

**CONGREGATION OF THE SERVANTS OF CHARITY
OPERA DON GUANELLA**

PASTORAL PLAN

2008-2009

***REKINDLE THE GIFT
OF YOUR RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION
TO JESUS CHRIST***

Servants of Charity
GENERAL COUNCIL

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HERE I AM

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her. (Lk 1,26-38)

Introduction

We would like to briefly explain the content of the following Pastoral Plan and to clarify its directions.

Taking into consideration the requests and suggestions made by the 18th General Chapter and resuming the spiritual journey from the last year Plan ¹, the General Council completes the two-year reflection on religious consecration and priesthood. ²

By taking into consideration the call to rekindle the gift of the 'sequela Christi', *"The General Chapter strongly underlines that the Servant of Charity, by discovering the love of Christ, has left behind everything because of Him. It exhorts each confrere and local community to rekindle the gift of their religious consecration by a life that should be coherent with the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, by faithfully observing our Constitution, in order to be in the world a clear prophecy of the Kingdom for a further apostolic fecundity."*³

The icon of the Pastoral Plan 2008-2009 is the Annunciation by Fra Angelico, at present in display at the Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain. By a refined structural expedient, two fundamental episodes of the relationship between God and man are juxtaposed. The background reminds the original sin of Adam and Eve, while in the cloistered portico it is portrayed the miracle of the new covenant between humanity and its Creator: the virginal maternity of Mary.

We have chosen the icon of the Annunciation because it offers the clearest better picture of this year's pastoral program.

Our Plan is connected with the Centennial Anniversary of the First Religious Profession of our Founder, Blessed Luigi Guanella, and his first Companions, that took place on the Vigil of the Solemnity of the Annunciation (24 March 1908). It was like the theological note 'A' to the hymn of charity that the new Congregation was called to compose. Father Guanella, by consecrating himself during the first vespers of the Annunciation, seemed to have given the "initial intonation" to our Congregation, in its beginning and for its future growth. He gave us the musical tone, the true path, the suggestions on how and what the future Guanellians should do in order to be his faithful disciples.

FIRST PART

"HERE I AM"

Pope Benedict XVI, in his homily on the Solemnity of the Annunciation on 25 March 2006, uses expressions very useful to us if we want to understand the origin of our Congregation. *"In the Incarnation of the Son of God we recognize the origins of the Church. Everything began from there. Every historical realization of the Church and every one of her institutions must be shaped by that primordial wellspring. They must be shaped by Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. It is He that we are constantly celebrating: Emmanuel, God-with-us, through whom the saving will of God the Father has been accomplished. And yet today and all days we contemplate this aspect of the Mystery - the divine well-spring flows through a privileged channel: the Virgin Mary."*

Every historical realization of the Church and every one of her institution, like ours, should go back to that "Yes", the great "Yes" of the Virgin Mary, the "Yes" of Father Guanella in favor of his Congregation, born on the evening of March 24th, 1908.

It was an official and juridical "Yes" requested by the Church and it arrived after countless "Yes" given to the Lord. Like the Virgin Mary, our Founder has given his "Yes" to the Lord, and in doing that he started a new hymn that can be played and sung by numberless hosts of his spiritual children.

In the "Yes" of our Founder there was already our "Yes", the "Yes" of our small Congregation, the evangelical little flock.

The most authoritative biographer of Fr. Guanella, Father Leonardo Mazzucchi, wrote an editorial on the magazine, *The Divine Providence*, published in October 1911, whose title was *"Infirma mundi elegit Deus"*, *"The Lord chooses the least of the world"*.

Father Mazzucchi poured out all bitterness he had in his heart caused, on one hand, *"by words and actions of ungenerous friends and acquaintances who are showing contempt to and mocking our Houses that are costing bloody sacrifices of constant material work, ardent love, constancy of will, and vivid desire to make them better and better in their spiritual and material aspect."*⁴

On the other hand, Father Leonardo was expressing his pain caused by the recognition of the weakness, inconsistency and deficiency of his and of his confreres. Such deficiencies stood out clearly when compared with the high goals and the great projects entrusted to the newly born congregation.⁵

"In both cases, it seems that for an instant a fearful sense of dismay pervades our body, going down into our heart and provoking a humiliating and disheartening sense of inability of continuing our ministry. In those

*hours of discouragement, our mind is crossed by clashes between cruel mockery and solace."*⁶

At this point, what is the solution that Mazzucchi is proposing?

To himself, to the reader and to all of us today, he opens not only a door but a highway, pointing out a direction that we are all invited to take.

He reminds us to go back to Jesus who, *"in founding and implanting his Church in the world, loved to choose poor and uneducated fishermen, poor human instruments through whom His power could be clearly manifested. On the same way, the largest part of those whom God calls to be members of our Congregation is poor, of humble conditions and not that great in human knowledge."*⁷

With St. Paul, Fr. Mazzucchi replies to that situation, *"When we, by our desire and efforts are able to kindle in our hearts the fire of divine charity, nothing, no obstacle, no adversity, no contempt and not even our inability could separate us from our ministry of charity."*⁸

He recalls the words that St. John Bosco, on the evening of May 14th, 1862, delivered to 22 young men who at that evening made their first profession, *"We have the Lord, and because of that, we can go forth with trust in our ministry, knowing that we are doing his holy will. However, these reasons are not the most important ones, the ones that give hope to our Society. There are other and bigger reasons, among which I would like to recall the main and only goal that we have embraced: the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. Perhaps, the Lord wants to use our Society to do some good to his Church. If the Lord continues to give us his help, our Society will take roots in other parts of the world and will reach a thousand members."*⁹

Fr. Mazzucchi concludes his editorial, *"Thus, we feel in ourselves a reawakening of our courage and trust. Our short life as a Congregation speaks to our soul. The human deficiencies of our Institute help us to recognize better the visible presence of Divine Providence and God's Will. We feel in our heart an ardent and longing desire to burn the miseries of our sinful and not so virtuous life inside the unquenchable fire of love for Jesus Christ, our Lord, the supreme ideal for our religious perfection and for our suffering and abandoned neighbor."*¹⁰

Toward the end of his article, Fr. Leonardo recalls what Fr. Bosco said to his confreres, and asks a question, *"What would be and do in a few years, with the help of God, the 130 members, brothers, priests, novices and aggregates of this small and young Congregation of the Servants of Charity? In his mercy, may the Lord make us privileged and blessed instruments of his glory! The Christians souls should unite their prayers to ours, so that, in the field of Christian charity, the spirit of God may transform us into glorious and approved heralds of the good deeds of the Catholic Church and of the mercy of the Lord."*¹¹

What would be and do in a few years, - Fr. Mazzucchi asked himself - the 130 members, brothers and priests, novices and aggregates, of the newly born and still infant Congregation of the Servants of Charity? Today, those 130 are over 500, distributed throughout the four continents, in 19 countries, and present in 175 centers of charity, in 6 provinces and 1 Delegation. Perhaps, even Fr. Guanella asked himself the same question on that evening of March 24th, 1908, while making his perpetual profession of simple vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

We would like to recall once again that moment, by quoting the words that Fr. Mazzucchi left us in the biography of Father Guanella.

"... On the evening of March 24th, at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus during a solemn and moving ceremony held in Como, Father Luigi Guanella together with Fathers Salvatore Alippi, Aurelio Bacciarini, Guglielmo Bianchi, Giovanni Bruschi, Samuele Curti, Sperandio Filisetti, Marcello Magoni, Leonardo Mazzucchi, Paolo Panzeri, and Vittore Pontoglio took his perpetual simple vows. Fathers Victor Castano, Giovanni Colombo, Martino Cugnasca, Riccardo Negri, Silvio Vannoni, and Alessandro Zaffaroni, unable to be present, took their vows in Milan on the following March 28th. The act of Profession, as Father Luigi Guanella noted in his report, done according to the desires of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and in answer to the desire for some time expressed and cherished by the professed, "was for us gathered there an occasion of some fear but at the same time a most impressive and solemn importance." Before the world and God, who was present and accepted our aspirations and resolutions expressed in those sacred vows, we were the little flock, the infirma mundi, the weak ones of the world, the despised instruments which God, generous in comforting and giving his promises, was calling into the public field of the Church and society for the providential beginning of an everlasting and glorious undertaking. This undertaking would succeed if we would be faithful to the divine designs and intentions for the restoration of the world, brought back to Christ with works of charity. At that late hour, while the mysterious silence of the night made our hearts beat with unusual strength, and the Angels of heaven certainly hastened into the sanctuary praying and rejoicing, Father Guanella spoke humble, inspiring and simple words. But he spoke not only with his lips, but with his great heart, his holy soul uttering accents of rare sublimity of thought and affection. Father Luigi, the martyr of many labors and many past and future sufferings for our good; the Father always so generous and compassionate, inestimable in his exquisite and most tender love for us who were guilty of reluctance and grave spiritual indolence to his burning desires, was deeply moved in thanking us for having given him the way of binding ourselves before God with those blessed bonds, by accepting his invitation and putting ourselves in his following, and thus being able to close his tired days in oblivion, in poverty, and in the holy peace of the religious life. Our hearts could stand no more, and we shed tears of love, of holy jubilation, of repentance, and of gratitude which left a mark on our souls, never to be eradicated." ¹²

From the "Yes" of Mary to the "Here I am" of each Guanellian religious

"The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.'" (LK 1:26-38)

There is no place where our faith is more clearly and intensely depicted than in this passage of the Annunciation of Mary; where more clearly the human adventure begins because of God's initiative. As Mary said her "Yes", as our Founder said his "Yes" on that March 24th, 1908, so also the Guanellian religious, once again, today is invited to say his "Yes" to the Lord. Here I am.

Our Constitutions remind us, "Religious profession is the act by which, through the ministry of the Church, we offer ourselves totally to God for his Kingdom. Through religious profession we bind ourselves by a public vow to observe integrally the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience according to the spirit and the particular law of the Institute." ¹³

We too are looking, particularly during this year, at our beginnings with a profound sense of "being privileged": we had the fortune of meeting Jesus, of knowing Him, and of being called to follow Him.

We have received the grace of answering "Yes" to Him,
A "Yes" that we have to repeat day by day,

A "Yes" that should tell the richness of a meeting that had touched the deepest recesses of our heart, a "Yes" that should tell the beauty of his call to follow Him. The Founder, too, is very attentive in stressing this aspect of Jesus initiative. He says, *"Think about the great mercy that the Lord has shown by calling you to religious life. The Lord has reserved for you an intimate discourse that he uses only for his dearest souls. To you the Lord has opened the eyes of the mind so that you may be set on high, on the heavenly place where the holy doctrine of the Divine Savior dwells."* ¹⁴

If we are following the Lord Jesus it is because, through his Holy Spirit, his call had reached us. In total humility and truth we have to recognize that the Lord has rested his gaze and hand upon us, making us his own. (Is. 51:16; Ps 139:5).

SECOND PART

A JUBILEE YEAR

What is the purpose of celebrating a Centennial?

The occasion of our Centennial could be an opportunity for making memory or an act of hypocrisy.

External celebrations could be solemn, well done and well organized; we could run the risk, however, to celebrate them with indifference, lack of interest, and having in our mind and heart no intention at all to renounce our state of affairs.

What is the meaning of remembering this particular event of our Congregation?

Remembering our origins means that we have to try our best to rediscover the Guanellian Charism and spirit, to strive to live it with a renewed enthusiasm, to review the present experiences of our faith and ministry *"in the light of charity expressed in the filial abandonment to God and in the evangelical mercy toward the poor."*¹⁵

The Centennial should not be only a day in the calendar, a list of celebrations and activities, but it should become a special occasion for reflection and conversion that involves both the single confrere and each community. Every single one of us has to give his collaboration in making our Centennial a memory that is different from many other anniversaries; a memory that leads us to become newly aware and determined to free ourselves from the vicious circle of postponing indefinitely, like our diets, what we are supposed to do today, namely to change and convert ourselves, *"to discard from our life whatever is useless and prevents our spiritual growth; to get rid of our individualism and secularization that we may have embraced. We have to free our spiritual energies toward a renewed enthusiasm for Christ and a clearer commitment to be evangelizers"*.¹⁶

To our Congregation, this Centennial should be a year of grace, enabling us to rediscover the freshness of the origins.

It should be a true Year of Grace from which many other graces and occasions to give thanks should flow.

It should be like the "year of grace" that Jesus was talking about in the synagogue of Nazareth, when he fulfilled the words of the prophets

of old, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. *He has sent me to announce a year of favor from the Lord*" (LK 4:18-19).

Pope John Paul II writes in his letter 'Tertio Millennio Adveniente' in regard to the upcoming Jubilee 2000, "*For the Church, the Jubilee is precisely a year of the Lord's favor, a year of the remission of sins and of the punishments due to them, a year of reconciliation between disputing parties, a year of manifold conversions and of sacramental and extra-sacramental penances*" (n. 14).

The primary object of the Jubilee should consist - according to the Pope - "*in inspiring in all the faithful a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbor, especially the most needy*" (n. 42).

This year of grace that impels us to seek conversion, presses us for a deep renewal of our life as individuals, as communities, as Provinces, and as Congregation.

The Congregation, each community, each religious in this Jubilee year, like a fragile boat, is obliged to go back to the spring that originated a torrent of graces for a great **THANKSGIVING** and then enter into the river of **FORGIVENESS** and from there reach the sea of a renewed **"YES"**, of a deeper and renewed confession of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man for us, the only Savior of the world. Each one of us should pray in order to feel again the renewing breath of the "Spirit of the Lord that is upon him and sent him to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners" (LK 4:18).

CHAPTER ONE

GIVING THANKS

Perhaps, gratitude and thanksgiving are not so much esteemed among believers.

The Guanellian religious, called to follow Christ in the beautiful Charism of charity, has received an extraordinary gift for which he should give thanks to the Lord every day.

We should make our own the words that John Paul II gave us in his Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life, *"We have to give thanks for religious life."*¹⁷

Saint Paul reminds us, *"Name something you have that you have not received" (1Cor 4:7).*

Everything has been given us as a gift.

We live, we breathe, and we move daily into divine generosity.

Every day we should ask ourselves, *"In truth, what is that belongs totally to me?"*

Each one of us, each community should say with the psalmist, *"I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my Savior. The stone, which the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes" (Ps 118:21-23).*

Who is that stone, first rejected and then re-used, if not each one of us and our Congregation, the little flock?

Like Saint Paul, we too *"let us give thanks in everything - and for anything that happened until now -"(1 Thes 5:18). "Let us overflow with gratitude" (Col 2:7). "Let us dedicate ourselves to thankfulness" (Col 3:15).*

Lets strongly feel the need of giving thanks because, as Leon Bloy wrote, *"Everything that happens is worthy of admiration".*

Everything that is happening to us, and everything that happened in the past , is worthy of admiration.

We should imitate the Virgin Mary whose Magnificat (Lk 1,46-55) is the explosion of her gratitude to God's mercy.

Like Mary, may we, during this year, raise a constant prayer of thanksgiving for all the graces we have received, and a plea that they may rest upon us always.

Remembering our origins, first of all, should be a particular occasion to give thanks to the Lord who, within the Church, has outlined our human journey through an encounter that is a gift of his love, a gift mediated by the Church as a community of faith, hope, and charity. Everything is a gift, and because of that we have to give thanks to the Lord who is the giver of all that is good.

The Lord teaches us that *"when you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'we are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty' (Lk 17:10).*

What an administrator is supposed to do is to, scrupulously and gratefully, bear fruit out of what he had received so that he, at the end, may give back everything, with no waste or squandering.

During this year, let us all be one in giving thanks for the great works the Lord has done and is doing in our Congregation.

By a renewed sense of gratitude and responsibility, let us give thanks to the Holy Spirit who has raised up our Founder in the Church.

Let us give thanks to our poor who are our true teachers of life, from whom we have learned so much, and from whom we should learn still much more.

Giving thanks for the past could be relatively easy.

Giving thanks for the present could be a little bit more difficult, because, usually, we are caught up into numberless duties that do not allow us to stop for a moment, and take time to give thanks to the Lord for what is going on around us, good or bad as it may be.

Giving thanks for the future is more difficult, because we are totally in darkness about what could happen to us in a year, a month, a week, tomorrow, in an hour, a minute, in a moment.

Anyway, *"let us give thanks to God the Father always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:20).*

Giving thanks means trusting in the present and hoping in the future, living in joy, and waiting for unexpected and always new gifts of love.

CHAPTER TWO

"FORGIVE, O LORD, OUR UNFAITHFULNESS"

Remembering our origins means for all of us to make a sincere and serious examination of conscience to measure the true distance between what we have received and what we have concretely lived, internalized up to now.

It is the Lord who is asking for that.

As administrators of his goods, He invites us to give an answer to his statement, *"Give me an account of your service"* (LK 16:2).

How have you administered the gift of the Holy Spirit that the Lord has given you through the Founder?

Did the talents of religious life and vows, you have received, bear fruit?

These are some of the questions that, in the spirit of our jubilee year, we should answer.

"Let us allow the Spirit to enlighten us!" ¹⁸

We are in need of his light and truth, his strength and conversion to the gospel.

Let us abandon us to the work of the Holy Spirit.

He is the Spirit that gives life (LK 1:35; Acts 1:8 and 9:17; 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 5:17), that gives holiness (2 Thes 2:13; 1 Pt 1:2; Rom 15:16), that instills charity (Rom 5:5) that makes us grow (Eph 3:16), and helps us how to pray (Rom 8:26; 1 Cor 12:3 and 14:15; Eph 6:18).

"The Lord impressed on your mind a light that helps you to know and do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong. Follow that light, and you will be dear in the eyes of God, like King David who was found according to the heart of God!" ¹⁹

"Allow the Lord to guide you!" ²⁰

The Book of Revelation reminds us, *"Keep firmly in mind the heights from which you have fallen. Repent, and return to your former deeds (Rev 2:5)"*.

Keeping the memory of our beginnings should not be envisioned as an escape, something rhetoric and nostalgic.

Instead it should be seen as an act of due gratitude, an opportunity of deeply reviewing and renewing our life.

One hundred years after the first composition of the hymn of charity, the sons of Father Guanella should ask themselves if they had been faithful to that music and notes, or if they have sung their own tunes.

O Lord, we ask for your forgiveness!

Forgive us if during these one hundred years we have wasted or deformed the gift we have received.

Forgive us if we have squandered the Charism we have received from you and that was passed on to us by those who have preceded us in faith.

Forgive us if our Constitutions and Regulations have not being our guide and Pole Star. ²¹

Forgive us for the occasions when our communities have been unable to discover the true meaning of the Founder's Charism; when they were unable to interpret it and to put it into practice according to the signs of the time, and the new expectations of the Spirit.

Forgive us for not having been able *"to fully participate in the life of the Church in all its dimensions, and in ready obedience to the Shepherds, especially the Roman Pontiff."* ²²

Forgive us when our heart had slept rather than staying awake with you.

Forgive us if our heart is still sleeping.

In the Book of Revelation, the Risen Lord is still telling us what He said to the Church of Sardi, *"Wake up, and strengthen your faith (Rev 3:2).*

To the Church of Sardi, Jesus is asking not to rely on the glories of her past, *"Call to mind how you accepted what you heard. Keep to it, and repent. If you are not watchful, I will come upon you like a thief" (Rev 3:3)!*

May our heart sleep no more!

The heart of a religious should be what the Lord wants, not only at the moment of the profession of vows, but at each moment of his life as consecrated person.

Our relationship with the Lord should be lived on the notes of a heart

always new and undivided, freer and freer from the chains that often are keeping us prisoners to small or big passions.

What the Lord is asking from a religious is to let Him dwell in his heart.

All of us have memorized the words from Revelation, *"Here I stand, knocking at the door. If anyone hears calling and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with me (Rev 3:20)"*.

This is the time in which we have to purify ourselves and return to the essential things.

It is time to scrape the rust off the surface of our heart.

It happens every time we want to paint something. Before painting we scrape the old paint so that the new one can hold on.

Think about the much debris settled on your heart and mind.

Think about how much junk we throw into them every day.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGIOUS LIFE: FROM ONE "YES" TO ANOTHER

The "Yes" that God says to men is the "Yes" based on which the believer, the religious, gives his daily answer to God's love.

The first step is taken by God.

The first "Yes" is always of God.

"The Father, creator and giver of life, draws to himself (Jn 6:44) every creature of his, by a special love and in view of a special mission. "This is my beloved Son: listen to him (Mt 17:5)". Complying with this call that comes to him through an interior attraction, a religious entrusts himself to the Lord's love, that wants him to be at his service in an exclusive way, and he totally consecrates himself to Him and to his plan of salvation."²³

"This is the meaning of the call to consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father, who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion.

The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally

dedicating his life to God, consecrating to him all things present and future, and placing them in his hands. This is why, with St. Thomas, we come to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his complete self-offering, as being comparable to a genuine holocaust."²⁴

Making memory of the "Yes" that Father Guanella's said to the Lord when he was 66 years old, means to go back to the beginnings, to our roots. It means to see reality, tasks, commitments, resolutions and goals in the light of that authentic, original experience.

It does not mean that we have to remember old points of view, neither visiting a museum, nor dedicating monuments.

Rather, we have to find out the truest motives, the most original inspirations, the most vital inner system, both of our congregation's early story and of our present society. A society that hands over to us many uncertainties and much insecurity, but also opens up enough space for loving our present time and situation while dreaming it as a little different from what it is now.

The Charism of our Congregation hides in itself numberless riches that we have to discover over and over.

The greatness of this gift surpasses ourselves, and its newness has to generate a sense of wonder in us.

There is only one rule if we want to preserve an alive and dynamic Charism: We have to live it thoroughly and with enthusiasm, and to have the courage to share it with others.

The main task of our religious communities is and will always be to assume the primary role to carry out in history the divine gift we have received.

The Charism is the divine presence that the Holy Spirit has given to the Founder and to the members of the Institute.

Each religious is called to personally discover the deepest meaning of the Charism, so that his personal and community's identity and vocation, may not be impoverished.²⁵

CHAPTER FORTH

YES, FOR BECOMING WITNESSES OF HOPE

"Watchful in hope and prayer" 26 because "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

Toward the end of his Encyclical Letter on Hope, Pope Benedict XVI turns to Mary as Star of the Sea: Ave maris stella ²⁷, and says, *"Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route."* ²⁸

Pope Benedict looks at Mary as the brightest star that illumines the road of the pilgrim man: *"Who more than Mary could be a star of hope for us? With her "yes" she opened the door of our world to God himself; she became the living Ark of the Covenant, in whom God took flesh and became one of us, pitching his tent among us."* ²⁹

"Holy Mary, through you, through your "yes", the hope of the ages became reality, entering this world and its history. You bowed in humility before the greatness of this task and gave your consent: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (LK 1,38). By hastening with holy joy across the mountains of Judea to see your cousin Elizabeth, you have become the image of the Church that carries the hope of the world in her womb, across the mountains of history". ³⁰

Since the beginning of time it has been necessary to talk about hope. Today, it is more urgent than ever.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote his second Encyclical on this matter. ³¹

In a world packed with people who are resigned, pessimistic and paralyzed by fear, it is urgent to find Christians who are *'joyful in hope'* (Rom 12,12), bearers of trust, serenity and joy within the Church and society.

The world today is in need of men who are prophets of hope, simply because *'they are saved in hope'* (Rom 8:24).

At the end, hope is a longing for meeting Christ ³², to such a point that *"the only Christian way to live in the present time is to wait for the Lord"*. ³³

Hope is essentially awaiting the coming of the Lord Jesus in love. Religious Life is awaiting the Spouse that is coming, with love.

Hoping is to live in a state of constant vigilance, as we may read in the parable of the Ten Virgins (Mt 25:1-13).

The gift of hope helps us to reflect upon our own relationship with time, and to set our life on the right path *"The entire reflection on hope concerns living and dying in general, and therefore it also concerns us here and now"* ³⁴, the Pope says.

"It is here and now that hope begins its adventure. The present is the only time we have in our hands. The past is already past. We do not know how our future will be. Our only riches is the present. Living the present is the rule of our times. In our times so frenetic we have to stop at the present moment because it becomes the only chance we may have to truly live and to introduce, as from now, our earthly life into the flowing of eternal life". ³⁵

Today's man lives in an era that we could describe as "the time of the merchant": time is money, time is production, time is competition, and a constant running.

Time is taken for granted, and everything is due and expected.

The virtue of hope says that time is of God.

Hope reveals us the secret of how to live time, how to change it from mere quantity and emptiness into quality and redemption.

Time is life, the most precious good we can have.

God is the Lord of time, of our time and of our life.

"Living the present moment is the simplest and most secure way to achieve holiness". ³⁶

"Living our life moment by moment and by great intensity is the secret for learning how to live our last moment". ³⁷

We have received the gift of hope to live "a beautiful life".

Of course, we are not talking about having a 'good time' because of money and many comforts, like upper-class people.

We possess hope so that we may live time in fullness here and now; our own self should be totally dedicated to the Father.

Now we see Him indistinctly; however, we will fully enjoy Him in the eternal life.

Pope Benedict says about eternal life, *"It is the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time - the before and after - no longer exists".* ³⁸ *"From the standpoint of the Christian life as a whole, vocation to consecrated life is, despite its renunciations and trials, and indeed because of them, a path of light over which the Redeemer keeps constant watch: Rise, and have no fear".* ³⁹

CHAPTER FIVE

JESUS, THE WAY TO THE FATHER PAR EXCELLENCE

Keeping at bay any idolatry, we may say that Jesus is the sacred icon of the humanity of the Father.

He is the only legitimate and visible image of the invisible God.

Looking at the Crucified Jesus, we are not driven to despair because of his suffering, passion and death.

Instead, by the Crucifix we are led and attracted to the Mystery of his beauty as the obedient Servant of the Lord.

In Christ, who accomplishes the plan of the Father till its extreme consequences, we see preserved the beauty that is able to inspire, motivate, transform, and mold human life.

We are celebrating a Centennial that should lead us to walk on the path of "Excellence", a path opened by Jesus who is the Way par excellence.

The word "excellence" is a word that today is used and abused in many sectors of our society.

That word has, unfortunately, infected also the Theology's vocabulary.

When we speak about the theology of the excellence of religious life, we mean more discipline, high standard of consecrated life, strong organization, obedience to the Magisterium, austerity and coherence, vocations ministry, more visibility (religious habit, crucifix...), and more prayer.

All that may be used to fight against the secularization that is under way.

The "excellence" of our bearing witness involves everything that may lead to our fulfillment.

It involves the true love that is fidelity, responsibility, sacrifice, renunciation and joy.

The crucified and glorious Jesus represents the witnessing, "excellent" in itself that captures and conquers humanity.

In contemplating Jesus on the cross, we should see Love and its saving power: we are satisfied by God's mystery.

To be excellent means to be like Christ.

Like Jesus, the religious should be content of his life, even when his life implies poverty, sacrifice, renunciation, submission, and even death.

For sure, in the eyes of the modern men, so eager to pursue material comforts, what is required from a consecrated person could appear anachronistic, useless and even masochistic.

Instead, what religious life requires is nothing else than to swim against the current and to be faithful to the Gospel, simply because we religious believe that our earthly journey is only a pilgrimage. Happiness, communion, full maturity, complete achievement can be found only at the end of the pilgrimage.

To be an excellent religious is to assume responsibly the task that the Church has given to Religious Life at the Vatican II: to be sign of the things to come, a sign of the "not yet", because no one can be content of the "now" of the earth.

Pursuing "excellence" is a must, even though we are so few to do it. When we are a minority it is difficult to emerge.

The only way to emerge and to bear personal witness is to possess excellent qualities, acquired by living ,day in and day out, our vows and mission, in a cordial atmosphere of relationship with others, in our community life.

This is what the Jubilee Year is asking from us Guanellians!

The Founder, too, by the example of his life and authoritative word, urges us to be "excellent" in doing good, not to surrender ourselves to difficulties; to prefer always action rather than mere speaking.

"Our charitable ministry demands from the Servants of Charity a tireless hard-working. They, not by words but by deeds, have followed the example of Jesus who has paved the way by preceding all with the example of charity, and following it up afterwards with words of holy doctrine." ⁴⁰

Father Guanella even dares to propose to his religious to become a "victim", rather than devalue the witness of charity.

"Religious should give their body and soul to charity even to the point of becoming victims for the poor of Jesus Christ, because it is written that the Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep." ⁴¹

THIRD PART

THE VOWS: THREE "YES" FREEING THE HEART

The 18th General Chapter had the goal to deepen the witness of our consecrated life.

It pointed out that within our religious communities there is a tendency to prefer the mission as the main element that defines our Guanellian identity, to the detriment of our consecration that should be, instead, the primary element of our vocation.

Though recognizing that many confreres live faithfully their religious commitment in their individual life, the Chapter believes that it is necessary to give more visibility and emphasis to our tension toward holiness, through the following suggestions:

- sharing, that comes from faith, of the values that are at the foundation of our choice of life (vows);
- diligence in getting rid of all the moral trash, caused by our individualism and secularization, that prevent our spiritual energies to be set free of bringing us toward a new enthusiasm for Christ and of embracing a clearer option for evangelization. We are constantly tempted by a secularized world that offers us its consumerist, hedonistic and individualistic mentality. We must give priority to witnessing our religious life, and to avoid the mere exterior fulfillment of our obligations, without the engagement of our heart.⁴²

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGIOUS ARE HOMELESS BECAUSE OF THE KINGDOM AND FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

When we hear about someone who is homeless and has "no fixed abode", our mind goes back to what we see many times: homeless people sleeping on benches, on the steps of churches, in the parks...etc.

Who are those homeless people?

Who are those nomads roaming our streets?

People who are attending to them, as part of their ministry, say that they somehow had got lost, that they have felt emptiness in their heart, and have experienced the failure of their own life.

They want to survive by taking refuge in their dreams - even in their own religious world - calling themselves happy in their marginalization.

It is their way to save their dignity.

And so they tell to themselves and to us a distorted story of their life. They invent a character that enables them to exist, to hide themselves behind it, and to build their new artificial identity by illusions and dreams.

The homeless person is a person that runs away.

Running away becomes necessary. For, how can a person accept that he/she is a failure?

The icon (image) of the homeless that gets lost and finds himself again could be assumed by the Guanellian religious, called to lose himself for the Lord, and to let himself be expropriated by the Lord.

Little by little we all have become fat, couch-potatoes, easy-going, nonchalant in our religious life.

The desire of taking risks disappears because we prefer to be comfortable and seated on a couch, watching TV, or having our eyes glued in front of a computer screen for hours.

Even our dogs got fat...

It is necessary to go back and follow the example of the Founder, a man from the mountains, and a man well versed in life.

Once again we have to pick up the stick, the knapsack on our shoulders, and dreams in our mind.

We have to find again that strong inspiration and powerful passion that one day pushed us into the streets.

We have to sneer at the devil that, skeptical, seats on our shoulders and laughs about our utopias, our passionate dreams, our great feelings, and whispers in our ears, "Why do you do that?"

We have to run to the Lord who, in turn, is coming toward us. He is our Lord, so different and so far more beautiful than all our dreams.

Religious, nomads for the love of God.

"It is up to us to start again from Christ, and to recognize that at the origin of our being Christians there is not an ethical decision or a genial idea, rather there is a meeting with an event, with a Person that gives life to new horizons and to our final decision" ⁴³.

During this year we are strongly invited to renew ourselves.

Basically, religious life implies that we accept to renew ourselves day in and day out, according to God's will.

The road to excellence, that we have spoken of earlier, is possible only if we want to belong to the Lord.

"We do not have any other treasure than this. We do not have any priority than the one that calls us to be instruments of the Spirit of God within the Church, so that Jesus Christ may be met, followed, loved, adored, announced to all, in spite of difficulties and oppositions." ⁴⁴

Pope Benedict reminds us that *"Belonging to the Lord means to be on fire with his incandescent love, to be transformed into the splendor of his beauty: our littleness is offered to him as a sacrifice of sweet fragrance so that it becomes a witness of the greatness of his presence for our epoch, which has great need to be inebriated by the richness of his grace. Belonging to the Lord: this is the mission of the men and women who have chosen to follow Christ - chaste, poor and obedient - so that the world may believe and be saved. To belong completely to Christ so as to become a permanent confession of faith, an unequivocal proclamation of truth that frees us from the seduction of the false idols that deceive the world. To belong to Christ means to keep the flame of love always burning in our heart, continually fed by the richness of faith, not only when this brings with it interior joy but also when it is accompanied by difficulty, aridity and suffering. Prayer is the nourishment for the interior life, intimate conversation of the consecrated soul with the divine Spouse. Even richer nourishment is the daily participation in the ineffable mystery of the divine Eucharist, where the Risen Christ makes himself continually present in his corporeal reality."* ⁴⁵

Religious, seduced by the Lord

"You have seduced me, O Lord, and I let myself to be seduced", Jeremiah says (Jer 20:7).

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you", the Lord says to Jeremiah (Jer 1:5).

God possesses Jeremiah's life, and that divine possession burns in him like a fire, a fire so intense that the prophet will yell at Him one day, *"Cursed be the day on which I was born!"* (Jer 20:14)

It is a seduction that requests a "yes", an inescapable giving, the surrendering, on the part of the called person, of his body, mind, heart, activities, suffering and joys *"till the end of his days"* (1Sam 1:28)

Everything should be surrendered to the Lord.

*"An intimate, sincere and strong mind and heart should characterize the person who is embracing religious life in order to serve solely the Lord with great perfection and to secure eternal salvation."*⁴⁶

That divine possession becomes the place where we celebrate the spousal covenant of love. The wedding is *"consumed" by giving our own body to God, as Saint Paul clearly exhorts in his letter to the Romans (12:1)* "I beg you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship."

*"The living image of the Church as Bride. In the consecrated life, particular importance is attached to the spousal meaning, which recalls the Church's duty to be completely and exclusively devoted to her Spouse, from whom she receives every good thing."*⁴⁷

Saint Jerome says that when we are "caught", we fell in love of Christ, and we would like to pass all our life to sing to him the Song of Songs: *"Are you reading, writing, awake, or asleep? Let love be the only music that you hear from the instruments of shepherds. This should be the lute that keeps awake your soul. Mad by love, seek the one that your soul is thirsty of, and openly talk to him: I may be asleep but my heart is awake. When you will find him, keep him close to you and never let him depart from you."*

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS LIFE: CAUGHT, TAKEN UP BY JESUS, "THE TREASURE"

A Religious is the one who has understood that in front of Jesus everything, people and things, disappear like the stars at sunrise.

Like the farmer and the merchant of the gospel parable (Mt 13:44-46) who are buying and selling because "caught" by the treasure they have found, a religious, when caught by the love of Christ, risks his life "full of joy" (Mt: 13:44) for Him, exactly the way He gave his life for us.

Are we still able to imagine and to present religious life not as a heavy burden with its duties and obligations, but as a joyful discovery, a real possibility to reach freedom?

Are we able to say more and more, "I have found a treasure" rather than "I have left behind...."?

The true disciple, the true Christian does not talk much about what he has left behind, but speaks about what he has found.

Joy is born out of finding, not out of selling the treasure.

That joy is such, that can transform completely even the meaning of the selling by turning upside down the way of considering and living the detachment connected with it.

Both, farmer and merchant are able to make final and joyful decisions without a second thought because they have found something truly beautiful and precious. Nothing could be compared to what they have found, not even the discomfort of selling all their riches.

Their joy is in possessing the treasure and the pearl, that now are their insurance for their future.

For us religious, joy consists in fulfilling our personal dream of love, and in belonging to the One we love so much.

We sell not for the sake of possessing something or even someone very dear, but for the joy of being free, and giving totally ourselves to others.

We are not therefore petty, too prudent calculators incapable of taking risks.

For sure, we know how to describe and talk about the treasure, but we hesitate in deciding to make it our own.

We should keep in mind that God loves those who take risks for Him, while he disdains those who do not take a stance.

Sometimes we may give the impression that we religious know a lot about the theory and the rules of religious life, but we hesitate to engage totally ourselves with and for the Lord, while we know clearly that God the Father has not hesitated to 'invest' and offer the most precious gift, his beloved Son, in order to bring back home the 'precious pearl', that is the man created in his own image and likeness.

God, in Jesus Christ, became one of us to make us like Him and to bring us to that original state of beauty, harmony and communion, for which we were created.

The Fathers of the Church, in describing the descent of Jesus into Hell, say that Jesus, like a fisherman, plunged into the sea of our humanity to "fish" us out, to catch us.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VOWS: THREE "YES" TO GIVE FREEDOM TO OUR HEART

The three vows express one thing: the consecration a Christian makes to give himself totally to God in Jesus Christ.

They are three different expressions of one only vow: offering all our being to the Lord.

In our 'sequela Christi', we commit our whole life together with all its dynamisms, energies and most essential abilities.

Consecrated life is more than the three vows; it is the offering of the whole being.

At this point, we should ask, "What is the characteristic that makes our vows "Guanellian", coherent with the Charism and the spirit given by God to the Founder and to his religious family?"

Though each Guanellian religious practices the vows according to his own personality, there is a common "proprium" that makes our vows "Guanellian".

Vow of Chastity. The numbers 42-47 of our Constitutions put in evidence a self-giving that is filled with filial trust in the Lord, a fraternal and

family relationship among us, and an apostolic urgency toward the mission entrusted to us.

Vow of Poverty. The numbers 48-54 stress particularly two points: confident abandonment to Divine Providence and solidarity with the poor.

Vow of Obedience. In numbers 55-60, the character of being sons stands out clearly. That character is the reason that both inspires obedience, and guides its practice. The relationship "authority-obedience", according to the Guanellian Charism, is expressed in a rapport typical of a family, simple, active, modeled on the relationship that was nurtured within the Holy Family of Nazareth.

A second key to interpret the Guanellian aspect of our vows could be found in the poor themselves. *"The option for the poor is inherent in the very dynamics of a love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option, but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in it in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor."* ⁴⁸

"You must be chaste to the utmost!" the Founder and the Constitutions say, **"because only by clinging to God with an undivided heart we will be fully able to take care of the poor."** ⁴⁹

We have to be poor in order to be able to share with the poor. ⁵⁰

The Founder interprets poverty above all as a requirement of the Kingdom of God, as a sign of the love of the Father that in Christ shows his solidarity and fatherly care to the poor, by saving them and us through his Son.

God sides with the poor, and He is with the poor.

He himself became poor.

This is the core of the message that we Guanellians are called to announce to the poor, by journeying in solidarity with them, in imitation of Christ himself.

We could even say that our poverty is the main component of our Guanellian mission and not only a means or a way to express it.

The Lord calls us to proclaim his Kingdom to the poor through the evangelical solidarity with them.

He calls us to become poor with the poor as witnesses to His saving love toward them.

Evangelical solidarity means that we have to make our own a lifestyle that shows poverty, a lifestyle that trusts in Divine Providence, a lifestyle that demands from us sacrifice and work.

This is the life of the poor. They do not possess money. They have to rely on their labor. They trust in God's Providence who, fortunately, provides for them the necessary, because He cares for them (Mt 6:25-34).

Trust in Divine Providence, work, and sacrifice in sharing the life of the poor as a visible sign of the love of the Father who revealed himself in Jesus: this is the center of our Guanellian poverty!

We obey in order to learn how to serve the poor. ⁵¹

Completely caught up by the person and call of Jesus, we obey because of his love.

It is extremely important to make our own the Christological perspective that our Constitutions strongly underline when taking in consideration the vow of obedience.

The fundamental requisite that justify our vows is the inner invitation of Jesus to follow him, to imitate him, to learn from him, and to act like him.

Today's people need to see, to touch, and to experience our burning love toward the Lord that makes us joyful in following Him through the three vows, that we should embrace as spiritual freedom rather than a constriction.

"The vows should never be embraced in order to do and to observe particular things. What we have to do and observe are the consequences, not the primary purpose of the vows." ⁵²

The vows should be teachers helping the human heart of the person that has embraced the Lord, to be freer and freer, to love, and follow Him.

Freedom is the goal of our leaving behind everything.

Freedom is not the desert of our sentiments or the "non existing" peace of senses.

Freedom is not even that kind of perfection that seems to lessen our human nature, or leads to a false and silly gravity of manners.

Freedom is:

- * ability to love afresh and anew in every situation,
- * ability to use material things without being their slaves,
- * ability to follow and live the plan that God has provided for us.

"The three evangelical councils are at the service of and aiming at freedom. They are means or instruments to free the heart of the believer from the slavery of the three main human drives: drive to possess, drive to power, drive to pleasure. They coincide with the three concupiscences recalled by Saint John in his First Letter (2:16): carnal allurements, enticements for the eye, a life of empty show. All other human needs are connected to these three basic motivating factors".⁵³

Our Founder reminds us that the three vows could be likened to three towers that are defending us against the dreadful assaults of the world... *"The profession of our vows is a grace and a blessing. Blessed is he who appreciates this particular gift of God. The soul, chosen by God in his mercy to taste the sweetness of His divine love, should consider herself fortunate... It is only by mercy that the Lord chooses among his people souls spiritually ready to accept the beauty of His divine love."*⁵⁴

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VOW OF CHASTITY FOR A SUPERNATURAL USE OF SEXUALITY

The vow of chastity is *"not a negative virtue that takes care of our appetites and sexual impulses, but a joyful choice of the wonderful evangelical "treasure" that is Christ, in strict union with the theological virtue of charity."*⁵⁵

It is not originated from an absence, but from over-abundance.

It is not to be perceived as a deprivation, a mutilation, but as a supernatural use of our sexuality.

Since we are living in a time in which chastity is not taken too seriously, there is a need of a strong, clear, unequivocal, visible, solar, uncompromising and with no double meaning witness.

It should be a witness that everyone in the world should read as something beautiful and satisfying, expressed by a man who is not only convinced but also happy of his choice to live as a virgin.

People today perceive chastity only as a renunciation (more or less heroic but costly anyway), or worse, a relational rarefaction, an existential solitude, and a poverty of sentiments.

Because of that perception, there is a need today *"of someone who may bear witness to and meet the growing need for honesty in human relationship."*⁵⁶

Such perception is hard to die, and is often caused by our counter-witness.

"The reply of the consecrated life - to our hedonistic culture - is above all in the joyful living of perfect chastity, as a witness to the power of God's love manifested in the weakness of the human condition." ⁵⁷

"Chastity is a mystic virtue. It is a supernatural use of sexuality." ⁵⁸

Certainly, chastity is also a result of asceticism, will-power, and virtue. It is a mystic virtue because it originates from the passion of love.

"Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one's heart, putting Him above every other love, and thus to love every creature with the freedom of God!" ⁵⁹

Mysticism resembles eros, *"the supernatural use of sex"*. ⁶⁰

"The asceticism of virginity is beauty, not only renunciation. A virgin renounces something good (= conjugal love) for something greater. Therefore, he witnesses something great and beautiful because God is great and beautiful, because it is great to love God, because it is beautiful to sing his praises, because it is beautiful being together for His name, because friendship is beautiful, as well as working, rejoicing and suffering together, though that implies a lot of efforts." ⁶¹

Far from despising our body, chastity allows us to channel our energies, taking them away from egotism so that they may be directed toward a greater and mutual service that manifests an incredible richness of human warmth.

Once again, chastity is not a negative virtue. It is rather a true mastery of ourselves and a recognition of Jesus' Lordship on our body and life.

Saint Paul has something to say about it, and he uses fiery words, *"The body is not for immorality; it is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body (1 Cor 6:13)."*

Chastity allows us to live in our body the freedom of the Spirit whose fruits are love, joy, peace, patient endurance, benevolence, moderation, self-control, kindness, generosity, mildness, and forbearance (Gal 5:22)." ⁶²

Chastity also does not mean despising matrimony, as martyrdom does not mean that martyrs despise their life.

Matrimony is the divine way to give life to new lives, to the future, to the promise of a tomorrow.

Chastity is the lived experience of faith in eternal life already present here and now, shown to us in Jesus Christ who opens the future and carries out his promises.

For that reason it is a witness of Christian life in its entirety, already in our flesh and bones. Daniel Ange, a spiritual writer, says, *"Man can renounce human love only when a greater love seizes him totally. The guardian of chastity is love."*

We have already said that chastity is not the desert of our sentiments but it is an opening of our soul, allowing us to reach God and neighbor. That is a hard but joyful commitment.

True chastity is not mere sexual abstinence, but total self-giving, body and soul, to God and neighbor.

It is an attempt to see that our whole life may tend toward the fullness of love, toward transcendence, by an absolute and total offering of self.

It is not craziness. It is pure and unique love.

Whoever receives this call and lives it authentically, becomes a light to others, a source of warmth, and not a cold expression of a renunciation.

The Immaculate Mary is the most limpid and shining incarnation of chastity that gives life to love.

"The consecrated life must present to today's world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity." ⁶³

CHAPTER FIVE

VOW OF POVERTY: KEEPING HANDS AND HEART FREE

"History teaches that laxity within and decadence of religious institutes was all the time originated from breaking the vow of poverty. On the contrary, any effort for renewing religious life started from an ardent desire to imitate Christ, poor, and free from any slavery." 64

It seems to hear our Founder when he made an urgent appeal to the Servants of Charity to live poor. *"Keep in mind that our Institute was established in the midst of much opposition and in great poverty, entrusted more to Divine Providence than to human prudence. Live, then, in faith; live in great poverty; be poor, members of a very poor Institute, and whatever you have, give it to the poor in order to extend the bread of Providence to the largest number of forsaken people." 65*

"In our post-modern world people are frantically seeking to count something; because they "have" many possessions. Possessing many material things, prestige, success, and power has become the priority and the reason of life for many." 66

"To that materialistic provocation of a world, which craves for possessions, the reply of the consecrated life is found in the profession of the evangelical poverty." 67

"The primary meaning of poverty is to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart." 68

By getting rid of possessions, pride, and security, we can give room to the rushing of God into us.

Madelene Delbrel writes, *"Do not think that our joy consists in spending days and nights by emptying our hands, heart and mind. Our joy consists in passing days and nights preparing room into our hands, heart and mind for the Kingdom of heaven than never ends." 69*

"May our contemplation of both Jesus, the poor One, and of Mary, who excels among the humble and the poor of the Lord, help us to keep our heart free from temporal anxieties and to understand ever more the evangelical promise: Seek first his kingship over you, His way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides." 70

"Poverty is an open desire that urges our soul to be free and empty from material things, even when we visibly possess them. In fact, material

*things do not possess, clutter or make people rich. The reason is because they do not have the physical ability to enter into people. What may damage a person, grab, clutter, close his/her heart, preventing it from being open to God and neighbor is his craving to possess things. It is through that craving that things find the opportunity to enter and to dwell in the heart and mind of a person."*⁷¹

Religious, who have consecrated themselves to the Lord and made Him the main reason of their life, have to see everything with the eyes of God, and see material things only as a gift they have received from Him, gifts that they have to share.

*Our poverty becomes prophesy when "forcefully challenges the idolatry of money (mammon), making a prophetic appeal to society, which in so many parts of the developed world risks losing the sense of proportion and the very meaning of things. Thus, today more than in other ages, the call of evangelical poverty is being felt also among those who are aware of the scarcity of the planet's resources and who invoke respect for and the conservation of creation, by reducing consumption, by living more simply and by placing a necessary brake on their own desires. Consecrated persons are therefore asked to bear a renewed and vigorous evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality, also as an example to those who are indifferent to the needs of their neighbor. This witness will of course be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected".*⁷²

Our Constitutions state, "*Be poor with the poor*"⁷³

In the Guanellian Charism, poverty holds a special place. Sent to evangelize the poor, our Founder has perceived poverty above all as a demand of the Kingdom, a sign of the love of the Father, who in Christ shows his solidarity to the poor, by saving them through Him.

CHAPTER SIX

VOW OF OBEDIENCE: TO BECOME LISTENING PILGRIMS

The third challenge that should shake our comfortable world is the vow of obedience.

It is in the Our Father, a prayer taught by Jesus himself, where we make the first move toward obedience and fulfillment of God's will.

When we pray "**your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**" we recognize that inside God's creation there is a space where God's will is not fulfilled "as it is in heaven".

The only creature where God's will could be done or not is man. It is in man that we find discordance, sin, and conscious willing opposition to the will of the Father.

Because of that, consecrated persons "re-propose, in an especially vigorous way, the obedience of Christ to the Father, and the mystery of obedience as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom. By obedience they intend to show their awareness of being children of the Father, as a result of which they wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread, (Jn 4,34) as their rock, their joy, their shield and their fortress. Thus they show that they are growing in the full truth about themselves, remaining in touch with the source of their existence..." ⁷⁴

Completely caught up by the Lord and his call, we too embrace obedience because of His love.

Obedience is the foundation of the Institute.

Obedience is the consequence of our answer to God's call.

Obedience prolongs the "Here I Am" of the prophets of old, the Blessed Virgin, Jesus, the Apostles, and of all those who want to respond to God's call in love and fidelity.

Another element should be found in our sense of belonging.

By our "Yes" at our religious profession, we begin juridically our belonging to the Institute.

What the Founder says on the particular bonds that make us belonging to the Institute, could be easily connected to the vow of obedience.

"The contract that you have stipulated with the Institute -that calls you to serve the Institute and the Institute to take care of you like a mother toward her children - has been carefully examined by both parties by competent judges and God's ministers, in the name of the Church. You and the Institute have put your signature, knowing well what you were doing. Now a strong chain binds you to the Institute and the Institute to you." ⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

The more we enter into and understand the abyss of greatness that comes from our belonging to Jesus and from the beauty of our call to religious life, the more we should feel dismayed for our infidelities.

"In view of the great good and the great tasks of our vocation we feel like a little flock, trusting however in the promise of the Lord: 'Be not afraid, I am with you every day!' Faith in his presence encourages us to intensify efforts and toils." 76

When thinking about our vocation, a multiplicity of sentiments is raised in our heart; a sense of wonder because God has chosen us among the many, a sense of humility and inadequacy, together with the will to do our best not to disappoint severely God's expectations and the poor to whom we are sent.

Our Founder writes in his "Maxims and Method" that we need "to trust in Divine Providence because the hope of our Institute is to do some good and the best we can and to have a heart full of passion for it".

During this Jubilee Year, a year of grace, the words that Bishop Aurelio Bacciarini and his confreres wrote at the death of their and our "sweet Father", may resound in our heart: *"We will happily and strongly continue the ministry entrusted to us by the Lord, inherited by so great a father, confirmed by our faithful belonging to the Institute in which we want to live, to die, to consecrate ourselves, and to be victims upon its altar." 77*

SUGGESTIONS TO PROVINCES AND DELEGATION

- * Each community should plan some penitential celebration, possibly together with our Sisters and Laity.
- * Each Province should prepare some new short profile of Confreres who excelled in their religious life and who distinguished themselves for their virtue.
- * Provinces should promote pilgrimages, penitential celebrations in those churches chosen as places to receive the special indulgences connected with the jubilee year, so that the Holy Spirit may change our heart, may sustain us toward a new evangelization and a true conversion.
- * Provinces should organize or may invite confreres to attend Courses of spiritual retreat on consecrated life.
- * Provinces should promote meetings among communities for a better knowledge and deepening of the Ratio Formationis.
- * The whole Institute should follow what the Church proposes for the celebration of the Jubilee Year on Saint Paul.
- * The Holy Father called the next Synod of Bishops around the theme of the Word of God. Provinces are invited to prepare for the communities some aid on the love and concern of the Founder on the Word of God.

In The Jubilee Year of the Congregation of the Servants of Charity

The Holy Father grants a plenary indulgence

- To the Sacred Heart Shrine in Como, Italy, during the entire Jubilee Year and to the Shrines and Parish Churches of the Congregation around the world.
- To a Church per nation, where our Charism of charity is witnessed, only for some days of the year.

The indulgence, as cancellation of the temporal punishment, is a remission of the punishment provoked by our sins and it becomes plenary because it entirely frees from the temporal punishment caused by our sins.

The Apostolic Penitentiary on December 12, 2007, on a mandate of the Holy Father, by the Decree n. 606/07/1 grants the plenary indulgence to all the Catholic faithful that would visit the Shrine of the Sacred Heart from March 24, 2008 through March 24, 2009.

Besides the detachment to every sin, included a venial one, the pilgrims, after having followed the usual conditions (sacramental confession - Eucharistic communion - Our Father - Hail Mary - Apostolic Creed) could acquire a plenary indulgence:

- When, by themselves or by groups, in front of the altar where the bodies of Blessed Guanella and Blessed Bosatta are located, will participate to liturgical actions or some other pious exercise;
- When, by visiting the relics of the two Blessed, will spend some time in prayer to be concluded by an Our Father, the Creed plus a Hail Mary and a prayer to the Blessed.
- Friends and collaborators of the Guanellian Family, together with the sick people residing in the House that they assist through their merciful care, can receive the indulgence.

If the residents cannot participate to the jubilee celebrations because of sickness or other grave reasons, they may receive the indulgence in the place where they live. However, they too should follow the condition of having a contrite heart, a resolution not to sin any more, and to resolve to be better. Once their health may allow, they should unite themselves in spirit to the sacred rites by offering to the mercy of God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, prayers, supplications and their suffering, patiently endured.

The Apostolic Penitentiary, on a mandate of the Holy Father, by Decree n. 621/07/1 grants the plenary indulgence to all pilgrims that will visit the following Shrines and Parish Churches of the Institute around the world on:

- March 24, 2008 (opening of the centennial year) and March 24, 2009 (its closing);
- October 24 and 25, dies natalis and Beatification day of the Founder;
- April 20 and 21, dies natalis and Beatification day of Blessed Clare Bosatta.

Shrines and Parish Churches of the Institute:

- St. Joseph Trionfale Basilica, Rome, Italy
- Transito San Jose' Church, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Shrine of Our Lady of Work, Porto Alegre, Brasil
- St. Joachim Church, Madrid, Spain
- Sagaya Matha Parish, Cuddalore, India
- Corpus Christi Church, Mexico City, Mexico
- St. Joseph Shrine, Grass Lake, U.S.A.
- Transito de St. Jose' Church, Renca, Chile
- St. Michael Archangel Church, Asuncion, Paraguay
- St. Lucy Church, Bucaramanga, Colombia
- Immaculate Conception Church, Chapas, Guatemala
- Bl. Guanella Center, Quezon City, Philippines
- St. Teresa Center, Abor, Ghana
- House of Providence, Ibadan, Nigeria
- Holy Family Center, Kinshasa, Congo
- Sfant Iosif House, Iasi, Romania

You may receive the indulgence once a day. The indulgence could be applied for the living and for the dead by following the following conditions:

- First of all, you have to satisfy the three conditions, besides the exclusion of any affection to mortal and venial sin (confession - communion - prayer according to the intentions of the Holy Father). Those three conditions could be carried out many days before or after the actual act of receiving the indulgence. However, it is convenient that communion and prayer for the Holy Father should be done on the same day of receiving the indulgence.

- By devoutly participating to some jubilee celebration or some other pious exercise or by spending some time in prayer concluded by the Our Father, the Creed, a prayer to the Virgin Mary and to the Founder.
- All the time that the faithful are participating to a pilgrimage, by themselves or by groups, organized for the purpose to celebrate the Guanellian Jubilee.
- In any day freely chosen by the individual during the year.
- The indulgence could also be received by friends and collaborators of the Guanellian Family together with the residents they are mercifully taking care.

When the residents cannot participate to any celebration because of sickness or other major reason, they may receive the indulgence where they are on condition that they have a contrite heart and a desire not to sin any more, and may resolve to be better. Once their health may allow, they should go through the usual three conditions, they should unite themselves spiritually to the sacred celebrations by offering prayers and supplications and their own suffering, patiently endured and offered to the mercy of God through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

1908 - CENTENNIAL YEAR - 2008

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The General Council, in conformity to the directives given by the 18th General Chapter that were mentioning the year 2008 as the year celebrating the centennial of the first profession of Father Guanella and Companions, had proposed a two year period of reflection on the values of religious life and has entrusted to a committee of confreres from the Italian Provinces to prepare the event.

Its members are Fr. Wladimiro Bogoni, Fr. Nico Rutigliano, Fr. Tarcisio Casali, Fr. Mariolino Mapelli and Fr. Adriano Folonaro.

Its goal is to help the confreres to internalize the values of religious life and to deepen our Charism through different activities.

The calendar was approved by the two General Councils of the DSMP and SdC in their joint session held on December 13 2007.

March 24, 2008

Official opening of the centennial anniversary in the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Como.

March 24-30, 2008

Barza d'Ispra: Five day Retreat with the participation of the International Theological Seminary. Theme: Consecrated Life. Retreat Masters: Fr. Amedeo Ferrari, OFM Conv and Fr. Paolo Monaco, CSJ.

April 21 - May 3

Guanellian pilgrimage to the Holy Land for pilgrims of Italian and English language. Composition: 30 confreres - 10 Sisters - 10 Lay people. 7 from Sacred Heart Province - 7 from St. Joseph Province - 5 from Divine Providence Province - 3 from Africa Delegation.

May 27 1858-2008

150th Anniversary of the Birth of Bl. Clare Bosatta.

June 7 2008

Como, Divine Providence House

Morning: **Meeting on the Centennial**

Afternoon: **Dedication of the "Luigi Guanella Museum"**

August 6-10, 2008

Pilgrimage of the Guanellian Families to Lourdes, France

August 24-30 2008

Display on Father Guanella at the Rimini Meeting

August 31 - September 21 2008

2nd Course for Formators in Rome

September 21 2008

Rome

Meeting on

- the Centennial of the Servants of Charity
- the 30th anniversary of the Centro Studi Guanelliani
- the Centennial of the approval of the Institute of the daughters of St. Mary of Providence

September 28 - October 4, 2008

Rome - Villa St. Rose - Retreat of the two General Councils

October 4 2008

**Meeting of the two General Councils, four Provincial Superiors,
and National Council of GLM of Italy**

October 12-18, 2008

Pilgrimage to Lourdes with the Diocese of Como-UNITALSI

October 2008 - March 2009

**Monthly Days of Recollection (SdC - DSMP - GLM) in Rome and
Como**

December 6-8, 2008

Rome, Domus Urbis: National meeting of GLM

March 22, 2009

**Solemn Closing of the Centennial - St. Joseph Trionfale Basilica
Rome**

April 13-19, 2009

Barza d'Ispra - Five day Retreat on Consecrated Life

Master: Fr. Alessandro Pronzato

April 2009

Guanellian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land for pilgrims of Italian and
Spanish language. 30 Confreres - 10 Sisters - 10 Lay people -

5 from Sacred Heart Province

5 from St. Joseph Province

5 from Cruz del Sure Province

5 from Santa Cruz Province

5 from Our Lady of Guadalupe Province

FOOTNOTES

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- 11** ib
- 12** Fr. L. Mazzucchi, *The Life, the Spirit, the Works of Fr. Luigi Guanella*, Como 1920, pages 182-183
- 13** Constitutions and Regulations, n. 41
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- 15** Const. and Reg. n. 9
- 16** Final Document of the 18th General Chapter - Third Committee
- 17** John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n. 2
- 18** Const. and Reg. n. 36
- 19** *Let us to the Father*, page 35
- 20** *Svegliarino*, page 53
- 21** Const. and Reg., Foreword
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- 41** Luigi Guanella, *Regulations 1905*
- 42** 18th General Chapter
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- 46** Regulations DSMP 1899
- 47** John Paul II, Vita Consagrada, n. 34
- 48** ib. n. 82
- 49** Constitutions and Regulations n. 43
- 50** ib. n. 48
- 51** ib. n. 55
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IN HASTE

"During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior". (LK: 1:39-47)

AFTERWARD

"Mary traveled in haste to the hill country of Judah" (LK: 1:39)

Like the Virgin Mary, the Guanellian must reach out in haste to the people in order to bring to them Jesus Christ, the Charity made flesh. The visitation of Mary who brought in the womb her son Jesus to her cousin Elizabeth, was not a mere gesture of kindness but an event of salvation; in the same way, Guanellian charity should become the event of grace that manifests Jesus and the dynamism of his love.

Pope Benedict XVI, on June 1, 2007, at the closing of the Marian month in the Vatican gardens, standing in front of the grotto of our Lady of Lourdes, shared this reflection on the gospel story of the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, connecting that event with the story of annunciation. *"The Holy Spirit who gave life to the Son of God in the flesh of Mary, enlarged her heart to the dimensions of God and urged her to take the road of charity";* he explained, *"it's the urge of charity that impels Mary to travel and run to help her cousin Elizabeth.*

Jesus is only in his initial stage of development in the womb of Mary but his Spirit has already filled her heart, so that the Mother begins to follow her divine Son. It is Jesus himself who urges Mary empowering her to run in aid to her neighbor. With generosity and without taking in to accounts her legitimate personal needs, her difficulties and concerns and even the risks for her own life".

In summary, it is Jesus who helps Mary *"to overcome everything guided only by the faith that manifest itself through charity"*, Pope Benedict added, while pointing out that Mary has *"a human heart perfectly attuned to the Holy Trinity whose dynamism in charity and heart is inhabited by the grace of the Father, permeated by the power of the Spirit and interiorly moved by the Son"*.

In Mary charity, *"is perfectly manifested and becomes the model of the charity of the Church, the manifestation of the Trinitarian charity"*.

Benedict XIV at the end of his reflection invites to pray *"for all Christians, that they may be able to say with St. Paul, 'it is the love of Christ that urges us' and therefore become capable, with Mary's help, of spreading the Fire of Love through out the world"*.

"Every gesture of genuine love, even the smallest one, contains the spark of the infinite mystery of God: your concern for your brother, your becoming neighbor to him, your sharing of his needs, and the healing of his wounds, your responsibility for his future, everything even in their smallest details, becomes, "God's language" when is animated by the spirit of Christ. Let's strive to make sure that everything, both in our personal life as well as in the life of the church in which we are inserted, may be motivated by and oriented to charity. The mystery that we celebrate today is enlightening this point. In fact the first decision that Mary made after receiving the message of the angel was to run in haste her cousin Elizabeth to help her. (Lk1: 39) What the Virgin Mary took was an initiative of genuine, humble love, encouraged and, motivated by faith in God's word, following the inner impulse of the Holy Spirit. The one who loves forgets himself and places his life at the service of his neighbor. This is the image and the model of the Church.

Every ecclesial community, like the mother of Christ, is called to welcome with complete availability the mystery of God who comes to dwell in her and to urge her to walk on the roads of charity. This is the direction that I have set up at the beginning of my pontificate, inviting all, in my first encyclical letter, to build the Church in charity, as a community of love (see *Deus Caritas Est*, part II) ⁷⁸

In Haste

"Mary goes in haste to visit Elizabeth, not moved by anxiety or uncertainty, but by joy and concern. She doesn't travel because of curiosity or to verify whether the angel was telling her the truth; she believes what she heard about her cousin; she runs to her impelled by friendship. Mary goes in haste to Elizabeth." ⁷⁹

Run...Run

Also our Founder, following the example of Mary, makes this sense of urgency, of being in haste" the characteristic of his mission of charity because *"we cannot stop until there are poor to be assisted"*.

Father Guanella was never stopping: his life style was described as 'run...run'

Our founder's way of flying on the wings of charity, looked strange only to those who did not know the true reason for which he was running, planning, loving, suffering...

Father Guanella used to say; *"the difficulties and challenges make us run"*.⁸⁰

He frequently addressed his sisters in these words: *"Hurry up, wear wings to answer God's call, be solicitous in doing good"*⁸¹

And again: *"it is enough to us to know clearly what God wants in order to be full of trust and feel secure"*⁸²

The 'run...run' of Fr. Guanella is not frenzy for being efficient but is a flame of a burning passion, not caused by the search of something that is lacking in one's life. It is a way of pouring out one's personal richness in favor of the common good, valuing the gifts of grace and nature and placing them at the service of God's plan.

Mary said Yes.

Also the Guanellian religious must go back to repeat his 'Yes, Here I am'

From the Virgin Mary, from her concern and prompt response of charity, we draw the model for a life spent in the generous service of the poor.

⁸³

Today everyone should feel moved by the sense of urgency, not because we are agitated by anxiety, doubts, pre-occupations, but because we are burning with passion for Christ and his poor.

Without being open to mission, the memory of our beginnings could run the risk of becoming a dangerous act of narcissism, an empty self-contemplation and gratification.

We must live the Centennial Jubilee Celebration with a renewed zeal and passion for Mission: **"Here I am, send me! There is a new urgency for mission !"**.

A mission, which, more than in external works consists in making Christ present to the world, through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more the consecrated persons will allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ will be made present and active in the world for the salvation of all. ⁸⁴

Some years ago, during a missionary congress in Montesilvano, Italy,

Fr. Vittorio Farronato, a Comboni missionary in Congo, came out with this colorful expression: *"in the past for missionary urgency we meant that 'if I didn't go to baptize those people they would have gone to hell'.*

"Today, the missionary urgent mandate is interpreted as a call to meet the need and the right of every person and nation; to taste the goodness of the Lord, which is another way to describe the universality of salvation".

We can look at the evangelization also as a concrete way of protecting and meeting the right of every person to real happiness (obviously a special type of happiness, not the one passed of as such by the new age).

There has always been someone who would label such approach to mission as too intimist.

"Not at all" the pope says, "the gospel is something very concrete, a 'good news' on human dignity, science and technology, human labor, universal availability of earthly resources, ecology..."⁸⁵

"For this 'new evangelization' we need people who are lovingly dedicated to the Lord and His gospel... The new evangelization, like that of all times, will be effective if it proclaims from the roof tops what it has first lived in intimacy with the Lord. It calls for strong personalities inspired by saintly fervor."⁸⁶