

Homily by Father Gianfranco Lunardon for the Feast of St. Camillus
Rome, July 14, 2026
Church of the Magdalene, Piazza della Maddalena 53, 00186, Rome

Welcome to all of you gathered here today in prayer around the holy figure of Camillus de Lellis.

On behalf of our Superior General, Fr. Pedro Tramontin, and the confreres of this Camillian community of “Maddalena,” I invite you to pray for our Camillian Order—for the Superior General, for the young confreres in formation, for the elderly and sick confreres, for those confreres struggling with their vocation, and for those confreres who are experiencing the joy of their consecration; for all those—men and women—in the Camillian charismatic family who today draw inspiration from the charism of Camillus de Lellis.

An invitation to pray for all the sick, and for all those who, whether out of professional duty, conscience, or the promptings of the heart, care for them.

On July 14, 1614, Camillus de Lellis died right here, in the convent of *Maddalena*.

The commemoration of his death—his birth into heaven—today could be a good opportunity to reflect on the timeless fervor of the Camillian charism, lending new credibility to the hospital ministry and the domestic apostolate of the “*fathers of the good death and the beautiful dying*,” beginning with the way of life through which Saint Camillus lived and celebrated his own passing.

The recent restoration of the two side panels of the altar of the glory of Saint Camillus has highlighted precisely this structural detail: two Camillians, angelic in appearance, who, under the gaze of the Founder, assist two dying people in the dim light—one of whom has already passed away, as evidenced by his cadaverous pallor. Why did our forefathers, specifically for the Saint’s beatification in 1742 and canonization (June 29, 1746), make this choice to enshrine the saint’s holiness across the centuries in this specific—yet universal—form of ministry? I say universal, since death is the only “*totally real reality*” of life... everything else is merely a “possible reality.” ..

Our tradition tells us that from the very beginning of the Order’s foundation, the piety and zeal with which St. Camillus and his confreres accompanied the dying were such that people came to believe that the presence of the *Minister to the Sick* at the bedside of the dying was a sign of predestination. Thus, the people began to call them ‘*fathers of a good death and a beautiful passing*’.

Unfortunately, for a long time people no longer wanted to speak of death and dying—perhaps because the subject had been overemphasized in the previous era, or because of a silent repression brought about by the intoxication of technical and scientific progress in post-industrial society. Given this ambiguity in the attitude of contemporary people toward this pivotal event in our lives, I am increasingly convinced that the attitude one adopts toward death depends largely—or entirely—on the attitude one adopts toward life.

Take, for example, the life and death of Saint Camillus. It is clear that the saint’s experience took place in an era far removed from our own, culturally characterized by different standards and values. But perhaps it is precisely this distance in time and culture that will help us rediscover—or

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strengthen—our way of living and, therefore, also of living responsibly when “*the hour of our death*” comes.

St. Camillus’s death is carefully recounted by his first and contemporary biographer, Father Sanzio Cicatelli, in the *Transito* of St. Camillus. What *face* of death is revealed here? How does Camillus experience his death and the process of dying?

One is struck by the *serenity* that shines through the entire picture against which Camillo’s dying unfolds. And this is without detracting in any way from the *seriousness* and *drama* of the event.

Death is understood as the most important step—or passage—in life. Camillo is fully aware of this aspect. The dramatic dimension of death emerges from this awareness and is expressed as a tension between the intense joy Camillo feels at the thought that he will soon enter eternal life, and the realization of his own unworthiness for such a gift, for which he appeals solely to the mercy of his Lord.

Another tension dominates the entire scene: the *intense desire to be with his Lord forever*, whom he served here on earth in the poor and sick. Ever since he learned from the doctors that his illness was irreversible, he has been striving and eager to hasten toward his goal. And this is not out of fear of the sufferings that may accompany his decline, but solely out of the desire to “*go to rest in Heaven with Christ.*” He, in the certainty of eternal life, is well aware that death does not put an end to life; on the contrary, it finally ushers one into its fullness.

Camillus neither forgets nor neglects to bring to *fulfillment what had been his earthly mission*: the service of the poor and sick through the establishment of a religious order. From this concern spring the *essential words* he addresses to the brothers gathered around his bedside; as well as the *testamentary letter* he addresses to his present and future sons—where, through the expression of his last will, his thought, or rather his passion for the *poor of our Lord*, which dominated him throughout his life, is summarized; and finally, the *spiritual testament*, which reveals the innermost fibers of his spirituality and which he wished to be buried along with his body.

But perhaps the aspect that strikes today’s observer most deeply when viewing this magnificent painting is the *centrality of the figure of the dying Camillus*: in fact, he alone is the protagonist of the entire event and manages his own death in an *utterly personal* manner. Camillus’s strong personality, shaped by his intense commitment to fulfilling his mission, receives its final touch in death, which now characterizes him, forever, as the one who has fully given himself “*to the poor infirm of our Lord,*” or, which amounts to the same thing, “*dedicated to serving the Lord Jesus Christ in the poor infirm.*” It is this, it seems to me, that distinguishes Camillo’s passing from the death and dying of men in our time.

What kind of man emerges from that account?

Camillo lived a profound *inner life*, as evidenced by his prayer, his desire to “*withdraw into himself*” to assimilate the meaning of the sacramental rites of Viaticum and Anointing of the Sick that he

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had received, and his conviction of *hope in the life to come*, where he would be *with Christ* forever. For this reason, he is *free to decide* for himself and regarding his own death, to *surrender himself* to the merciful love of the One from whom he awaits “*the call*,” and for this reason he makes comprehensive decisions about himself in his “testament.”

The “testamentary letter,” then, together with the words he addresses to the religious gathered around his bed, reveal at the same time the *care he continues to have for the work he has undertaken*, and the *gift of self*—of his life—that he has offered to God and to the sick in need, striving to ensure that this service endures over time beyond his death.

This way of dying is the *fruit of a long, painful, and passionate life journey*. After a troubled, reckless, and wayward youth, Camillo’s life unfolded with extreme consistency with what he had intuited following the moment he calls his conversion, on February 2, 1575: “*As if struck down by divine light, he let himself fall to the ground in the middle of the road. There, kneeling on a rock, he began—with unusual anguish and tears streaming from his eyes—to weep bitterly over his past life [...] Forgive me, Lord, forgive this great sinner. Grant me at least the space for true penance.*”

Camillus would devote the rest of his life to understanding and carrying out God’s plan for him—to serve the sick and needy: a life lived in passionate love for Christ Crucified, loved and served in the suffering; a life that was eminently *dialogical*—that is, one lived in continuous dialogue with the Crucified One so that He might enlighten him in carrying out what Christ Himself defines as ‘*His own work*’ and not Camillus’s; a life *totally open to the transcendence* of the God of Jesus Christ, and therefore open to the hope of the resurrection.

There are three guiding principles that shape Camillus’s life and shed light on the meaning of his death: the *certainty of eternal life*, which is fully realized only after death. Death is thus understood as a *passage*, the supreme moment of the transformation of Christ’s disciple that began with Baptism: “*For you were buried with him in Baptism, and with him you were also raised from the dead*” (Col 2:12).

Second, Camillus’s entire existence is marked by *conversations with the Crucified One*, the Virgin Mary, Saint Michael the Archangel, and the saints. He took the apostle’s exhortation seriously: “*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ... set your minds on things that are above, where Christ is*” (Col 3:1). Faith in the resurrection matures through an authentic encounter with God, through unceasing dialogue with him, and through a life centered on this intimate and personal relationship with the Lord.

Finally, Camillus lived his life in a constant attitude of *loving service to the poor and the sick*. He lived entirely detached from himself, so as to be wholly “centered” on Christ, whom he saw in the person in need of care and tenderness. It is an attitude of *ex-stasis*—that is, being “outside of oneself,” not “pre-occupied” with oneself, but wholly focused and attentive to “that which is other than oneself.” Here too, Camillus takes the Gospel statement seriously: “*Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life will save it*” (Lk 17:33).

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In his dying, Camillus reveals to us that a person achieves self-realization only by *transcending oneself*—that is, by committing oneself to something or someone other than oneself: if, on the other hand, one stubbornly seeks one's own fulfillment and happiness directly, one is doomed never to find it.

This was Camillo's *art of living*, which prepared him for his very personal *art of dying*. Indeed, we can say that Camillo's death is the most complete expression of his *art of living*