



ALONGSIDE OUR COADJUTOR BROTHERS!

Message for our Consolata Missionary Brothers Coadjutors

Very Dear Brothers,

on the occasion of your feast, I want to testify to you all the affection, closeness and sympathy of the Institute. It is true that vocations to brothers are decreasing significantly and we are all saddened by this. In our hearts and in our memory, there are many beautiful figures of coadjutor brothers who, in silence, gave their life for the mission with love and generosity.

On the day of the commemoration of St. Joseph the Worker, your feast desired by the Founder, we want to remember you with affection and, since 2022 is the celebratory year of Camisassa, we have recovered some of his testimonies. They describe the figure of some brothers and show how great his esteem was for them, which they reciprocated heartily.

As lay brothers and coadjutors, you fulfil your missionary vocation by working daily and with generosity as Joseph and Jesus did in the workshop of Nazareth, the place of the mystery of the Incarnation. Nazareth is the great mystery of the total assumption of our life by God, who is incarnated in each of our concrete situations. Since then, in the passage of time and in the space of our existence we have encountered the Eternal, the Infinite. Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, a model for you brothers, offers us an anonymous holiness, not ostentatious, and not made up of heroic deeds, but which takes place in what is small, in the ordinary event of everyday life.

We know that everyday life is exhausting and that it is often difficult to connect faith and daily life, well you brothers, by virtue of your vocation, teach us that every human reality can become a “sacrament”, that is, a visible sign of the presence of God. In each action, however small, at every moment, the reflection of a greater reality can shine through.

M. Delbr el wrote that “every little action is an immense event in which heaven is given to us, in which we can give heaven. What we have to do does not matter. Everything we do is nothing but the shell of the splendid reality, the soul’s encounter with God, renewed every minute, every minute increased in grace, more and more beautiful for our God”.

As brothers, you teach us to accept to live our life where we are asked to do so, to welcome our Nazareth, accepting that not exceptionalism or heroism, but the normality is the place of salvation and encounter. with God.

Allamano thought of you brothers as a qualifying part of his project. From the beginning, his plan foresaw that you brothers would have the task, with your work, of making improvements in the missions. This is why Allamano says that «you are indispensable in the missions».

This expression must undoubtedly be understood in the sense that you, as coadjutor brothers, are precious for the practical work you carry out, but above all in the sense that you are the incarnation of everyday life as an irreplaceable Christian dimension that makes the presence of the mystery of God visible.

Camisassa is close to the candidate-brothers who gradually enter the Institute; he soon becomes his friends and enjoys their affection. They know his technical ability and make use of his experience. He communicates to them, at the right moment, ascetic ideas and suggestions that favour fidelity for such a difficult commitment. To Brother Benedetto Falda who had left very young for Kenya and worked in particularly harsh conditions, he wrote letters that are a masterpiece of spirituality and, at the same time, true practical work manuals. Let us read one, which dates back to the heroic times of the beginning of the missions.

« Turin, 8 March 1904

Dearest Brother Benedetto,

I received your letter dated February 3rd yesterday. You cannot believe how pleased I was to know that things are going well at the sawmill and you are always happy with your job. Convince yourself that that is a true apostolate, as much as the priest who preaches. The impression that work makes on the Akikuyu, the feverish movement of machines, honours work and awakens in them the desire to imitate you, to learn in order to improve their living conditions. We were afraid that they would be indifferent to the news you bring. It is reported that some tribes are indolent. Similar types are also not very firm in practicing what religion proposes to them. Lasting fruits are obtained among those who are also attentive to the things that civilization brings. Look at Uganda: it is a region that has many Christians. This is because they saw the White Fathers at work and the desire to learn came. Then also countless conversions came.

You know, Benedetto, why am I telling you these things? So that you and those who are with you may persuade yourselves that, as coadjutors, you are true missionaries, even if you are a carpenter, a bricklayer, a farmer or other.

To do your part well you must work with a spirit of faith, willingly, joyfully, in agreement and always intent on the thought that God sees you, intent on setting a good example.

With a spirit of faith: with the thought that God sees, do things as if you had Jesus at your side and had to examine you whether you are doing well and whether he is approving you.

Gladly: that is, as if you were never tired; never waste time!

Happy: always with a smile on your face, never in a bad mood. Sometimes you may not be so, but do not let it show. And then, be never hard with Africans!

Agreeable: treating one another with charity, helping each other reciprocally; in short, be one heart, one soul, as true brothers in the Lord Jesus.

Good example: the natives have simple eyes, but they see everything, they observe everything, they do what you do. They seem a little forgetful or inattentive; no, they study you from head to toe and an impression remains in them which then lasts a lifetime.

Woe to you if you scandalize one of them! Apply the words of Jesus to your environment. You are observed more than in Italy where everyone goes his own way. If I talk about setting a good example, I also mean it also in little things, like getting impatient, being rude or being rude. Set a good example in everything!

I am lecturing! But I do not want to upset you: I only desire your good and that you always work as true missionaries, even doing material things; I would like to say many things to you, Benedetto, and to the others, as when I was with you.

Let me stop here!

I just want to add that our Rector, reading your letter, was very happy: in addition to being satisfied with the work you do, he rejoices when you tell him that your people love you and, moreover, they already give you help in the work at the sawmill. This means that they are growing fond of you, of everyone. Yes, try to make them be fond of you, so that you may be able to say, even at work, short words of exhortations, about God who rewards good people... They are words and, says the Rector, which, if spoken with faith, make you an apostle. Thus says the Rector: to be an apostle with the word and with the work».

Rereading these lines carefully, one notices a marvellous crescendo of humanity and sincere affection for the distant brother. He was a young man of 22, inside a forest and all engaged in the hard work of the sawmill. Benedetto needs to feel loved so that he can continue his witness with a spirit of sacrifice. It is also nice to confirm his personal exhortations with the words of the «Rector», that is, of their Superior. He is only the «deputy», and even in any letter he takes care to highlight the one whose collaborator he only considers himself to be.

The letter is not over. His tone changes abruptly and unfolds in the enumeration of what he has sent by sea and in explaining how to use the mortiser, a dangerous machine. We still follow the writing that has a missionary inspiration even if its content is eminently technical.

«... And now we come to talk about what to do at the sawmill. From the job sheet you send me, I notice a growing improvement. However, what I believe is urgent is the installation of the circular saw: by itself it will be able to replace all the work done with the band saw. (This is the large circular saw with a diameter of over one meter, Editor's note). The bandsaw will continue to be useful for other jobs.

In your letter, you are not telling me about the mail package containing 24 meters of saw tape, leather rings for the shuttlecocks. If you have not received it, tell me. Tell me if you have received the parcel sent to Limuru on February 24th with other supplies. Also, the pack of straps. Three packs in all.

I sent you the best quality mineral oil - it costs 4.50 per litre. There is also that of the Zimmermant type; costs 5.50 per litre.

Then, be careful to place the mortiser well: take care to fasten the belts so that the spindle never turns backwards: it is very dangerous. Then screw the mortise iron tightly: otherwise, it slips out and hits like a shotgun ball. Pay attention to the drawing (there is in fact the drawing with indicative arrows, Editor's note). Repeat this warning well to everyone! I will soon send you the drawing to make doors and windows; I will also send the wooden model.

Your people at home? They look great! Your letter? I personally gave it to your dad.

*Say hello to everyone at the sawmill with you. Be well! Your very affectionate C. Giacomo Camisassa» (Giuseppe and G. Paola Mina, *The blessing of being second*, pp.80-85)*

This segment of the letter seems to be written by a very expert mechanic who knows all the secrets and pitfalls of the trade and who gives useful suggestions to a workmate. Instead, it is the affectionate letter of one who believes in the Mission whose nature is not only a proclamation, but also a testimony of life, sacrifice and effort.

I also like to report here a testimony of Brother Benedetto. He, writing to Father Gays about Camisassa, states that the affection and esteem between the brothers and Camisassa were mutual. In founding the Institute for the mission, Camisassa and the Founder were an example of unity and communion, and the brothers were their first beneficiaries and protagonists.

“Very Rev. Father Gays,

In reference to your request to put in writing what I remember of our beloved Can. Camisassa, I take the liberty of writing to you what most impressed me in my mind.

I met the Most Reverend Vice rector, so called by all the confreres at the Institute, from the first day that I had the good fortune of being placed in contact with the Most Reverend Our Founder. I remember that I was struck by his affability, I do not say paternal, but fraternal, indeed, almost as a companion. Being in those days worried about looking for a mechanic to send to Africa with the new machines, he immediately loved me and confided to me his projects that were completely shared by me, enthusiastic about his ideals that I made my own.

Given the scarcity of time (4 months in all, for my preparation and that of the machines) he personally took care of making me have knowledge in order to have the opportunity to practice a sawmill of which I was quite inexpert. I was able to see with what practicality and ease and accuracy he handled the affairs that at the same time varied from dealing with the engineer for the amplification of the Shrine - he gave orders to the Administrator, Don Gunetti, about the wine in the cellar and he occupied himself with seeing whether the files I had bought were of the right cut to sharpen steel saws - and his business also impressed those like me who had to deal with him. He had drawn up plans for systems which he passed to me to make the drawings which he corrected with the same care and competence, as he corrected the drafts of the Periodical, even the minutiae, not with pedantry, but with the competence that made him capable of correcting the drawings as well of the marbles of the entrepreneur Catella.

What impressed me most was that his activity made him stingy with time, so that a few hours of sleep were enough for him and having at that time a friend of mine, Theol. Rossi, at the Ecclesiastical Boarding School, he told me that at any time he woke up in the night he always saw the Vice Rector's window lit up.

When I arrived at the Mission, I was able to put into practice the very practical advices that He had given me at my departure, but a few months after my arrival there he wrote me a letter, I think in the month of September, which you received from me a few months ago. In that he lovingly admonished me that I was too reserved in writing and told me: «How is it that after so much we have arranged together for that machine, you do not say a word to me? Regarding the spiritual, you often write to the Rector, but for the work I want detailed, long and frequent letters from you.» He lived from the life he imprinted on the mission that arose, assisted by his indefatigable nephew Monsignor Filippo Perlo.

After a few months, I received drawings and details of a two-story house, which he wanted, as a model, to be used when building the Missionaries' houses. But the details were so meticulous and plentiful and executed with such skill, that I thought where he had done his studies to be so skilled in carpentry and tricks known only to experienced technicians.

In 1908, when I came to Turin, I was happy to observe the construction of the Mother House in Corso Ferrucci, a colossal work that he conceived and directed with uncommon diligence and competence and this, while he was a repeating professor, it seems to me, at the Boarding School and he had to attend the choir at S. Giovanni, as a Canon. Having stayed only a few days in Turin, I did not have the opportunity of meeting the Vice Rector very much, but I remember that having to go to Marseille and from there directly to the Missions, after a stay of a month in France, it was He who took care of everything so that I lacked nothing in my forced exile and for my departure he sent me a magnificent raincoat as a gift telling me that when I wore it I remembered him with the ejaculatory "Refugium Peccatorum", and prayed for him!!

I saw him again in 1911-1912 in Kenya, during his visit there. In those days I could see that he was not feeling as well as in Italy - the life of Mission was for him too different from that of the city. In those days I regret having to say that we did not agree much with his ideas about the work he wanted to be done even on holidays; He was so dynamic that he did not conceive that one should rest on Sundays and for this reason we had a bit of a conflict with the staff of the sawmill - since He considered manual work in the style that both He and Monsignor Perlo did without stopping, considering only the good of the Mission - and certainly his good faith to serve the Lord every moment of his life made him forget that the worker has the right to a weekly rest.

For Mission work, then, he had a special cult - taking an interest in our Mission life as if he had no other purpose in his life. I remember that in my forced rest in Marseille I wrote a large notebook of Kikuyu customs and traditions - and sent it to him by mail. A few days later he wrote me an enthusiastic letter, encouraging me to write more for the Periodical, telling me that he had read that notebook in one breath in one night, and I can imagine with what difficulty He, a man of high learning, reading my scribbles! And in his letters, he did not only talk to me about works, but I kept for a long time a long letter of four pages in which he animated me in continuing with vigour in the service of the Mission, with words so inflamed with love for God and for souls, that I was touched to the heart!

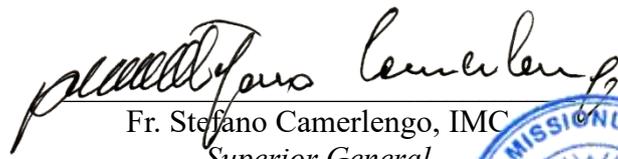
I saw him again in 1920 when I came to Italy; after 18 years, I realized that the work and the years began to lay heavy on his strong fibre, but his gaze and his word were still those of many years ago, all vivacity and all enthusiasm for what concerned the Institute, which he certainly considered it, in part, as his creature, having admirably assisted our Most Reverend Founder and Father, in establishing our Institute on solid foundations. I always had a special affection for him and unlimited admiration; I always considered him a man of a very strong faith, even if sometimes his methods collided a little with the method of worldly prudence. I believe his motto was "All for the glory of God". Please accept, Most Reverend Father, my most affectionate greetings in the Lord. Coadjutor Benedetto Falda (Testimony of Brother Benedetto Falda on Camisassa, Turin, 2 June 1944)

Dear brothers, meditating on these testimonies leads me to underline two important things. The first is that there are no magical answers to our life and that our consecration, as an authentic donation, is the best we can do and live in a simple and authentic daily life. The second is that

a true «conversion», not only of language, but also of lifestyle, is being demanded of consecrated and missionary life, as indeed of the whole Church. Such a conversion would favour the connection with young people in order to offer them a journey of faith and a vocational proposal.

May no one steal from you the joy of following Jesus Christ and the courage to propose him to others as the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14: 6).

Brotherly, to one and all: courage and forward in Domino!


Fr. Stefano Camerlengo, IMC
Superior General



Rome, 01 May 2022, feast of St. Joseph the worker!