a progressive and new awareness of the God of the Gospel within the awareness of oneself. **"Turn your gaze inward"** (St. Teresa of Avila).

It is as if we were given a new way of seeing, a new way of looking at ourselves, through which—surprisingly—we also discover God's presence. It is the beginning of a new way of defining ourselves, starting from the experience of unconditional love; a new way of defining ourselves from which we cannot exclude God, lest we deny our very identity.

This new way of seeing ourselves and God is a willingness to accept ourselves as we are and to allow God to exist as He chooses to reveal Himself. A way that inevitably demands a purification of the mind, the heart, desire, and the will. Between illusion (a "purely natural" faith) and the authentic experience of God, there is therefore an obligatory step: conversion.

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We thus approach Camillo's spiritual experience, and we do so precisely starting from the moment of his conversion.

Although hagiography presents the event as a specific, dated moment, Camillo's conversion was a slow process that lasted his entire life—certainly not a one-time event on that February 2, 1575.

In fact, from the moment he experienced God's love, Camillo was struck “by such a profound blow that for the rest of his life he always carried its memory and its marks in his heart.”

Camillus is called to “his true knowledge”

(title of Chapter X of the manuscript life of St. Camillus – St. Ciccilli)

“Called”: thus we are in the midst of the Lord's gift of grace, of God's providential and gratuitous initiative... certainly through a series of historical mediators (Antonio of Nicastro, Friar Angelo, ...)

“His knowledge”: “his”—whose? Camillus's or God's? The narrative then clarifies this: it refers, in fact, to both.

“Kneeling on a rock, he began, with unusual sorrow and tears streaming from his eyes, to weep bitterly over his past life. Saying...: ‘Ah, wretched and unhappy am I! What great blindness was mine not to have known my Lord sooner?’” (Vms 46).

Camillus “turns his gaze inward” and there makes the most startling discovery of his life: he sees “the blemishes and ugliness... of his wretched state” and, right there beside him, a God who loves him nonetheless.

Perhaps Camillo always remembered that day as the “day of his conversion”—certainly not because he lived off his income from then on; rather, perhaps that was the first time he looked at God in a new way, beginning to discover God's true face, which is “always beyond” our schemes, our ideas, our images, and our ideals.

From the moment he allowed God's face to shine with its own light, he was irresistibly drawn to it. Camillo discovers that God is God and not a man, that He cannot be confined within the narrow confines of our perspectives, that He is constant newness and continually surprises us... that His thoughts are not our thoughts...

Camillo's true “knowledge of God” is that of a mercy beyond all hope. Camillo's spiritual experience appears deeply marked by a new awareness (in

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the light of God this time, and not merely of himself) of his own limitations and sins.

One is reminded of Oscar Wilde's witty remark: "Experience: the name men give to their own mistakes." Indeed, "his principal exercise [was to] make a daily feast of weeping over the sins of his past youth."

"No more world, no more world"

Just as Zacchaeus "restores"—there is always a very concrete and extremely costly price to pay to prove to oneself that conversion is true, profound, irreversible, and not merely a romantic sentiment—it is absolutely necessary to "burn the boat"; it is not enough simply to pull it ashore!

This is the resolution in which the program of his new life is condensed, the goal of his conversion. But what does it mean?

It is certainly a sign of a radical change, but precisely because it "puts the ax to the root," conversion requires a change in **quality** rather than in **quantity**.

Rather than adding something new—even something "more perfect"—to our lives, it is a matter of imprinting a new style upon them. In conversion, it is not so much the objects of one's interests that change, but rather the criteria by which those objects are evaluated.

It has been pointed out that the same desire lies at the root of both sin and conversion: the desire to be "like God" unites Adam and Eve on the one hand and the resolve of those who are converting on the other. What changes is the driving force: no longer self-satisfaction, but self-transcendence.

One moves from the desire to "save one's life" to the desire to "lose it for God."

What once satisfied the heart and gratified its needs (to the point of making it dependent on them) now proves truly insignificant in the face of this new way of seeing oneself before God. But even in this case, it is nothing more than a demonstration that it is precisely this limitation that becomes an opportunity for salvation, an offering—perhaps even an opportunity for the self-sacrifice of oneself (beyond and even before that of others!).

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“Grant me the space for true penance”

Reading the account of Camillus's life before his conversion, we notice another element of continuity, one that takes on a diametrically opposite meaning after his encounter with God: it seems he also had the habit—especially in situations of grave danger—of making vows (which he would usually forget once the danger had passed)!

From vows made “in vain” to the vow to give himself even at the risk of death (the fourth vow): in between lies a long journey of conversion.

This evolution marks a conversion of spiritual experience—the transition from a “functional” spiritual experience to a “personal” one. Camillus's faith is purified: before, it appeared mostly as an expression of a natural inclination; now, it is a gift from God that he has received and made his own.

Before, God was placed in a position where He could satisfy desires, meet needs, and give meaning to what would otherwise be absurd, and faith in Him was something that probably satisfied him—and certainly reassured him—in the face of the immediate prospect of death.

The personal encounter with the God who reveals Himself as the One who is “always-other” unmask the “sedative god,” the “antidepressant,” the idol, and the false god of Camillo's past.

I believe this was the “space of true penance” that Camillo asked for in prayer and which God granted him: now Camillo discovers a God who, instead of fulfilling desires, communicates His own (“My thoughts are not your thoughts”), challenges, unsettles, creates tension, and asks man to desire no longer his own will, but according to the desires of His heart.

From an existential perspective, this shift in perspective implies a Copernican revolution, in which—in concrete terms—Camillo removes himself from the center of the universe and restores God to that place.

Converting Mind, Heart, and Desire

From Camillo's story, we can understand that conversion is often not an exceptional or miraculous event, but rather a process of purification—a radical change in one's life perspective. It is the transition from illusion to encounter, from my desires to His, from a false to an authentic spiritual experience.

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Intellectual Conversion

At this level, one understands the values well, but there is a risk that it will remain merely an intellectual attraction; the new criteria are not necessarily applied to decisions, because even though one “sees clearly,” one may not feel personally involved at all.

If we stop here, perhaps we have love “with all our mind,” but also a love of “the mind alone,” which immediately reveals its limitations and absurdity. God may even become an interesting topic, a matter of speculation, but He may not touch life in its raw ordinariness.

This person cannot tolerate unanswered questions, much less anyone changing their questions! Faith, with the inevitable uncertainty that characterizes it, terrifies them.

They do not know how to walk in the darkness of faith; they do not know how to surrender to an attitude of faith, much less do they have the courage to take the risk of faith: they are incapable of trusting and entrusting themselves, because deep down they have not yet understood that God asks for a relationship of trust and not of certainties! His faith may be unshakable, but it is also a poor faith: he wants to believe with his mind, but not involve the rest—his heart, his desires, his decisions...—and this is his delusion.

Moral Conversion

It consists in choosing what is truly good, and thus also choosing value over satisfaction when value and satisfaction are in conflict.

It is one thing to know the values of the Gospel; it is another to make them the criteria that guide one's decisions. But it is also true that it is one thing to make a decision and quite another to put it into practice! Here we descend to a more existential level, one that touches the very heart of everyday life: here lies the effort to orient one's entire life toward the values in which one believes. Yet this constitutes both the strength and the limitation of this conversion.

Lurking just around the corner is the risk of voluntarism. The choice of what is good and valuable can, in fact, be lived out within the narrow logic of obligation and duty; it can be tainted by a strong sense of guilt toward every form—even legitimate and desirable ones—of satisfaction and pleasure, which will ultimately push the person toward such rigidity that it becomes a source of ever-increasing tension and frustration. Faith is reduced to morality,

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the experience of love to a precept, and the gratuitousness of grace is harnessed within the confines of the law.

The spiritual experience is lived primarily in terms of an achievement rather than a gift, and since personal esteem often depends on observance, failure is perceived as the greatest misfortune that can befall one.

It's a short step from voluntarism to perfectionism. This person is too busy preserving their own irreproachability to set aside energy for love; they are too busy "earning" heaven to be able to perceive—as we've also seen in Camillo's conversion—beyond their limitations and sin, a mercy that loves them in a completely gratuitous and unmotivated way; they are too caught up in denying their own limitations and justifying themselves to transcend themselves and discover the countless reasons to be grateful... Let's be clear: there is no ill will in all this—if anything, there is too much of it!

Religious Conversion (cf. Zacchaeus)

It consists in being seized by what touches us most deeply.

It is surrendering oneself totally and forever—without conditions, restrictions, or reservations. In other words, it is having the courage to risk one's life for the Gospel. It goes without saying that if this were not first and foremost a gift from above, it would not be possible at all.

Through the experience of this unconditional love, our frame of reference is turned upside down: now the true failure is the inability to surrender oneself completely, to respond with an equally radical love, in order to remain attached to oneself.

From this new perspective, the person is freed from themselves—or, if you will, liberated from the imposed conditioning of the inevitable price to be paid.

But the horizon has changed, and so has the criterion that drives desire and guides decision and action: no longer the **price** to be paid, but rather the beloved to be reached, whatever the cost.

The Good Samaritan

The icon so dear to us Camillians—that of the "Good Samaritan"—I would like to present by letting Camillus himself speak: **"to learn to die in order to live" and "to learn to live in order to die."**

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The fundamental rule bequeathed to us by Saint Camillus is the proposal of a timeless value that then opens up, for us, the responsibility of a radical duty and a specific way of life.

Formula of Life for Ministers to the Sick

From the first constitution of the Order, promulgated by the second General Chapter (1599)

“If, inspired by the Lord God, anyone wishes to practice the corporal (**Samaritan**) and spiritual works of mercy according to our Institute, let him know that he must be dead to the world—that is, to relatives, friends, possessions, and himself, in order to live solely for Jesus Crucified under His most gentle yoke of perpetual poverty, chastity, and obedience, and in service to the poor and sick—even those afflicted by the plague—in their bodily and spiritual needs, day and night, according to what is commanded of him.

He will do this out of true love for God, as penance for his own sins, remembering what the Truth, Jesus Christ, says: “Whatever you did for one of these least of my brothers, you did for me,” and elsewhere: “I was sick and you visited me: come with me, O blessed ones, and take possession of the Kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.” In fact, the Lord says, “With the measure you have used to measure others, you will be measured in return.”

Therefore, let anyone who has been thus inspired by the Lord meditate on the meaning of the perfect truth of these words and delve deeply into this excellent means of acquiring the precious pearl of charity, of which the Holy Gospel says: “When a man finds it, he sells all his possessions and buys it.” This pearl is precisely what transforms us into God, purifying us from the stains of sin, for charity covers a multitude of sins.

Therefore, whoever wishes to enter our Order should realize that he must be dead to himself, if he has received such a great gift of grace from the Holy Spirit that he cares neither for death nor for life, neither for sickness nor for health: but, as one who is dead to the world in every respect, he must give himself completely to fulfilling God’s will in perfect obedience to his superiors, renouncing his own will entirely, and consider it a great gain to die for Christ Jesus the Crucified, our Lord, who says: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” [...]

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Thus renewed, let him prepare himself to suffer greatly for the glory of God and for the salvation of his own soul and that of his neighbor.”

In the Rule of Life for the Ministers of the Sick, it is interesting to note—precisely in reference to “holiness”—this threefold emphasis on being “dead to the world,” “dead to oneself,” and “dead to the world in every respect.”

Thus, for Camillus, there is a ‘dying in order to live’ as well as a ‘living in order to die’; that is, a dying and a living, understood and lived precisely as a “reserving oneself in an absolutely exclusive sense / without any kind of reductionism,” all for the most sacred thing par excellence: the “service of the poor and sick, even those afflicted with the plague,” done “out of true love for God.”

In this text we find an expression that points us in a precise direction for reflection on Camillus’s experience of the cross and of mercy, the primary and enduring sources of his holiness: for him, service to the sick was the place where he “learned to live in order to die.”

These two expressions aptly summarize Camillus’s experience of holiness: his entire life was “**B learning** to live in order to die and to die in order to live,” at the school of the Crucified One.

But this still does not seem to be enough: holiness consists in a “good deed done well” (**first good**: seeing, stopping, money spent, the innkeeper’s involvement, postponing one’s own commitments, mortgaging one’s future with the promise to return; **second good**: discretio, ‘for God’s sake’), in which the “primary good” is not the external, apparent, visible, objectified, quantifiable content of one’s actions; rather, it is primarily embodied in a radical, coherent “Christian way of life,” constantly monitored in its deepest motivations.

In fact, when Camillus comes to identify the sole and fundamental reason for practicing the “works of mercy”—in dying to oneself and living solely for the Crucified One—he states, in a sober yet extremely clear formula: “which one will do out of true love for God.”

Here we touch upon the very core—and often overlooked aspect—of the experience of faith and thus of holiness, which is capable of making mercy authentic. Camillo invites us to go beyond appearances, to look at ourselves in the presence of the cross, and to allow his word to set us in the truth. The emphasis placed on the adjective “true” seems to point to the possibility (which is far more than a mere possibility, since it is, in fact, the

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ordinary situation!) of a “false” love of God, of a superficial mercy toward the sick—which becomes the most radical form of anti-holiness!

Camillo understood the distinction between “real good” (true) and “apparent good” (untrue good), between what I value as a value—a good in and of itself—and what is, in some way, merely something important to me. As in other aspects of the life of faith—and perhaps even more so—in the works of mercy, what is at stake is our ability to offer a sincere gift (which does not always coincide with good intentions, though they certainly motivate us) of ourselves to others.

The call to true love confronts us with the urgency of questions such as: What am I truly seeking in my service to the sick—in what I do? For whom am I doing what I do? Who is causing me to do what I am doing? To whom am I actually giving this part of my time, my energy, my life... which I believe I am giving?

If, in an effort to be honest with ourselves in the face of the crucified love, the answers we are able to give ourselves do not go beyond the appearance of that “good” we do (and which is often “clearly visible” to others, so they won’t ignore it!)...; if we are unable to discern that “true good” by which we have been seized and upon which we have decided to stake the meaning of our lives...; if, behind the ebb and flow of gratifications that inevitably sustain and motivate our daily choices—including our small and great moments of “self-giving”—the one true response—to Jesus Crucified—does not emerge—even if only in its embryonic form—then we are deceiving ourselves (it is somewhat harder to deceive others; we can never deceive God).

If the answer (certainly not the verbal one, but the existential one, which takes shape in our lifestyles, in the small, ordinary, often straightforward choices that make up our days) is not “for Jesus Crucified,” inevitably—whether we want to acknowledge it or not—it will always be an answer that boils down to “for myself” (“Save yourself” or “Am I my brother’s keeper?”)!

I will discover that there are always spaces, situations, relationships—and probably even moments of service—exclusively reserved for myself, in which I can be and live only for myself and bend everything around me to this end.

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The True Sign of Love: Suffering and “Great Suffering”

Can “great suffering” be a “mercy of the Lord”? It is a question that St. Camillus compels us to consider. In fact, he used to speak of suffering and illness as a “mercy of the Lord.” Keeping in mind the question about the sincerity and truth of our mercy—which Camillus has compelled us to ask ourselves previously—it may be natural to wonder: But how (or even “if”) is it possible to live out the gratuitousness of love?

The Rule of Life can offer us an important guide for discerning our fidelity to the (Camillian) charism of mercy, and ultimately, for discerning the very quality of our striving for holiness of life. Camillus concludes: “But let everyone, as if dead to the world, give themselves entirely to the fulfillment of God’s will... and consider it a great gain to die for the crucified Christ Jesus, our Lord... and, thus renewed, prepare to suffer greatly for the glory of God, and for the salvation of one’s own soul and the souls of one’s neighbors.”

Whoever has set out on the path of mercy out of true love for God will certainly be tested by suffering. There is no intention whatsoever to equate discipleship with illness; if one must at all costs draw an equation, the terms are rather “true love” and “pain”! But now pain, weakness, trial, limitation... are the ordinary conditions that in some way present themselves to us when we allow the “word of the cross” to permeate our lives.

This is not merely or primarily a matter of “pragmatism” or “convenience.” Here, suffering greatly for God is simply a sign of the purity of the gift—ultimately, the true proof of love. Indeed, whatever is said about Camillus’s physical suffering applies all the more to the great suffering that inevitably characterizes discipleship of the Crucified One.

Camillus believed that suffering “had been sent to him by the Lord,” “so that he might become accustomed to serving Him without any sort of pleasure, but rather with great pain and bodily affliction, which he said was the true sign of love, since one must then serve God with greater constancy

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and fortitude when the soul felt not only oppressed by pains, and bodily infirmities; but also arid and deprived of every spiritual taste and consolation; just as it almost always happened to him.” (Cic. 1624, 165–166).

On closer inspection, we must all go through times of desolation and trial, for these are the times when we are tested in our steadfastness, in the consistency of our ideals, and in the truth of our genuine love. We must all pass through an inevitable sense of frustration, such as when we fail to live up to the ideals we would like to embody, and especially when it is difficult for us to gauge the effectiveness and appreciation of the service we are performing. But the moment of frustration, the moment on the brink of demotivation, the moment when we have no other reason to continue in that service except the original one (if not forgotten)—for Jesus—that is the moment when I can, perhaps for the first time in my life, begin to be a true disciple of Jesus, because I no longer have the gratifications I had before.

The test of “suffering greatly” is therefore closely linked to the truth and freedom of our relationship with God, to His gratuitousness, which may or may not appear in all its splendor when all the gratifications that obscure it fade away. This, after all, is the mystery we contemplate in Jesus Crucified; this is the path of His holiness! God seems, in fact, to leave us with our weaknesses; He leaves us that thorn that causes us “great suffering,” as an antidote to our vanity, “so that we may not become conceited” (Rom 12:7) because of the good we do—which is the very attitude that humiliates every authentic aspiration to holiness—so that, driven by a frantic search for gratification, we do not buy back everything we had previously sold, “to acquire the precious pearl of charity”!

Ultimately, this is the treasure of holiness that Camillus has placed in our hands