

ANNUAL LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL, FR. VALDIR JOSÉ DE CASTRO, TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. PAUL

SANCTITY A Style of Life

Dear Brothers,

Grace and peace!

To proclaim the Gospel, at all times and in all places, is the task that the Risen Lord entrusted to his disciples of yesterday and of all time (Mk 16:15). Faced with the present challenges of our society, marked by the loss of human and Christian values, it is urgent, with renewed spirit, to assume with love and hope our commitment to «evangelize in joy as apostle-communicators and consecrated persons»¹. Boldly we want to continue our mission to live and to proclaim Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life, the "eternal Gospel" ², in the culture of communication.

This aspiration leads us to deepen our identity, which means taking into consideration all dimensions of our life, synthesized by our Founder, Blessed James Alberione, in the image of the "four wheels" of the Pauline cart, which must go united and together: "The whole person in Jesus Christ, in view of loving God completely: intelligence, will, heart and physical strength. Nature, grace and vocation: everything for the apostolate. A cart that runs on the four wheels of sanctity, study, apostolate and poverty»³. Not one or two wheels, therefore, but four! This is the challenge for us Paulines and the entire Pauline Family, in accordance with the particular charism of each Institution.

After celebrating the centenary of the founding of our Congregation and the beginning of the Pauline Family, in the course of my service of animation, entrusted to me by the last General Chapter, I propose to reflect together with you, year by year,

¹ Acts of the X General Chapter, Chapter Declaration, pp. 60-63.

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation (24 November 2013), no. 11.

² Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation (24 November 2013), no. 11.

³ James Alberione, Abundantes divitiæ gratiæ suæ (AD), Roma, 1998, 100.

on one of these dimensions of our Pauline life. In this year, I invite you to put a special focus on the first wheel, *sanctity*. It is an appropriate and consistent theme, which is well associated to the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. God, who is Holy and calls us to sanctity, is Merciful in his essence.

This letter does not pretend to be a theological treatise; it intends simply to offer some insights that would help to reflect on sanctity not as an abstract ideal, but as a concrete style of life.

1. Sanctity: Configuration with Christ

Generally, today, we speak little of sanctity. Perhaps because we think of it as a set of extraordinary gestures or ways of unusual act, far from the lives of ordinary people. Or because we see sanctity as similar to an object of luxury, patrimony of a few, unattainable whether by us in our consecrated life or by Christians in their state of life.

Speaking of sanctity, Fr. Alberione puts it this way: «Sanctity does not consist in working miracles, in extraordinary or exceptional things: it consists only, and not any other, in conformity with the divine will. It is to live the will of God»⁴. In keeping with this explanation, Pope Benedict XVI says that "sanctity, the fullness of Christian life, does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but in uniting one's self with Christ, in living his mysteries, in making ours his attitudes, his thoughts, his behavior»⁵. In fact, in the light of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, to be holy does not mean acomplishing exceptional things, but to live united with Christ. In *Lumen Gentium* the theme of sanctity is presented in this perspective: sanctity as a measure of our union with Jesus⁶, who teaches us to live in conformity to the will of the Father.

All Christians, of every state and category, are called to follow the example and become conformed to the image of Christ, by clothing themselves with sentiments of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Col 3:12) and of the many other sentiments that lead to union with Him and to a life more compliant and integrated to his Gospel. All the baptized, in fact, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity and to promote in society a more human manner of living⁷.

Let us remember that in the first Christian communities, and those founded and animated by the Apostle Paul, saint was synonymous with Christian (2Cor 1:1), that is,

⁴ Idem, Fedeltà allo Spirito Paolino, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, 1965, p. 49.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 13 April 2011.

⁶ Stefano De Fiores-Tullo Goffi (a cura di), "Santo" in *Nuovo Dizionario di Spiritualità*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), Edizioni Paoline, 1985, p. 1370.

⁷ Lumen Gentium, no. 40.

people of flesh and blood who, with faith and hope, were striving to witness to the Gospel with their lives, despite human weaknesses and hardships of every day life. The canonized saints are an example of men and women who, in the course of their existence, let Christ fully affirm and shape their life in love. We remember the words of St. Paul to the Philippians: «I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...» (Phil 3:8-9).

Christian sanctity, in fact, is no other than uniting one's self with Christ, entering into the dynamic of love that creates communion and brings service to the brothers: «God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him» (1Jn 4:16). Now, the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rm 5:5)⁸, a love that gives meaning to life and propels one to mission.

Jesus is the love of God in person, and this love is expressed in concrete gestures of hospitality, mercy, compassion, tenderness towards all, especially towards the needy. He has established love as the first characteristic that must distinguish his disciples: «This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another» (Jn 13:35). There is no way to sanctity without love!

2. Communication: Environment of our Sanctity

The encounter with Jesus, therefore, places us in the perspective of love, gives us a new horizon, and places us on the path of sanctity. Only, thanks to the encounter – or re-encounter – with the love of God in Christ Jesus, which transforms us in joyful friendship, we are redeemed from our individualism and we succeed to break self-centeredness. In other words, for one who welcomes this love that restores the sense of life, it is impossible to contain the desire to communicate it to others⁹; one feels the need to go out, to share what one has received. We Paulines are called to live and announce the Gospel (to go out!), giving to others, in communication and with communication, what we have received from the Lord.

The culture of communication is the living context of our specific charism. It is our privileged environment for the proclamation of the Gospel; it is the place of our witness as apostle-communicators. Being "saintly" in this "modern" reality – a word that etymologically means "belonging to our time" – demands from us to realize some aspects which I now want to emphasize.

⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 13 April 2011.

⁹ Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, no. 8.

The first aspect is the *culture* itself. As already affirmed by Pope John Paul II in 1990, it is not enough to use the means of communication to spread the Christian message and the Magisterium of the Church, but it is necessary to integrate the same message into the culture created by modern communication. Therefore it is essential to have in mind that this culture originates, before even of the contents, from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology¹⁰. Being a "modern" saint requires one to learn, understand and speak the languages of today in order to get the Gospel to people today.

Besides the aspects of content and languages, there is to strongly emphasize the element of *witnessing*. There exists a Christian attitude of presence in the environment generated by communication that presumes that the way we communicate, the choices, the preferences, the judgments we make are deeply consistent with the Gospel (born from the Gospel), even when it does not speak in an explicit way. As noted by Pope Benedict XVI, there is a Christian way of being present also in the digital world: this is concretized in a form of honest and open communication, responsible and respectful of others¹¹. To be holy in the culture of communication requires one to assume a lifestyle that engages him in the quality of communication.

A third aspect to underline concerns the responsibility of building the "culture of encounter". Pope Francis, referring in particular to the Internet, notes that «it is not enough to be passersby on the digital "highways", simply "connected"; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved. ... The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people»¹². The saint, in the world of communication, values the person whether with the technical means or with his presence. One seeks to build bridges, not walls. One is committed to effect communion and to fight division.

In this sense, the "saint", being inspired by the Gospel, is the one who listens. In fact, "communicating means sharing, and sharing demands listening and acceptance. Listening is much more than simply hearing. Hearing is about receiving information, while listening is about communication, and calls for closeness. Listening allows us to get things right, and not simply to be passive onlookers, users or consumers... Listening is never easy... Knowing how to listen is an immense grace, it is a gift which

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, 45th World Communications Day (5 June 2011), "Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age", 24 January 2011.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter (7 December 1990), no. 37.

¹² Pope Francis, 48th World Communications Day (1 June 2014), "Communication at the service of an authentic culture of encounter", 24 January 2014.

we need to ask for and then make every effort to practice»¹³. The saint is one who listens to God, to others, to the reality, to those who suffer, and so on.

3. The "Pauline colour" of our Sanctity

Today there are many Christians who work with the right intention and try to live sanctity in the environment of communication. We are not the only ones to do so, nor are we the only ones who use the means of communication and the digital network in the work of evangelization. All religious institutions of the Church, to some extent, use today one or the other means of communication, and it could not be otherwise. The field of communication is not exclusively ours. Moreover, we must humbly acknowledge (let us remember that humility and trust constitute sanctity!¹⁴) that some institutions do more and, sometimes, better than us. So what distinguishes us from those who do what we do?

It characterizes us in remaining in the culture of communication by "being Paulines". We bring with us a particular "charism". We are there with a "Pauline" Christian lifestyle, a way of being and doing. We can say, as regards our presence, that there is a "Pauline-Christian" style of being in the field of communication that is born from living the Gospel in the light of our charism.

As "apostle-communicators and consecrated persons", as part of our state of life and specific charism, we are called to live united with Christ and to witness to his love; to be "saints" in communication and with communication, bringing with us the charismatic wealth inherited from our Founder. For this, reflecting on sanctity means having also to have our identity and the foundations on which we build it.

In the environment generated by communication, strongly influenced by technology – mechanical, electronic and digital – we want to be there with a real "Pauline" Christian lifestyle, doing our part in building the culture of encounter. This challenge demands from us to always return to the origin of the proclamation, as I have already said, it is Jesus himself. It is in the encounter with Him, who for us is the "Master, Way, Truth and Life," the perfect communicator whom we find in the content of our message and the meaning of our life. In Him, we find "the mystique" who is the real engine of our apostolic action.

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¹³ Idem, 50th World Communications Day (8 May 2016), "Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter", 24 January 2016.

¹⁴ James Alberione, *To the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master*, 1947, 436; cfr. *Vademecum*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), 1992, 679.

Our Founder understood Him well, to the point of defining the process of sanctification as a process of christification: so that Christ be formed in us (Gal 4:19) ¹⁵. For this, our central devotion cannot be other than Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life. It does not signify a "little devotion", but devotion of Jesus the Master¹⁶; and that "devotion" is not something separate from real life, but it is an action that involves the whole person¹⁷. In fact, "the devotion to the Divine Master is not an accessory devotion: it invests all our spiritual life, all our studies, all our apostolate, all our external activities: everything» ¹⁸.

4. The Form of our Sanctity

In the journey towards sanctity, of "Pauline color", lived in the culture of communication, we have two important references: Mary, Queen of Apostles, and the Apostle Paul. Fr. Alberione insists: «Piety is not colorless, but piety of Pauline color, and namely, piety that is addressed to the Divine Master, to the Queen of Apostles, to St. Paul. This is our piety!»¹⁹

Let us recall that when we speak of "piety", this can not be reduced to a set of prayers that feed devotions closed in themselves, but an expression of who we are and must be integrated with what we do. As we read in *Notes on Pastoral Theology*: «When one says "piety" it means life. It is not, as superficial souls erroneously understand it, a simple external formalism, nor, like his enemies slandering him, an illusion of spirits affected by mysticism: no. It is all an internal activity that manifests outside of itself laden with fruitful works»²⁰.

Mary is the one who receives the invisible God and makes him visible to the world, communicating him in human flesh ²¹. She shows us the mission, the "pastoral spirit" ²², which presupposes having in herself the message (the "Gospel") to be able to offer it. In relation to our apostolate with communication, the Founder used to refer to Mary as "publisher" of God, making it clear that, etymologically, "to publish" properly means "to give birth" ²³. We have the same mission of Mary, which is to give

¹⁵ Carissimi in San Paolo (CISP), Edizioni Paoline, Roma, 1971, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ James Alberione, To the Daughters of St. Paul, 1956, p. 271; cfr. Vademecum, cit., 562.

¹⁷ Idem, To the Daughters of St. Paul, 1959, p. 138; cfr. Vademecum, cit., 590.

¹⁸ Idem, Prediche del Primo Maestro, 6 (1958), p. 5; cfr. Vademecum, cit., 587.

¹⁹ Idem, *Per un rinnovamento spirituale (RSP)*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), 2005, p. 556

²⁰ James Alberione, *Appunti di Teologia Pastorale (ATP)*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), 2002, 7.

²¹ San Paolo (SP), November-December 1954; cfr. CISP, p. 599.

²² James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei (UPS)*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), I, 376.

²³ RSP, cit., p. 547.

Jesus to the world, materializing (publishing) the Word with the press, radio, television and, also today, with digital media, with all languages of communication.

The Apostle Paul is another reference in our journey towards sanctity, but he is not just any reference. He is the father, the teacher, the exemplar, the protector, the true founder of our Institution ²⁴. Fr. Alberione recalls that before putting the Congregation under the protection of St. Paul, he prayed a lot: «He wanted a Saint who excelled in sanctity and at the same time he would be an example of apostolate. St. Paul has united in himself sanctity and apostolate» ²⁵. The challenge for us is to live and give fully Jesus Christ, as St. Paul the Apostle interpreted, lived, and gave him to the world²⁶.

While Jesus is the "original", the Apostle, for us, is "the form"²⁷. The Founder exhorts: «We must form ourselves in him. To live, that is, to think, to operate, to be zealous, how he thought, how he has done, how he was zealous for the salvation of souls, how he prayed. Being really Paulines!»²⁸. Despite our limitations, we are called, like the Apostle Paul, to expand our heart so that it becomes more generous and broad in outlook ²⁹, to look at the world, as he did with the eyes of Jesus. In him we will find the good communicator and the audacity, the vision, the prophetism, the methodology of our apostolate.

Mary and Paul, two people who know how to listen to the Word and practice it, making it a style of life. Therefore, the devotion to Mary, Queen of Apostles, should lead us to learn what to give in the apostolate; and to learn from St. Paul the spirit more rightly and do our apostolate more actively, so that we are not only called by name but being really Paulines³⁰.

5. The Sources and the Nourishment of our Sanctity

In our journey towards sanctity we need to nourish ourselves every day, to have the necessary strength to transfer sanctity in our commitments. The Word of God and the Eucharist are the two sources of our spiritual life, so intimately complementary

²⁴ SP, July-August 1954; cfr. CISP, cit., p. 147.

²⁵ James Alberione, *Pensieri*, Edizioni Paoline, Roma, 1972, p. 55; cfr. *FSP-Spiegazione delle Costituzioni*, 1961, 463.

²⁶ SP, April 1957; cfr. CISP, cit., p. 159.

²⁷ James Alberione, *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo (ACV)*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), 2005, pp. 61-63.

²⁸ Cfr. *Vademecum*, cit., 653 (on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of Foundation of the Daughters of St. Paul, 1955).

²⁹ James Alberione. È necessario pregare sempre, 2, (1940), p. 362; cfr. Vademecum, cit., 637.

³⁰ Idem, *Haec meditare*, IV, 1947-1948.

that one cannot be understood without the other³¹. Our Founder has understood this well, so as to affirm, referring particularly to the apostolate of the printed editions: «The Eucharist and the Bible form the apostle of the press. These two things should be inseparable and indivisible in your hearts»³². The Word of God heard and celebrated, especially in the Eucharist, nourishes and strengthens us inwardly and enables us to have an authentic evangelical witness in everyday life³³. If we do not give time to listen to the Word, what shall we say, what can we communicate?

In the Bible we are called to feed ourselves especially with every word of the Gospel according to the spirit of St. Paul³⁴ and also to nourish ourselves with his letters, which allow us to enter «in the true way of sanctity and in the true spirit of the apostolate»³⁵. In the "Visit" we find a space for meditation and prayer essential in the path of sanctity, to be experienced not as something formal and conventional, but as a valuable time in which the disciple goes to school of the Divine Master. «The real Visit is a spirit which pervades all the hours, the occupations, the thoughts, the relationships, etc...»³⁶.

The Eucharist and the moments of prayer (individual or communitarian) do not make sense if they do not enter our lifestyle and if they do not form part of the various concrete situations of life. We must be wary of a community where it strictly respects the timetable of the "practices of piety" but lacks love, mercy, hospitality, tenderness, education, apostolic and community commitment ... as well as hope and joy! Likewise it is to be said of those communities where the moments of prayer are neglected or left out and one notices an apostolic commitment lacking in creativity because of the difficulty of living together. I reiterate what was said in our last General Chapter: «The double table of the Word of God and of the Eucharist, which build up the community, be for every Pauline the source from where he draws strength to rekindle the gift received in order to increase apostolic vigour and to overcome whatever could create division»³⁷.

We must pay attention to our pace of life, mainly when it takes an eminently operational cadence, to the point of not leaving time for prayer. It is worth mentioning the warning of Fr. Alberione about the risk of transforming our apostolate in simple industry and pure commerce: «There was no need of a religious institute to make industry. Consecrated persons were not necessary to God to make commercial

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (30 September 2010), no. 55.

³² James Alberione, *To the Daughters of St. Paul*, 1941, p. 137; cfr. *Vademecum*, cit., 1058.

³³ Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 174.

³⁴ AD, cit., 95.

³⁵ Prediche del Primo Maestro: San Paolo, pp. 260-261; cfr. Vademecum, cit., 631.

³⁶ UPS, cit., II, 110.

³⁷ Acts of the X General Chapter, Priority 2.2., p. 67.

activities!»³⁸. It is indeed necessary, especially in the apostolate, to take into account and take seriously what the Founder says about the organization and be attentive to the laws of the market. However, these strategies should not be an end in themselves. We are in the Church as apostles, not as managers. Vigilance is still required to «stay abreast at the human-divine sphere of the apostolate, exercised with the most rapid and efficacious means, in a pastoral spirit»³⁹.

Our Founder never separated the life of piety from "real life", which encompasses all aspects of reality, from the personal, communitarian, apostolic and ecclesial to that of the social and cultural. We remember his Eucharistic adoration, a young man of sixteen, during the unforgettable night of transition from the 19th to the 20th century. As he prayed, he carried in his heart and in his thoughts all the different situations of his time. He himself says: «His prayer lasted four hours after the High Mass... that the century to be born in Christ, in the Eucharist; for new apostles to reform the law, education, literature, the press, morals; for the Church to give fresh impetus to mission; for good use to be made of the new means of apostolate; for society to welcome the great teachings of Leo XIII's encyclicals, especially with regard to social questions and Church freedom... He felt an obligation to serve the Church, the women and men of the new age, and to work with others in an organized way»⁴⁰. From the Eucharist, celebrated and adored with a social conscience 41, comes the light that enlightens all!

The Eucharist and the moments of prayer favour the encounter with Jesus Master and this allows us to recognize and find him also in situations of our daily lives. Each of us has the opportunity to meet the Son of God, experiencing Him with all his love and infinite mercy in many places. We can meet Him really present in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, but we also can recognize Him in the faces of our brothers, especially the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the refugees who are the living flesh of the suffering Christ and the visible image of the invisible God⁴². As He affirmed: «Whatever you did to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me» (Mt 25,40). We can also feel the presence of God in creation. Many passages in the Bible and, in particular, the encyclical *Laudato si'* of Pope Francis, keep us awake in the face of this reality that cannot leave us indifferent.

6. Conclusion: Sanctity, a Gift to Ask

Sanctity is not an ideal of the past, but a challenge for today. We can reflect on this issue from multiple angles. But as I tried to explain, we cannot forget the practical

³⁸ James Alberione, To the Daughters of St. Paul, 1948, p. 574; cfr. Vademecum, cit., 1066.

³⁹ SP, February 1951; cfr. CISP, cit., p. 809.

⁴⁰ AD, cit., 19-20.

⁴¹ ACV, cit., pp. 161-162; cfr. Vademecum, cit., 1093.

⁴² Pope Francis, Angelus, 11 January 2015.

aspect of the witnessing of sanctity as a style of life, especially in the world of communication. This brings us to break the dichotomies that we normally build, that is, the gap between the concrete life (with its hopes and joys, with its difficulties and sufferings) and prayer. The path to sanctity implies a constant search for an integrated life, despite the human limitations, recognizing our «insufficiency in everything: in spirit, in knowledge, in the apostolate, in poverty».

The awareness of our fragility always requires a profound revision of life, which leads us to overcome the heaviness and fatigue, to overcome mediocrity, spiritual worldliness and individualistic lifestyle. The theme of our last General Chapter was a real appeal to review and to live our "being" and our "doing" in the wake of sanctity: «I do everything for the Gospel» (1 Cor 9:23).. Paulines, evangelizers-communicators. In Christ new apostles for humanity.

Along this line, and from what I have written, it is appropriate to ask ourselves some questions: How do we live the Gospel among us? Is sanctity a way of life or a reality far from our real life? In our life, is there integration of personal and community life with spirituality and apostolate, or we live in a schizophrenic way? Do we give time to prayer? Does the Eucharist create fraternity and mercy, propel us in the mission or is it just a routinary habit? Do our devotions engage the whole of our person? Do we pursue with enthusiasm the Pauline charism, giving it testimony in the culture of communication?

Even if our examination of conscience be negative and we feel like the elder son or the younger son of the parable of the "Merciful Father" narrated in the Gospel of Luke, let us remember that the Father is always willing to forgive, when we return to Him with a repentant heart. The Apostle Paul discovered this love in Jesus, a love that has transformed his life to the point that made him say: «So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come» (2Cor 5,17). We too can have this experience!

May the Lord help us to move forward in our commitment to do everything for the Gospel in creative fidelity to our charism, lived in today's world, in order to serve the people of today. In this regard, here is a passage from a beautiful speech of Pope Francis: «You know that a charism is not an exhibit from a museum, which stands untouched in a display case, to be contemplated and nothing more. Fidelity to the charism, keeping it pure, in no way means enclosing it in a sealed bottle, as if it were distilled water, to prevent it from becoming contaminated by the outside. No, a charism is not preserved by keeping it aside; it must be opened and allowed to go out, so it may come into contact with reality, with people, with their anxieties and their problems. In this way, in this fruitful encounter with reality, the charism grows, is

renewed and reality is also transformed, is transfigured through the spiritual power that this charism bears»⁴³.

With the beatifications of our Founder, Fr. James Alberione and of Fr. Timothy Giaccardo the Church has recognized that it is possible to sanctify themselves in our charism, starting from the "Pauline-Christian style of living"." Others, men and women, in the Pauline Family are examples of a life of love and of self-giving: the Venerables Maggiorino Vigolungo, Bro. Andrea Borello, Can. Francesco Chiesa, Sr. Tecla Merlo, Sr. Scholastica Rivata. Many other members have lived sanctity in silence. We thank the Lord for the life of everyone. Now is our moment! It is up to each of us to live sanctity as a real style of life.

With Mary, Queen of Apostles and St. Paul, let us follow Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life, trying to unite ourselves ever closer to Him and to one another, to strain forward with love, in communion and with audacity.

Happy and Blessed Easter!

Rome, 27 March 2016 Easter Sunday – Resurrection of the Lord

> Fr. Valdir osé De Castro, SSP Superior General

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⁴³ Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the General Chapter of the Schönstatt Fathers, 3 September 2015.