

Presentation

As all the people of God, we too and mainly us, are invited to give a new and more convincing testimony of our faith as the foundation of our choice to live the radical nature of the Gospel.

With the centrality of the theme of faith we are called to 'confess, celebrate, live and pray' together as a community, in order to support us and confirm our commitment to being evangelized and to evangelize our poor and as many people as we can. We have strongly proclaimed in our General Chapter: the New Evangelization begins with ourselves, the more the Gospel penetrates into our ordinary community life, we will be more fruitful in our apostolate.

So these proposals can help us to reflect together and plan some simple demonstrations of our faith that can also grow our belief and our commitment in giving wide and with greater courage 'bread and Lord' to our guests.

Two must be the strong points of our faith:

- God is our Father, from which derive the personal confidence of being unconditionally loved by God and our ability to be fathers and brothers for our poor, spiritual fathers who accompany to live fully the life of the children of God
- Christ is present in the poor, but to feel it and live it we must bring to our poor with a poor heart, we must first live the evangelical beatitude of poverty.

These proposals are not a pastoral plan, but a stimulus for reflection that can help us to realize our community reality as the pastors, the Pope and the Bishops are asking us in different cultural situations in which you need to express our faith.

Good journey of faith at all!

Fr. Alfonso Crippa

General Superior

Rome, February 2nd, 2013

I Part

The magisterium of the Church

APOSTOLIC LETTER
"MOTU PROPRIO DATA"

PORTA FIDEI

OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF
BENEDICT XVI

FOR THE INDICATION OF THE YEAR OF FAITH

1. The "door of faith" (*Acts 14:27*) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It begins with baptism (cf. *Rom 6:4*), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. *Jn 17:22*). To profess faith in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is to believe in one God who is Love (cf. *1 Jn 4:8*): the Father, who in the fullness of time sent his Son for our salvation; Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of his death and resurrection redeemed the world; the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church across the centuries as we await the Lord's glorious return.

2. Ever since the start of my ministry as Successor of Peter, I have spoken of the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ. During the homily at the Mass marking the inauguration of my pontificate I said: "The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance."^[1] It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied.^[2] Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.

3. We cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden (cf. *Mt 5:13-16*). The people of today can still experience the need to go to the well, like the

Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (cf. *Jn* 4:14). We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (cf. *Jn* 6:51). Indeed, the teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power: "Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" (*Jn* 6:27). The question posed by his listeners is the same that we ask today: "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (*Jn* 6:28). We know Jesus' reply: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (*Jn* 6:29). Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation.

4. In the light of all this, I have decided to announce a Year of Faith. It will begin on 11 October 2012, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and it will end on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, on 24 November 2013. The starting date of 11 October 2012 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a text promulgated by my Predecessor, Blessed John Paul II,^[3] with a view to illustrating for all the faithful the power and beauty of the faith. This document, an authentic fruit of the Second Vatican Council, was requested by the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 as an instrument at the service of catechesis^[4] and it was produced in collaboration with all the bishops of the Catholic Church. Moreover, the theme of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that I have convoked for October 2012 is "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith". This will be a good opportunity to usher the whole Church into a time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith. It is not the first time that the Church has been called to celebrate a Year of Faith. My venerable Predecessor the Servant of God Paul VI announced one in 1967, to commemorate the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul on the 19th centenary of their supreme act of witness. He thought of it as a solemn moment for the whole Church to make "an authentic and sincere profession of the same faith"; moreover, he wanted this to be confirmed in a way that was "individual and collective, free and conscious, inward and outward, humble and frank".^[5] He thought that in this way the whole Church could reappropriate "exact knowledge of the faith, so as to reinvigorate it, purify it, confirm it, and confess it".^[6] The great upheavals of that year made even more evident the need for a celebration of this kind. It concluded with the *Credo of the People of God*,^[7] intended to show how much the essential content that for centuries has formed the heritage of all believers needs to be confirmed, understood and explored ever anew, so as to bear consistent witness in historical circumstances very different from those of the past.

5. In some respects, my venerable predecessor saw this Year as a "consequence and a necessity of the postconciliar period",^[8] fully conscious of the grave difficulties of the time, especially with regard to the profession of the true faith and its correct interpretation. It seemed to me that timing the launch of the Year of Faith to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council would provide a good opportunity to help people understand that the texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers, in the words of Blessed John Paul II, "have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition ... I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as *the great grace bestowed on the Church in the*

twentieth century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.”^[9] I would also like to emphasize strongly what I had occasion to say concerning the Council a few months after my election as Successor of Peter: “if we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church.”^[10]

6. The renewal of the Church is also achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us. The Council itself, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, said this: While “Christ, ‘holy, innocent and undefiled’ (Heb 7:26) knew nothing of sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), but came only to expiate the sins of the people (cf. Heb 2:17)... the Church ... clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. The Church, ‘like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God’, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1 Cor 11:26). But by the power of the risen Lord it is given strength to overcome, in patience and in love, its sorrow and its difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without, so that it may reveal in the world, faithfully, although with shadows, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it shall be manifested in full light.”^[11]

The Year of Faith, from this perspective, is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world. In the mystery of his death and resurrection, God has revealed in its fullness the Love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 5:31). For Saint Paul, this Love ushers us into a new life: “We were buried ... with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Through faith, this new life shapes the whole of human existence according to the radical new reality of the resurrection. To the extent that he freely cooperates, man’s thoughts and affections, mentality and conduct are slowly purified and transformed, on a journey that is never completely finished in this life. “Faith working through love” (Gal 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life (cf. Rom 12:2; Col 3:9-10; Eph4:20-29; 2 Cor 5:17).

7. “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (2 Cor 5:14): it is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. Today as in the past, he sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19). Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to himself the people of every generation: in every age he convokes the Church, entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new. Today too, there is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith. In rediscovering his love day by day, the missionary commitment of believers attains force and vigour that can never fade away. Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord’s invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples. Believers, so Saint Augustine tells us, “strengthen themselves by believing”.^[12] The saintly Bishop of Hippo had good reason to express himself in this way. As we know, his life was

a continual search for the beauty of the faith until such time as his heart would find rest in God.^[13] His extensive writings, in which he explains the importance of believing and the truth of the faith, continue even now to form a heritage of incomparable riches, and they still help many people in search of God to find the right path towards the “door of faith”.

Only through believing, then, does faith grow and become stronger; there is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one’s life apart from self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God.

8. On this happy occasion, I wish to invite my brother bishops from all over the world to join the Successor of Peter, during this time of spiritual grace that the Lord offers us, in recalling the precious gift of faith. We want to celebrate this Year in a worthy and fruitful manner. Reflection on the faith will have to be intensified, so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing. We will have the opportunity to profess our faith in the Risen Lord in our cathedrals and in the churches of the whole world; in our homes and among our families, so that everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations the faith of all times. Religious communities as well as parish communities, and all ecclesial bodies old and new, are to find a way, during this Year, to make a public profession of the *Credo*.

9. We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to *profess* the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope. It will also be a good opportunity to intensify the *celebration* of the faith in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist, which is “the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; ... and also the source from which all its power flows.”^[14] At the same time, we make it our prayer that believers’ *witness* of life may grow in credibility. To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed,^[15] and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year.

Not without reason, Christians in the early centuries were required to learn the creed from memory. It served them as a daily prayer not to forget the commitment they had undertaken in baptism. With words rich in meaning, Saint Augustine speaks of this in a homily on the *redditio symboli*, the handing over of the creed: “the symbol of the holy mystery that you have all received together and that today you have recited one by one, are the words on which the faith of Mother Church is firmly built above the stable foundation that is Christ the Lord. You have received it and recited it, but in your minds and hearts you must keep it ever present, you must repeat it in your beds, recall it in the public squares and not forget it during meals: even when your body is asleep, you must watch over it with your hearts.”^[16]

10. At this point I would like to sketch a path intended to help us understand more profoundly not only the content of the faith, but also the act by which we choose to entrust ourselves fully to God, in complete freedom. In fact, there exists a profound unity between the act by which we believe and the content to which we give our assent. Saint Paul helps us to enter into this reality when he writes: “Man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (*Rom* 10:10). The heart indicates that the

first act by which one comes to faith is God's gift and the action of grace which acts and transforms the person deep within.

The example of Lydia is particularly eloquent in this regard. Saint Luke recounts that, while he was at Philippi, Paul went on the Sabbath to proclaim the Gospel to some women; among them was Lydia and "the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (*Acts*16:14). There is an important meaning contained within this expression. Saint Luke teaches that knowing the content to be believed is not sufficient unless the heart, the authentic sacred space within the person, is opened by grace that allows the eyes to see below the surface and to understand that what has been proclaimed is the word of God.

Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment. A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. This "standing with him" points towards an understanding of the reasons for believing. Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes. The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity this public dimension of believing and proclaiming one's faith fearlessly to every person. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us fit for mission and strengthens our witness, making it frank and courageous.

Profession of faith is an act both personal and communitarian. It is the Church that is the primary subject of faith. In the faith of the Christian community, each individual receives baptism, an effective sign of entry into the people of believers in order to obtain salvation. As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: " 'I believe' is the faith of the Church professed personally by each believer, principally during baptism. 'We believe' is the faith of the Church confessed by the bishops assembled in council or more generally by the liturgical assembly of believers. 'I believe' is also the Church, our mother, responding to God by faith as she teaches us to say both 'I believe' and 'we believe'." [17]

Evidently, knowledge of the content of faith is essential for giving one's own *assent*, that is to say for adhering fully with intellect and will to what the Church proposes. Knowledge of faith opens a door into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God. The giving of assent implies that, when we believe, we freely accept the whole mystery of faith, because the guarantor of its truth is God who reveals himself and allows us to know his mystery of love. [18]

On the other hand, we must not forget that in our cultural context, very many people, while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are nevertheless sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world. This search is an authentic "preamble" to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God. Human reason, in fact, bears within itself a demand for "what is perennially valid and lasting". [19] This demand constitutes a permanent summons, indelibly written into the human heart, to set out to find the One whom we would not be seeking had he not already set out to meet us. [20] To this encounter, faith invites us and it opens us in fullness.

11. In order to arrive at a systematic knowledge of the content of the faith, all can find in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* a precious and indispensable tool. It is one of the most important fruits of the [Second Vatican Council](#). In the Apostolic Constitution [Fidei Depositum](#), signed, not by accident, on the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Blessed John Paul II wrote: “this catechism will make a very important contribution to that work of renewing the whole life of the Church ... I declare it to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.” [\[21\]](#)

It is in this sense that the Year of Faith will have to see a concerted effort to rediscover and study the fundamental content of the faith that receives its systematic and organic synthesis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed in her two thousand years of history. From Sacred Scripture to the Fathers of the Church, from theological masters to the saints across the centuries, the *Catechism* provides a permanent record of the many ways in which the Church has meditated on the faith and made progress in doctrine so as to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith.

In its very structure, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* follows the development of the faith right up to the great themes of daily life. On page after page, we find that what is presented here is no theory, but an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church. The profession of faith is followed by an account of sacramental life, in which Christ is present, operative and continues to build his Church. Without the liturgy and the sacraments, the profession of faith would lack efficacy, because it would lack the grace which supports Christian witness. By the same criterion, the teaching of the *Catechism* on the moral life acquires its full meaning if placed in relationship with faith, liturgy and prayer.

12. In this Year, then, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will serve as a tool providing real support for the faith, especially for those concerned with the formation of Christians, so crucial in our cultural context. To this end, I have invited the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, by agreement with the competent Dicasteries of the Holy See, to draw up a *Note*, providing the Church and individual believers with some guidelines on how to live this Year of Faith in the most effective and appropriate ways, at the service of belief and evangelization.

To a greater extent than in the past, faith is now being subjected to a series of questions arising from a changed mentality which, especially today, limits the field of rational certainties to that of scientific and technological discoveries. Nevertheless, the Church has never been afraid of demonstrating that there cannot be any conflict between faith and genuine science, because both, albeit via different routes, tend towards the truth. [\[22\]](#)

13. One thing that will be of decisive importance in this Year is retracing the history of our faith, marked as it is by the unfathomable mystery of the interweaving of holiness and sin. While the former highlights the great contribution that men and women have made to the growth and development of the community through the witness of their lives, the latter must provoke in each person a sincere and continuing work of conversion in order to experience the mercy of the Father which is held out to everyone.

During this time we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (*Heb 12:2*): in him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness in the face of an offence received and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfillment in the mystery of his Incarnation, in his becoming man, in his sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of his resurrection. In him who died and rose again for our salvation, the examples of faith that have marked these two thousand years of our salvation history are brought into the fullness of light.

By faith, Mary accepted the Angel’s word and believed the message that she was to become the Mother of God in the obedience of her devotion (cf. *Lk 1:38*). Visiting Elizabeth, she raised her hymn of praise to the Most High for the marvels he worked in those who trust him (cf. *Lk 1:46-55*). With joy and trepidation she gave birth to her only son, keeping her virginity intact (cf. *Lk 2:6-7*). Trusting in Joseph, her husband, she took Jesus to Egypt to save him from Herod’s persecution (cf. *Mt 2:13-15*). With the same faith, she followed the Lord in his preaching and remained with him all the way to Golgotha (cf. *Jn 19:25-27*). By faith, Mary tasted the fruits of Jesus’ resurrection, and treasuring every memory in her heart (cf. *Lk 2:19, 51*), she passed them on to the Twelve assembled with her in the Upper Room to receive the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts 1:14; 2:1-4*).

By faith, the Apostles left everything to follow their Master (cf. *Mk 10:28*). They believed the words with which he proclaimed the Kingdom of God present and fulfilled in his person (cf. *Lk 11:20*). They lived in communion of life with Jesus who instructed them with his teaching, leaving them a new rule of life, by which they would be recognized as his disciples after his death (cf. *Jn 13:34-35*). By faith, they went out to the whole world, following the command to bring the Gospel to all creation (cf. *Mk 16:15*) and they fearlessly proclaimed to all the joy of the resurrection, of which they were faithful witnesses.

By faith, the disciples formed the first community, gathered around the teaching of the Apostles, in prayer, in celebration of the Eucharist, holding their possessions in common so as to meet the needs of the brethren (cf. *Acts 2:42-47*).

By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel that had transformed them and made them capable of attaining to the greatest gift of love: the forgiveness of their persecutors.

By faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind so as to live obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity, concrete signs of waiting for the Lord who comes without delay. By faith, countless Christians have promoted action for justice so as to put into practice the word of the Lord, who came to proclaim deliverance from oppression and a year of favour for all (cf. *Lk 4:18-19*).

By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages, whose names are written in the Book of Life (cf. *Rev 7:9, 13:8*), have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus wherever they were called to bear witness to the fact that they were Christian: in the

family, in the workplace, in public life, in the exercise of the charisms and ministries to which they were called.

By faith, we too live: by the living recognition of the Lord Jesus, present in our lives and in our history.

14. The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity. As Saint Paul reminds us: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (*1 Cor* 13:13). With even stronger words – which have always placed Christians under obligation – Saint James said: "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled', without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith" (*Jas* 2:14-18).

Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path. Indeed, many Christians dedicate their lives with love to those who are lonely, marginalized or excluded, as to those who are the first with a claim on our attention and the most important for us to support, because it is in them that the reflection of Christ's own face is seen. Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:40). These words are a warning that must not be forgotten and a perennial invitation to return the love by which he takes care of us. It is faith that enables us to recognize Christ and it is his love that impels us to assist him whenever he becomes our neighbour along the journey of life. Supported by faith, let us look with hope at our commitment in the world, as we await "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (*2 Pet* 3:13; cf. *Rev* 21:1).

15. Having reached the end of his life, Saint Paul asks his disciple Timothy to "aim at faith" (*2 Tim* 2:22) with the same constancy as when he was a boy (cf. *2 Tim* 3:15). We hear this invitation directed to each of us, that none of us grow lazy in the faith. It is the lifelong companion that makes it possible to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us. Intent on gathering the signs of the times in the present of history, faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.

"That the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (*2 Th* 3:1): may this Year of Faith make our relationship with Christ the Lord increasingly firm, since only in him is there the certitude for looking to the future and the guarantee of an authentic and lasting love. The words of Saint Peter shed one final ray of light on faith: "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him

you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:6-9). The life of Christians knows the experience of joy as well as the experience of suffering. How many of the saints have lived in solitude! How many believers, even in our own day, are tested by God's silence when they would rather hear his consoling voice! The trials of life, while helping us to understand the mystery of the Cross and to participate in the sufferings of Christ (cf. Col 1:24), are a prelude to the joy and hope to which faith leads: "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). We believe with firm certitude that the Lord Jesus has conquered evil and death. With this sure confidence we entrust ourselves to him: he, present in our midst, overcomes the power of the evil one (cf. Lk 11:20); and the Church, the visible community of his mercy, abides in him as a sign of definitive reconciliation with the Father.

Let us entrust this time of grace to the Mother of God, proclaimed "blessed because she believed" (Lk 1:45).

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 11 October in the year 2011, the seventh of my Pontificate.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

[1] [*Homily for the beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome*](#) (24 April 2005):AAS 97 (2005), 710.

[2] Cf. Benedict XVI, [*Homily at Holy Mass in Lisbon's "Terreiro do Paço"*](#) (11 May 2010):*Insegnamenti* VI:1 (2010), 673.

[3] Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution [*Fidei Depositum*](#) (11 October 1992): AAS 86 (1994), 113-118.

[4] Cf. *Final Report of the Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops* (7 December 1985), II, B, a, 4 in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, ix, n. 1797.

[5] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Petrum et Paulum Apostolos* on the XIX centenary of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul (22 February 1967): AAS 59 (1967), 196.

[6] *Ibid.*, 198.

[7] Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God*, cf. Homily at Mass on the XIX centenary of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul at the conclusion of the "Year of Faith" (30 June 1968):AAS 60 (1968), 433-445.

- [8] Paul VI, *General Audience* (14 June 1967): *Insegnamenti V* (1967), 801.
- [9] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter [*Novo Millennio Ineunte*](#) (6 January 2001), 57: AAS 93 (2001), 308.
- [10] [*Address to the Roman Curia*](#) (22 December 2005): AAS 98 (2006), 52.
- [11] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*](#), 8.
- [12] *De Utilitate Credendi*, I:2.
- [13] Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, I:1.
- [14] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*](#), 10.
- [15] Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution [*Fidei Depositum*](#) (11 October 1992): AAS 86 (1994), 116.
- [16] *Sermo* 215:1.
- [17] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 167.
- [18] Cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, chap. III: DS 3008-3009; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [*Dei Verbum*](#), 5.
- [19] Benedict XVI, [*Address at the Collège des Bernardins*](#), Paris (12 September 2008): AAS100 (2008), 722.
- [20] Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII:1.
- [21] John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution [*Fidei Depositum*](#) (11 October 1992): AAS 86 (1994), 115 and 117.
- [22] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [*Fides et Ratio*](#) (14 September 1998), 34, 106: AAS 91 (1999), 31-32, 86-87.

II Part

Faith in Fr. Guanella: the Fatherhood of God

ONE POINT, ONE SMALL BUT FIRM POINT

Fr. Guanella and His Basic Certainty

When one fosters a certainty in one's life and is mindful of it, everything is possible, even the trial of suffering. On the contrary, without this firm point of reference in the soul, everything eventually becomes unbearable, even pleasure.

It is the secret of the saints and the experience of all: a little certainty nourished with love can be the orbit around which everything revolves. If this is absent one feels useless and can even arrive at the point of giving up, but if one resists the tides and assaults it becomes the key to everything, the point upon which everything else depends, even eventual failures. For some it is a creature, for others an idea or a flag; at times a job, a place, even a fixation. For the saints it is obviously God and the way in which God reveals himself to them.

Why is it so important to ask which image of God this or that saint had? Why is it decisive for us to address the "theology" of Fr. Guanella? Naturally, it regards the foundation which shapes all else.

Two questions found in the Acts of the Apostles around which the Church is born strike me: the first, that of the crowds after Peter's discourse: "*What must we do brothers?*" and the second, that of Paul who, captivated by Jesus, asks: "*Who are you Lord?*" Of course, the second is much more important than the first, often taken for granted, but in reality foundational.

Who are you Lord? Who is God? This is the heart of the matter: because beginning from "that God" all else is born. There are those who in the name of God start wars and those who brings peace, those who fear him and those who joke about him, those who feel he is a father and those who feel he is a master, some see him as the great limit and others as the greatest opportunity. From the response to the question "*who are you Lord?*" also arises the whole history of Christian spirituality and the multi-form panorama of religious life in the Church.

In the case of certain saints, above all founders of religious orders, it is called a *charism*. With regard to Fr. Guanella, Fr. Attilio Beria¹ was the first to speak of it in an

¹ Attilio Beria (Pavia 1919 - Rome 1983) was one of the most outstanding Guanellians and brilliant scholars of Fr. Guanella. He divided guanellian studies in two clear stages: before and after him. He was the first to

explicit and shocking way, ² to the point of giving rise to discussions and disagreements for decades to come. First, Fr. Beria maintains, in terms of revelation and grace, that **the fatherhood of God is the charism of Fr. Guanella and his Congregations**: “it seems to us a duty to speak of revelation and a miracle before the realization that during this time (1878-1886) his way of sensing and experiencing the Lord as Father reaches maturity.”

How does one arrive at this foundational principle by reading the biography and writings of Fr. Guanella? Fr. Attilio proposes a striking analysis, unsurpassed thus far in its simplicity: it is fruitful to recognize the seed. Beginning with the following:

- how Fr. Guanella represents God
- the type of relationship he establishes with Him, and therefore his prayer life
- the way he evaluates himself and his life
- his view of others, his approach to others
- his way of being in the world
- what he considers to be a priority or a waste of time

Fr. Beria arrives at formulating a *Synthesis* – he calls it precisely this – in which he sees the driving force of the whole guanellian adventure, of thought and action, to lie in God’s fatherhood.

Part One

THE FATHER

19th Century Italy and the New Image of the “Father”

For a more complete discussion on the fatherhood of God it is helpful to take a look, even if briefly, at the concept of “father” in the northern Italian family during the middle of the 1800s. This will help us understand what Fr. Guanella means when he uses the term to refer to God, even with all its due distinctions. As one may imagine, we are faced

systematize to some extent the Founder’s thought and praxis beginning with his biography and his writings. Later guanellian Piero Pellegrini, his disciple, was able to develop and historically structure the master’s affirmations.

² His most decisive contributions to guanellian studies are the following three: a precious *Antologia di Scritti del Beato Fondatore don Luigi Guanella per le sue Congregazioni* [Anthology of Writings of the Blessed Founder Fr. Luigi Guanella for His Congregations], 1969; the address given at the extraordinary General Chapter of 1969 entitled *Il Beato Fondatore don Luigi Guanella sintesi vivente, spirito e carisma* [The Blessed Founder Fr. Luigi Guanella: Living Synthesis, Spirit and Charism]; the exquisite and incomparable introduction to the volume LUIGI GUANELLA, *Pagine spirituali e preghiere* [Spiritual Pages and Prayers] published in the “Fuochi” series under the direction of the great Fr. Giuseppe De Luca for Morcelliana Press, Brescia 1957, pp. 7-30.

with an overwhelmingly vast bibliography which spans from philosophy to sociology, from pedagogy to psychology, and from theology to anthropology.³

The “bourgeois family,” which developed in the 1800s, gave life to a great transformation in the concept of family: new roles were assigned to the father and the mother, which brought their identity into focus and strengthened it.

The Napoleonic Code, promulgated in 1804, provided for the equality of children, which the previous law of inheritance did not sanction, not even among sons. It changed the concept of paternity and maternity because it passed from an extended family model, with behaviors typical of the patriarchal family in which children did not always live with their parents, to the nuclear family composed of the couple and their few children. As long as the birth rate did not increase, the mortality rate diminished due to the improved conditions of health and hygiene and a higher quality of life. Moreover, when women entered the factories they could no longer manage as many pregnancies as before.

Little by little this situation also brought forth the re-dimensioning of male primacy in the family. Interestingly, we witness a development in conjugal life and marriage, which had up until then been based mostly on choices of interest, but now begins to be transformed into relationships of love between the spouses, as well as with their children who could no longer be considered only mouths to feed, but the objective of the conjugal union and recipients of care.

This whole situation, which would be developed in detail, leads to a totally new concept of father. Fr. Guanella adopts it. He proves to possess it because he appeals to the sentiments of his generation and offers further proof of always being a man identified with his times, even within the more avant-garde cultural matrices as the idea of the family.

He brings with him the positive legacy of the family of the 1700s, in fact to a certain extent he looks back and mourns its loss.⁴ Nevertheless he presents an anthropological picture typical of its time, in which the family offers a real possibility for social development and transmission of the faith and becomes a human training ground. As for the figure of the father, Fr. Guanella expresses precisely this model typical of the

³ For what I consider to be a succinct, detailed and precise summary see J. DUPUIS, *Storia della paternità [History of Fatherhood]*, Tranchida Editori, Milan 1992; for an interesting discussion of the historical evolution of the concept of father see also C. GUSTAVO PIETROPOLLI, *Un nuovo padre [A New Father]*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milan 1995; for other broad historical sketches see S. KRAEMER, *The origins of fatherhood: An ancient family process*, in *Family Process*, n. 30, 1991, pp. 377-392; for a serious review of the paternal image throughout the centuries, even if in an extremely specialistic form, see the work of the notable German anthropologist D. LENZEN, *Alla ricerca del padre [In Search of the Father]*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1994; finally the text of the professor from the Catholic University of Milan F. BELLETTI, *Essere padri. Aspetti esistenziali, emozionali e relazionali della paternità [Being Fathers: Existential, Emotional and Relational Aspects of Fatherhood]*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2003.

⁴ In general, in his autobiographical memoirs when he speaks of his origins and his childhood the significance is strong and the praise of times past, by now unrecoverable, is always highly emphasized.

bourgeois family, which constructed the roles and the playing out of roles within the family. According to this model, the father is never weak, always capable of doing everything, the leader, responsible for everything, the one who punishes but forgives, who opens the way for his children, and is exemplary in his morality...

Perhaps Fr. Guanella would have willingly highlighted the “maternity” of God, had he lived in our times. In the 1800s this concept, often utilized today, was rather unthinkable.

God’s Fatherhood in the Gospel and in Christian Tradition

I would like only to touch upon this subject, because an abundance of valuable literature already exists on it.⁵ Remaining within the Italian context, I can, however, indicate at least three striking and serious contributions for a discussion on this topic: two comments on the *Our Father* of the late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini,⁶ that of the biblical scholar from Como, Fr. Bruno Maggioni,⁷ as well as that of Enzo Bianchi, prior of Bose.⁸

A concise and synoptic reading of the biblical texts offers us a framework of minimal reference to God’s fatherhood. In fact, it appears an insignificant number of times, with less than twenty altogether. Fatherhood is spoken of within the context of the covenant, and God appears as the patient and rigorous educator who teaches unfaithful and rather rebellious children. He is the authoritative Father who even gets angry, reproaches, corrects, and at times punishes, but forgives and loves.

Nevertheless, it is above all in the reflection on the prayer of the *Pater* that the Church has identified the heart of the Gospel, commenting on versions found in both Matthew and Luke and taking its inspiration from the Jewish prayer in which it is rooted, to the point that a Jew could easily recite it.

Naturally, the title “Father” in reference to God could be found in all religions, but what decides the value of a word is the context in which it is situated, and for us a

⁵ Moving within a *mare magnum*, for a quality study I would suggest the essay of the biblical scholar from the Piedmont region of Italy, ROMANO PENNA, *La paternità di Dio nel Nuovo Testamento [The Fatherhood of God in the New Testament]*, in *Rassegna di Teologia*, XL (1999), pp. 7-40; also interesting is the work of the Jesuit FERDINANDO CASTELLI, *La paternità di Dio nella letteratura moderna. Negazioni, affermazioni, approfondimenti [The Fatherhood of God in Modern Literature: Negations, Affirmations and Analyses]*, in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1999, n. 1, p. 17; for another clear contribution see that of the Neopolitan theologian ANDREA MILANO, *Padre [Father]*, in *Dizionario di Teologia [Dictionary of Theology]*, ed. G. Barboglio and S. Dianich, Paoline, Alba 1977, p. 1082. For a brief elaboration of the figure of the father along the lines of religious psychology see that proposed by the Belgian professor ANTOINE VERGOTE, *Psychologie religieuse [Religious Psychology]*, Dessart, Bruxelles 1966, pp. 193-195.

⁶ C.M. MARTINI, *Non sprecate parole. Esercizi spirituali con il Padre Nostro [Unwasted Words: Spiritual Exercises with the Our Father]*, Portalupi Editore, Casale Monferrato 2005; IDEM, *Padre Nostro [Our Father]*, In Dialogo, Milan 2002.

⁷ B. MAGGIONI, *Padre Nostro*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2004.

⁸ E. BIANCHI, *Il Padre Nostro compendio di tutto il Vangelo [The Our Father: A Compendium of the Whole Gospel]*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2008.

decisive context is given by the meaning that Jesus attributes to it in his preaching, which includes and surpasses our usual concept of goodness, guardianship, providence and care. For Jesus fatherhood, among all of God's attributes, is not like the rest, rather it is the foundation of all the others. Our God will also be Omnipotent, but he is so because he loves me, because he saves me, such that his omnipotence is at the service of his fatherhood; he is also a judge, but his is the judgment of a Father...

Christians consider the prayer to be that of the wayfarer who lives on Providence and forgiveness, and whom the Father frees from distress and sustains in the hour of temptation so that he may proclaim His name, do His will and hasten the coming of His kingdom. God procures *bread* for this wayfarer day by day, liberating him from the anxiety of having to provide for himself: *bread, bread of the journey, bread of the poor*. This bread is the Father's first gift to us and is our first commitment to the Father's other children.

Already the structure of the *Our Father* with its seven petitions indicates this true center of the Christian faith: bread, connected with the fourth petition, is the center of the prayer because in the stylistic construction of ancient texts, which also served a liturgical function, the author was careful to place at the center, in *positio princeps*, what he considered to be primary. Bread? But it should be the humblest of questions...why is it in the center? Many say that here it alludes to the Eucharist, but in reality man needs bread, because the Eucharist alone is not enough and bread is fundamental.

Thus the disciples of the Kingdom can pray to the Father only if they hold within them these real requests for real needs, because they express a decisive truth: our dependence on God and the reception of bread from him as a gift. Even if it were to involve work, the realm in which the disciples move is that of the gift and of poverty, such that if they have bread it is because someone gave it to them.

This spirituality of dependency and holy mendicancy is not lived only in emergency circumstances, but in ordinary life. A whole education on this is necessary, because at times our economic and existential autonomy leads us to believe that we are able to do without any gifts and need not ask. Clearly we do not claim to go back to living by survival; how then do we live poverty while we have everything and bread risks being thrown out with our garbage?

Here the adjective *our* tied to the Father makes us recall that not only is the Father ours but also things are ours, and that there is a brotherhood of blood, a brotherhood of faith and of bread, which is more difficult to realize, but the most verifiable of all, because one can easily see if bread is shared or if the heart is closed.

In this proclamation of the Father and his kingdom guanellians recognize the inspiration of their Founder, his charism.

Fr. Guanella's Charism

Let us save ourselves right away from a frequent theological error: in our recent literature charism is often spoken of, but with the basic misunderstanding that it is

something externally added on, in a second moment, almost like a supplemental endowment.

Charism is the gift of the Holy Spirit, in a full, stable and intimate way, which helps Fr. Luigi expose and reveal himself for who he is. In other words, charism is not like a divine force which transforms the person, almost giving him a new personality to enable him to carry out the mission entrusted to him. The Holy Spirit does not transform Fr. Guanella, but reveals who he is, intimately; he does not change his identity, but makes it more visible, transparent, and legible. Charism identifies him as the beloved son sent to the most beloved children, along the lines of the chosen Son: to bring news of joy to the Father's little ones.

Fr. Guanella's charism is his person, as a gratuitous work of God and of his Spirit, placed at God's disposal. In other words, *Fr. Guanella's charism* is exactly how Fr. Luigi appeared in person, insofar as he let himself be worked on by God as a product of grace in his whole person throughout his entire life, from the cradle to the grave. Therefore, by *charism* we mean the permanent action of the Holy Spirit in him, with all the fruits that are derived from it in terms of visibility, transparency and evidence displayed.

Charism is not, above all, the joy of having found the key, *something to do*, the direction in which to journey throughout life, but the fortune of the relationship Fr. Guanella has with God, almost the chronicle of their relationship, from which flows "*what to do.*"

There are two elements in play: the Holy Spirit's action which is the pure and gratuitous divine initiative and its fruits which are the proof of Fr. Guanella's docility. And by fruits we mean his life, completely oriented to the Lord Jesus, because this is the work of the Spirit: to bring the entire person involved to Christ.

Christ's work is completely focused on the proclamation of God's fatherhood;⁹ the Gospel brings us the news of news, especially in the passage of the Beatitudes, which Fr. Guanella favors: no one is alone and left to himself, there are no orphans in this world, no life is without meaning, because God is a Father who wants to bless and save his children.

To present this proclamation as *the novelty* Fr. Guanella brought forth is the worst service we could offer to history, the Church and Fr. Luigi himself, because from the period of the Apostolic Fathers to Mother Theresa of Calcutta, passing through Francis of Assisi, Vincent de Paul, Francis de Sales, Alphonsus Liguori and thousands of others, the theme of God's fatherhood marks the whole history of Christian spirituality. It is enough to offer the example of Francis who strips in the square of Assisi and symbolically passes

⁹ The word "blessed" is one of the most recurring in his vocabulary and citations from the Beatitudes fill all of his literary works, including his letters. Moreover, he dedicates one of his spiritual writings to the Gospel passage of the Beatitudes in the crucial years of his failed foundation of the order in Traona in L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al monte della felicità. Inviti a seguire Gesù sul Monte delle Beatitudini*, [Let Us Go Up to the Mount of Happiness: Invitations to Follow Jesus on the Mount of the Beatitudes] *Opere edite e inedite*, vol. III, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1999.

from his father Pietro di Bernardone to the heavenly Father, radically choosing to trustingly abandon himself into the hands of this Father.

By now we know that Father Guanella receives from the tradition and Christian reflection this motif of fatherhood¹⁰ and nurtures it as his liveliest certainty, capable of coloring all else, seeing in the parable of the Prodigal Son the whole history of God and man: a Father, a home, children; departures and abysses of misery, depravation or bewilderment, then the return; above all, the sadness of the Father for the poverty and loneliness of his children, to the point of the extreme and sublime act of putting Jesus at stake, the beloved Son, so that all children would find the way home. That extreme and sublime gesture, which the biblical tradition and our deepest spirituality calls “*mercy*,” becomes Fr. Guanella’s motivation: the providential mercy of the Father rules the world, and to reach the little ones there is need of other little ones. He is one of them.

This is the story that convinces his heart, the best icon of charisma, where he, the beloved son, finds his vocation to mercy, and in his rereading of the Gospel parable of the Father who calls his children to save one another Fr. Guanella’s journey is altogether unique and new. Also new is the page he writes in the history of religious life because he generates *new monks and nuns*. While it is monastic life, with its strong contemplative dimension,¹¹ it is new, because all is developed outside of the new monastery conceived as a “home” and together inhabited by both *monks* and the *poor*. “*Pray and suffer*,” which echoes the benedictine “*ora et labora*” is the most visible sign of the new seed born from the old trunk. It is interesting to note that this program never appears in Fr. Guanella’s writings to his Congregations. They were his final words on his death bed, offered to those who asked for a last word, the best of the best. And he sees in this expression the synthesis that was immediately taken up and spread as the project of a life, his life, and that which would be possible for his followers.

While the term *pray* is clear and does not require an explanation, *suffer* must be preserved from a stray interpretation, which risks digression in masochist victimism, unacceptable even if the intentions are holy. The entire post-tridentine spirituality is presented as hinging on self-immolation: the true disciple of Jesus knows how to suffer with Him and sees it as a grace, a glory, and an inestimable fortune. But it is suffering

¹⁰ It was only in 1900 that the notable cycle of the sixteen Conferences of Berlin of the protestant theologian Adolf Von Harnack appeared on the *Essenza del Cristianesimo [Essence of Christianity]*, which focused on God the Father and his love for man. However, for at least three centuries the Church’s reflection returned to this point frequently, and Von Harnack brought it into relief only as a foundational core of the Christian life.

¹¹ Unfortunately that brilliant foundation, which involved the opening of the female House of the Guanellians at Genio of Musso on Lake Como was never studied. It was supposed to have been for the Daughters of Saint Mary, but they became inactive due to health reasons. They would have been totally dedicated to the purest form of contemplative life. Fr. Guanella thought it up and began it. It did not last long and this particular brilliant idea was never taken up again.

with Christ, understood in a pauline key,¹² where life, one's own life, is not considered the primary good: the primary good is the mercy of the Father for whose service we have been intended, "*your grace is worth more than life*" as Psalm 62 says.

I believe that Fr. Guanella's charism may be considered, above all in its most immediate effect, as unifying the person, because it is a matter of a monolithic force, that is, unitary which concentrates on thought, action, word and sentiments. In the biographical and spiritual reconstructions of the figure of Fr. Luigi, which stand out in our literature of the last half of the century, a *quasi-fragmentation* appears, so much so as to create questions and doubts: what is the central driving force of the sanctity of the Founder? Providence? Love? Fatherhood? The Sacred Heart? The Eucharist? Suffering?

Every once in a while someone strove to understand Fr. Luigi within the context of this or that suggestion according to the moment in time, circumstances, use, possible advantage, or else attempted to line him up with the latest papal Encyclical, with some slogan of the various Synods, or with the eventual documents of the conference of Religious, etc...

The charism creates unity in the person. It is a flame from which sparks emanate, some greater, some smaller, but always one and the same flame. Fr. Guanella appears to the examination of the historical and literary critic as a unified personality on a journey in one direction with one interest only, one word to say. In him there is a center. Actions, thoughts and achievements are variations of that unique center: the Father, his benevolent Providence, the charity with which, through the love of the Heart of his Son present in the Eucharist, he places himself at the feet of the poor and seats them at the table of the Kingdom.

The Joy of Fatherhood

Wishing to better explain that small, but firm point of reference in the soul, which is the key to everything for those who study Fr. Guanella, I would say: it is trust in God the Father who wants his children to be happy, even in their poverty.

It entails two almost incredible aspects because they are difficult to believe, and due to this I have evoked the image of *trust*.

The first: **A Father who wants our happiness.**

It is not easy to encounter people who even in trials are capable of firmly believing that God wants their happiness. And yet, it seems to me that one of the first points of the guanellian charism lies here, in the proclamation of a Father who wants to *see his children* happy; not *make them* happy, but *see them* so. Authentic parents are called to make their children happy; at times parents make themselves responsible for their children's joy in a wrong and dangerous sense; it is life, their life which must make them happy.

When reading the lives of the saints we are always amazed by the profound blessedness they have experienced even when almost all of them have entered into the

¹² Cf. Colossians 1:24.

trial of the *great* tribulation; Fr. Guanella knew exile, persecution, loneliness, incomprehension. In what way did he lack being tested? Perhaps only prison; he came close to it in the years of Savogno and Taona, to the point of having to preach under the control of others, with police in the back of the Church. The rage against him lasted way beyond his death. Even during his cause for beatification some took the trouble to testify against him to try to annul the process.¹³

And yet to those who read his autobiographical memoirs – a jewel of the spiritual life – his life clearly appears as a serene, peaceful and almost enjoyable journey. The elderly are not always this way, and even among consecrated persons it is often easy to encounter people who complain and drag behind them a history of unresolved bitterness with much remorse and regret. If you read the memoirs of the elderly Fr. Guanella you will perceive him to be content, as one who congratulates God and says “*great, you did everything good in my life; how beautiful it was...*,” but with a sense of confirmation, as if to say “*I knew, I did not make a mistake.*”

Whoever reads Fr. Luigi’s writings is struck, above all, by this aspect of a Father, touched and moved by the child who gets back up after having fallen and learns how to be steady on his feet, becoming an expert in walking. And then he jumps in and risks the most complicated of paths... One is also struck by the magnanimity of the Father, who requires from each person only what he or she can give, without demanding the same performance from all, more content with the attempt than the effective result. This first point of our diamond bespeaks the fact that if I am not happy, it is not God’s fault, nor that of life or adverse conditions.

The second aspect of what we call the guanellian charism is the fact that **the joy of this Father’s children is constituted through a process of renunciation** and purification, to which pain, self-mastery and struggle are not extraneous, as when – Fr. Guanella writes – gold is freed from all the debris which makes it impure in order to shine perfect light.¹⁴ In order to be golder. Not to be better, no! To be oneself. One does not become a saint to be better, but to be oneself, that is, a child of a Father who is holy.

We cannot be less than saints. But this is accomplished by accepting a first stage of death, because Fr. Guanella, commenting on the Beatitudes, says that joy can come either immediately or consequently.

There is a joy which comes from taking immediate advantage of the moment that passes, whatever the cost may be, a few instances of flavor and then an unbearable aftertaste. This happens when one seeks an immediate solution, a quick satisfaction, a sudden decompression, like a hunger to be placated. Certainly, such emptiness is quickly

¹³ Cf. P. PELLEGRINI, *La morte di don Guanella [The Death of Fr. Guanella]*, in *I tempi e la vita di don Guanella [The Times and Life of Fr. Guanella]*, Nuove Frontiere Editrice, Rome 1990, pp. 425-452.

¹⁴ L. GUANELLA, *Cinquanta ricordini delle Sante Missioni in ossequio ai cinquant'anni di sacerdozio del Santo nostro Padre Leone XIII [Fifty Recollections of the Holy Missions on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Priestly Ordination of Our Holy Father Leo XIII]*, *Opere edite e inedite*, vol. III, Nuove Frontiere Editrice, Rome 1999, p. 1104.

filled up, but this hastiness is paid for then in sadness! This is precisely like the impulse of anger which compels you to outburst, like when one punches his fist and there is immediate silence. You won, problem resolved. But then how much effort is necessary to recreate peace, trust and freedom? There is a joy that can be touched right away, demanding the immediate to feed certain ravenous beasts which are our primordial and derived appetites.

On the other hand, there is a joy that entails an almost traumatic initial moment, a type of dead first period, above all, in those who decide to live by charity and in charity. Charity is love, and the first objective of love is never my own joy, but the other, the Other.

We have drawn out this aspect of the blessedness of being children and we will have to dedicate further study to the strict bond between Fr. Guanella's charism and the garment of joy in which he asks his sons and daughters to be clothed. At every step the Founder writes that the *habitus* of the Servants of Charity and the Daughters of Saint Mary is cheerfulness, a cheerfulness which is neither a performance nor a mask, but the litmus test. If you are happy it means that you have found the Father and live as a child; if you are not, you cannot deceive with fake smiles because when pushed against the wall you will eventually breakdown, for that is not your truth, but a facade. Whoever lives as a child and hears the Father cannot be sad or spread sadness; if he does so he alone betrays himself, for it is not just any virtue, detail or frill that he lacks, but faith, that is, everything.

This is one of the problems among religious, which does not have to do with incompatibility, discomfort or the wrong environment: at times deep within not only are some not religious, but not even Christian. They do not lack predispositions or abilities, they lack the foundation: they are not believers. Fr. Luigi maintains that the sign of faith is joy, even in persecution. He goes so far as to say that some people, particularly taciturn in temperament, extremely reserved and shy, would become discouraged because they run the risk of feeling out of place and creating only problems with their timid introversion and their melancholic tendency. Obviously, this is not a moral judgment, but one of suitability; they would have too much difficulty and make it the same for others. And Fr. Luigi was known for his open-mindedness in admitting candidates to his order: those wanting in ability and intellect, strength or talent, devotion and meekness, all were welcome. But those who were sad, no.¹⁵

From His Father to the Heavenly Father

In his autobiographical memoirs, Fr. Luigi himself embarks upon this topic, explaining in detail how the goodness and strength of God was revealed to him through his blood family: he himself describes the figures of his father Lorenzo and his mother

¹⁵ L. GUANELLA, *Massime di spirito e metodo di azione [Spiritual Maxims and a Method of Action]*, *Opere edite e inedite*, vol. IV, Nuove Frontiere Editrice, Rome 1988, p. 27.

Maria, observing the characteristics in them that referred to the idea of God, which was already developing in his soul.¹⁶

Current pedagogy takes for granted that parents are the first to speak to children about God's love through their life as a couple and the dynamics within the family. A certain type of parenthood disposes the child to welcome God's fatherhood early on and to develop a relationship of trust with the Lord.

At least for a certain interval of time little Luigi lived with his extended family, and it was a rich but problematic way of existence; deference was given to the head of the family in everything, and it required a spirit of adaptation and continual dependency, with obedience as the fundamental rule.

It appears like a litany from witnesses that his father Lorenzo had a strong sense of authority and tended to be impulsive, at times fiery, but not closed and short-sighted; a tireless worker, also because he was gifted with a resistant temperament and good health, as well as with the acumen to provide for his family at a good economic level. Capable in business, serious, honest, scrupulous and very religious, he knew how to construct the home by himself and for his numerous family, he entered into commerce with a successful outcome, and he was also called to work in the town of Campodolcino's administration. Gifted with a decisive personality, his son Fr. Luigi describes him as one who "*was always the last to speak, and the last words were always his even in relation to the district or provincial authorities because he always knew how to be certain and just in his views and proposals.*"¹⁷ It would not have been too easy to rebut his words, given his ability and determination.

All the testimonies about Fr. Luigi's mother are in agreement. First of all, she was very different from her husband: meek, accommodating, smiling, usually gracious and patient.¹⁸ She too worked hard and lived a life full of sacrifices, both in and outside of the home, sustained by an authentic and strong faith.

The facts presented are few, yet it is worth setting forth two points: first and foremost, the contribution these two people offer to the formation of Fr. Luigi's personality. Already in his description of his parents we see his own self-presentation, as well as the emergence of his theological thought. With regard to Fr. Luigi, traits of a consistent and solid personality already take shape, in certain ways resolute and

¹⁶ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza. Autobiografia di un santo [The Ways of Providence: Autobiography of a Saint]*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2011, pp. 25-26. Even if in *Fragmenta vitae* Fr. Luigi is clearer: he says his father was "*very severe*" and his mother "*very sweet.*" For a more complete and balanced idea of Lorenzo Guanella and Maria Bianchi it is necessary to read some interesting depositions give by several witnesses to introduce the cause of Caterina Guanella, Fr. Luigi's sister.

¹⁷ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza. Autobiografia di un santo*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2011, pp. 25-26.

¹⁸ The testimony of Bishop Tommaso Trussoni, Fr. Luigi's relative, found in his funeral eulogy for the death of the Holy Founder is interesting.

unshakeable, yet amiable, affectionate and generous. As for his idea of God, which will then develop into a real theological vision, we witness the emergence of some of those traits already recognizable in his parental figures.

In particular I would say that from that model of the family emerges in Fr. Luigi the vision of **a God the Father who is first and foremost "greatest,"** great in giving himself, great in relationships. He is one with whom there is no comparison and who always remains at the point of surprising you; yet is weak and entrusted to the poor hands of a priest, as he notes in his writings. He is the Omnipotent one, the Lord of glory, who holds the destiny of peoples in his hands, at once infinite and defenseless. He is God and, therefore, above every one of our thoughts: *Deus semper maior*, God is always greater than what we can imagine or comprehend. This great God enters into a relationship with me; he seeks me and rejoices in my being...

Fr. Luigi will always borrow from that family model the idea of **a Father who is present** and whose presence is a condition for an abundant life. How much will he insist as Founder on being present with the poor, among the poor, and how much is this to be considered our mission today, in which changed conditions in managing the works make this presence impossible or very undefinable to us!

Fr. Guanella presents **a Father who is also strong and just**: strong because he gives according to truth and faces reality; just, because he is the principle of unity among his children and must mediate in fraternal relationships. For this reason he is a Father incapable of lies, deceit, or trickery: all that comes from him is trustworthy, we could say "edible."

Fr. Luigi's theology also highlights the characteristic of firmness in God, in the sense that he is not a Father with whom you can take it easy. Rather, he is **an exigent Father**, whose objective is the growth of his children, and he is capable of a high level of expectation. Loose and easy-going standards do not satisfy him, he asks for a commitment, a sacrifice... Yet he does understand errors and weaknesses, which is nevertheless greatness!

Finally, I would add that the paternal figure assumed by little Luigi in his Fracisio years presents a preceptive aspect as well: **the Father is also the law**, a law of truth, but a law; interior, as it is said, but a law; even when his child no longer believes in the law because it seems he no longer believe in the truth.

All these elements and many others flow into Fr. Luigi's thought during his childhood years. They would complement the pedagogical richness he gleaned from his formative experience in the twelve years of both college and seminary before his priestly ordination, intense but also hard years, in a certain way intolerable to a spirit as that of the Founder. Without beating around the bush, Fr. Luigi will synthesize those years in an image: a little bird in a cage. The little bird is himself, the cage the seminary. The cage represents the climate, the system, the absurd rigidity, the lack of relationships, air and light. He will treasure it in the best manner: radically going to the opposite extreme,

demanding in his houses an open atmosphere: joyful, informal, airy and above all understanding.

Nonetheless, those who would hold Fr. Luigi's formative period to be worthless or detrimental would be wrong, first of all because he himself emphasizes many times the fruitfulness of it, even if by contrast. Secondly, because he places responsibility more on the structure than on the persons, as if all those educators whom he acknowledges to be exceptional and sharp were slaves to their training, ignorant or unaware victims of... a system in a cage. It was also this experience that made the question mature in him: How does God love? How does he educate? How does he care for his creatures?

Charism, Spirit and Mission

When we speak of a guanellian charism, we cannot forget that there are two elements in play which are in perfect union: the radical devotion to the Father that Saint Theresa of Avila recalls with her "*God alone suffices*" and the unconditional consummation in the exhausting work among the poor who are the Father's treasure.

Fr. Luigi makes it his life's project, and being a priest he feels that in this way the Church, derided and opposed, is built up: with a priesthood devoted to service to the fatherhood of God, who in his Providence destines some of his children to form a family with those who are without one in the world, constructing homes that image the House of the Father. An atmosphere of hospitable grace is reproduced within them where Jesus is at the center, kindness is the basic attitude, cheerfulness the style, prayer the rhythm of life, and work the rule for all. There is much simplicity because God is rich in his poverty. Above all, there is a place for everyone; there is never a limit as to number. Rather the doors are open to the unwanted of the world, because they are the favored ones.

It appears clear that the charism, in Fr. Guanella's case as in that of other Founders, coincides with a *call to a certain mission*; the availability with which he responded, that is, his ray of openness to grace, is what we usually call spirit and the choices made in response to this call we designate as mission. God works on a person (charism), who is free to respond according to his possibilities (spirit) in the spheres of being and doing (mission).

God experienced as Father - to return to charism - moves Fr. Guanella to give his life for the children of this Father, and his mission is precisely in "*giving life*," which is a much broader horizon than the actual works themselves. The great amount of work he carried forth and asked of his followers as distinctive for belonging is just *action* [*azione*], but *motiv-ation* [*motiv-azione*] is an altogether different standard and responsibility: that experience of faith makes him attentive to the challenges of the world and the situation of the Church. Others will then encounter him and find that permanent inspiration suitable to them, thus, they will unite and form the first nucleus of the new family.

It is evident that we have before us the gift of grace proper to the Founder, but there is also that of his first companions: together they all define the "*charism of foundation*," which is what every guanellian assumes with the profession of vows and commits to

enriching and developing with his personal life of holiness. Now, for didactical and practical purposes, we objectify the content of the charism: which spirituality it produces, which mission it delineates, what its relational models are in community life, what is emphasized in the practice of the vows, which style of government befits it, and which characteristic virtues it exercises. And speaking of imitating, reproducing and safeguarding...

The key element is along the lines of a life lived! What is in play, first and foremost, is the quality of the faith life of the Congregation's members. In other words, all the interesting models could be safeguarded as evidence, but the decisive factor of the charism of an institute's permanent fruitfulness is the fidelity of its members.

Part Two

CHILDREN

The Other Side of Charism

The theme of God's fatherhood is "correlative," to use technical language, that is, it immediately evokes another theme, that of *filiation*. God is *our* Father, we are *his* children. It is a matter of one of the classic articles of the classic theological treatise "*De Gratia*."

Yet a quick look at early Christian literature as well as that more recent would present us with the following evidence: the dimension of the child in the Christian life is frequently cited by the Fathers of the Church all the way to the Tridentine period; yet immediately thereafter an eclipse occurs. From 1600 until our day, in the liturgy, in praxis, in manuals of theology, and in texts of spirituality allusions to the theme of filiation are rarer. It is taken for granted, but to the point of not citing or honoring it.

What is grounded for us in reality, in truth, is overlooked. Historians of theology explain it by the fear of confusion: in the sense that, yes, we are children, however . . . there is only one Child. How damaging fear can be! To the point of coining that very heavy term of "*adoptive children*," which appears in some liturgical texts, fortunately not many of ours. Only once does the other, very delightful expression appear: "*fili in Filio*," sons in the Son.

At any rate, keeping our eye on vocabulary, for example, the term *faithful* was created; then from the first popular and democratic re-emergence it began to be called *people*. The people? The faithful? But who are the faithful? We are *children*! This is the truth *par excellence*, which grounds us in the world, to God, to ourselves, to eternity: when all will pass away, because all will pass away, this truth will still remain. If this is the truth, to go against it or to disregard it is a slippery slope towards delirium, in the sense that if we do not ground our whole life in this fact everything loses its meaning and quality. With whom do I speak when I pray? Whom do I serve when I work? For whom do I accept the Cross when it is presented to me? Where do I retreat when I am almost about to break down? If we do not live as children, we live as slaves; or as employees,

which is another way of saying slaves. How many believers live as slaves or as employees!

Being children is the key to all of theological anthropology.¹⁹

Being a Child according to Fr. Guanella

Fr. Guanella welcomes this core element of the Gospel and nourishes himself on it. On the other hand, is there perhaps any other way of coming into the world than as children? Alternatives do not exist: whoever is born is born as a child. *To be* and *to be a child* coincide. Being a child is synonymous with being human. I cannot exist without being a child.

This is not a philosophical note, because Fr. Luigi made it the “motivation” for everything: even if you are confined to a bed, if you are out of your mind, if you do not know who you are and where you are or if you are about to die, even a delinquent or someone who is abandoned, deformed or a beggar... you are a child! With this proclamation guanellians write their page in history.

But what does it mean to be a child? What gift does this fortune include? A brief study of Fr. Guanella’s texts and his biographical data can suggest some points for reflection to us. In particular, in these observations I have taken into account four of his texts:

- the texts in which the Founder comments on the prayer of the *Our Father*
- initial writings for his religious, which are simple, less formal and juridical
- the two Rules of 1910 and 1911 written for his Congregations
- autobiographical texts and some fundamentally autobiographical spiritual writings

In our literature every time the Founder’s charism has been more deeply studied the focus has mainly been on his catechetical, moral, spiritual and liturgical writings – those which at one time we would have very happily called *operettas* in our internal lingo– because they allows us to glean a certain orderly theology. I do not disagree; I only note that it seems to me to be a limited and faulty field from which to draw, insofar as his *operettas* are mainly translations, re-writings, paraphrases, and above all, behind them stands the 17th century Jesuit Paolo Segneri with his “*Manna of the soul*,” among other writings. We will not go into this too deeply because we would wander far off course and because between the two of them lies an abyss of tendencies and interests, apostolate and character. It would suffice, however, to read the comments of the greatest

¹⁹ For possible further study on the topic of divine filiation in the classics see M. FLICK, Z. ALSZEGHY, *Fondamenti di una antropologia teologica [Foundations of a Theological Anthropology]*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Florence 1969; see also the more recent study of the milanese theologian G. COLZANI, *Antropologia teologica. L'uomo paradossale e mistero [Theological Anthropology: Man – Paradox and Mystery]* EDB, Bologna 1988; Brilliant as well is the work of the Spanish Jesuit Archbishop L. LADARIA, *Antropologia teologica [Theological Anthropology]*, Università Gregoriana Editrice Piemme, Rome 1986.

Italian literary critics²⁰ to realize that we would do a terrible disservice to Fr. Guanella, if we limited his theology to these writings in which there is minimal originality and an overwhelming dependency.

Also, I do not find the other path often pursued very inspiring: to see the source from which Fr. Guanella would have derived this or that element of his thought; except for those cases in which he himself was to affirm a thematic dependency, it seems to me to be uncertain terrain of very little use. Having established that he may have taken this or that from Cottolengo, Don Bosco or Saint Theresa, it would then be necessary to go back to their sources, but in order to discover what?²¹

This would run the risk of falling into the usual improper and unfruitful affirmations of a too severe vision of God proper to Fr. Guanella's time, which spoke of absolute dominion and total subjection. He miraculously escaped the maze of this vision, which was tied to certain noted biblical sources from the 17th and 18th centuries with the concept of Divine Majesty at the center, surrounded by images proper to human courts: bows, reverence, solemnities, apparitions, lavishness, and pomp. Obviously, man's attention was to be focused on not doing anything unworthy or improper which could be disagreeable to the Sovereign, so as not to fall into his wrath.

²⁰ For example, Francesco De Santis' judgment is fierce and harsh in his famous Encyclopedia: *"There is nothing serious about Segneri's work except his literary style, which adorns and embellishes the commonplace with citations, examples, comparisons and rhetorical figures. Thus it is drawn out, superficial, ordinary and verbose. He boasts of his introduction to preaching about paradise: To heaven, to heaven! The concept is this: the earth does not offer a perfect good; we aspire therefore to heaven. And we already knew this world. To heaven, to heaven, eh! Now, the first part need not be demonstrated because all admit it. But here Segneri torments himself and weaves all his intricate work around what is commonplace. And if he truly had the sentiment of earthly happiness and heavenly joy, his work would not lack novelty, freshness and depth. But it is only a literary pastime, a rhetorical exercise. Commonplace is the concept, commonplace its accents.*

He does not aim to effectively convert or persuade the listener; he neither has faith, apostolic ardor, nor unction; he does not love people, nor work for their health and good. He has in his brain a second-hand and inherited religious and moral doctrine, not achieved by the sweat of his brow, nor a great sacred and profane erudition: therein nothing is moved, all is fixed and in place. His activity is external, around leading the discourse and distributing hues, shadows, lights and colors. One could give him this negative praise, that even if he often tires the listener, he does not bore him, for he holds him in suspense and astonishment, with a growing degree of shades and rhetorical surprises; and at times charms and behaves like a child to please him. Still it is to his praise that he proves to be a correct writer, and does not fall into the eccentricity of Father Francesco Panigarola, or in the excessive sentimentalism and affectations of his successors."

²¹ For those who, nonetheless, wish to further study the vision of God in Don Bosco I would suggest the incomparable summary of the late salesian P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica. Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità [Don Bosco in the History of Catholic Religiosity: Religious Mentality and Spirituality]*, LAS, Rome 1981; while for Cottolengo I suggest the recent text of A. NORA, *Caritas Christi urget nos. Il carisma e la spiritualità cottolenghina: aspetto ecclesiologici [Caritas Christi urget nos. The Cottolengan Charism and Spirituality: Ecclesiological Aspects]*, Effatà editrice, Cantalupa 2008, an academic thesis, certainly more modest but systematic and clear.

In addition, even during Fr. Guanella's time, liturgical celebrations were still especially marked by this vision of a Most High God, with the singing of the *Rex tremendae maiestatis* which speaks of the *Dies irae*, with preaching focused on the universal and particular judgment after death, with an allusion in liturgies to the Eucharist being more brilliant than the king Sun in the rays of the Monstrance, and the magnificence of Eucharistic processions, etc...

Does all of this show that Fr. Guanella was beyond his time? And like a *prodigy he succeeded at launching himself onto another aspect, no longer that of God the Master and Lord, but that of a Father as an earthly father...* Out of the question! Fr. Luigi is fully within the styles of his time! He is so, above all, in his language which, as already mentioned, exudes that of the Jesuit Segneri, with all that ensues from him.

His novelty lies in the context within which the theme of God's fatherhood emerges: first and foremost, in his call and his faith by way of an original path, and then the works of mercy in which this fatherhood is proclaimed and served.

In my opinion the only sure way to talk about charism is by following the inspired intuition of Fr. Beria in the above cited monumental speech presented at the General Chapter of 1969-70, in which Fr. Guanella's theology was grasped through his biography. Today it would even be possible to add the autobiography insofar as we possess truly interesting texts in this regard, last but not least his letters.

It is along the way of life that something is given to us to try and grasp, in terms of originality. This was Fr. Luigi's style as well, for he was passionate about the narrative genre. A great guardian of memories, Fr. Luigi was convinced that based on recounted memories we can discover hidden certainties: one may feel that God has intervened many times in certain past events, and the reaction is to grasp from these gestures of God his usual way of acting, so from one gesture God reveals everything. Reading his fascinating autobiography "*le vie della Provvidenza*" ["*The Ways of Providence*"] in this way, offers us very interesting surprises.

I prefer to subdivide my meditation on charism, setting forth some *avenues* that can be developed in the future as indications for further study. Based on the fact that this text is destined for those suitable for the job and more expert than myself, I do not believe it is opportune to weigh it down with too many citations, which everyone would already know well anyway. Guanellians of every corner of the earth will feel that every expression has to do with "*our bread.*" However, it will not be a wasted effort to more critically elaborate upon these various affirmations in the future:

1. The child is born from an act of love
2. The child learns from the Father
3. The child remains in the Home
4. The child loves with the Father's love
5. The child is free
6. The child is concerned about his brothers and sisters
7. The child is recognized

1. The Child is Born from an Act of Love

The awareness that at the origin of our history there exists a loving will prevents us from the infantile tendency to spend our whole lives begging for a little flattery, artificial compassion and false praise. And how absurd every form of depression and discouragement becomes, if only upon waking in the morning I would be aware that I am there through an act of love which preceded and precedes me – obviously God's. I would hope also that of my parents, but this is not always the case.

It is absurd to seek another dignity elsewhere: God gave birth to me and did so through love, says Fr. Guanella. This confers on my destiny fortune and dignity, almost a fundamental strength which makes me capable of facing everything. My life is not a prank or a joke, a banal coincidence, much less a temptation: I am a child and am so through love!

One may say that this is obvious, completely obvious. Perhaps. However, if we take a look at certain confessions, criticisms, and a particular type of spiritual training...where is the child to be found? Often within one has the sense of being a god, not at all a child!

Everyone is born a child – and there is no merit in this alone – but if a person is not aware of it, then he will never live as a child; he will live like one who was adopted and psychologically seeks his true parents, with a deep sadness and a sense of not being grounded with respect to life and his own destiny, in such a way as to be almost incapable of being healed. Moreover, he will experience a certain hunger for approval and proof of being loved as if to continually say to the world *“let me see how much you love me.”*

It would suffice to meditate for a long while on the pauline hymn: *“he chose us before the creation of the world...predestining us to be his sons.”*²² Fr. Luigi, gazing at the Calcagnolo, Pizzo Stella, Angeloga mountains, thought *“I was chosen first.”* In this way, one rediscovers the joy of existing, which naturally makes him cheerful, in a way that is not forced. And he even becomes simple because all is resolved at the core: I am a child, He is Father.

Even the journey becomes simple because what happens to you is no longer considered a misfortune or an annoyance, even though it is an obstacle and produces pain, but it is part of a plan of love and ...the Father knew - at least He knew - how much Fr. Guanella lived the most trying afflictions with trust: *“leaving Don Bosco caused him great heartbreak. Fr. Guanella trusted the goodness of divine Providence in moving from Savogno to Turin and entrusted himself to the same divine Providence in returning from Turin to Como and then to Traona.”*²³

Being born through an act of love can only fill us with a sense of wonder because gratuitousness always surprises us and is a constant source of joy, just as it is a constant

²² Ephesians 1:4-5.

²³ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza. Autobiografia di un santo*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2011, pp. 65-66.

source of bitterness and sadness to be in the world and be aware of being a burden, born by accident or out of duty. Not encountering gratuitous love makes us prisoners, for the experience of gratuitousness is the sole opening for intuiting God and also the only truly universal language because anyone can understand it.

It seems to me that this may even constitute the basis of the purest guanelian anthropology: *what makes a human being a human being*. It is not the intellectual faculties that do so, but the human being's capacity to give and receive love. For this reason, Saint Luigi loved the disabled, for they were the proven proof of this certainty: love is a trace of God; it comes from Him and makes every relationship, every dignity, possible.

2. The Child Learns from the Father

One of Fr. Guanella's beloved evangelical icons was Jesus in the workshop in Nazareth, focused on learning his trade: even he, the Son, was called to learn.²⁴ And to the doctors in the temple he will say that he came into the world for this reason, to carry out the affairs of the Father's workshop... Even later on he will declare in the Gospel of John that he teaches what he has learned from the Father.

There is a learning which is born from watching the Father, as an apprentice in a workshop. This interpretation of the divine by use of human figures must not astonish us, for from the Incarnation onwards this is a normal and obligatory step to take. Fr. Guanella reads the mystery of Nazareth and the hidden life of Jesus as an apprenticeship on the part of the Son, who will declare himself to be "*inferior to the Father*," inferior because he is Son. This inferiority does not diminish the Son's worth, nor debase him; it does not prevent him from being himself. Thus, he continually affirms that he has come to do "*his*" will. The Son does not fear to do the Father's will because this does not constitute a failure to do his own will. His will is the same as the Father's, and he feels it is his task to live in response to it, living with the intent gaze of an apprentice fascinated by the Father's work, much less his words.

Let us feel like apprentices, *servants* of Charity, *daughters* of Saint Mary of Providence; not owners or masters. We do not have our own projects to carry out or our own discourses with which to address the world, we are apprentices... or little more!

3. The Child Remains in the Home

Not the slave, but the child remains in the home. That *remaining*, which is proper to Johannine vocabulary and bespeaks intimacy, because intimacy characterizes the

²⁴ Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al monte della felicità. Inviti a seguire Gesù sul Monte delle Beatitudini, Opere edite e inedite*, vol. III, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1999, p. 218; *Il pane dell'anima. Primo corso di Omelie domenicali esposte in una massima scritturale, Opere edite e inedite*, vol. I, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1992, pp. 294, 369; *Vieni Meco. La dottrina cristiana esposta con esempi in quaranta discorsi famigliari [Come with Me: Christian Doctrine Explained with Examples in Forty Familiar Discourses]*, *Opere edite e inedite*, vol. III, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1999, p. 403.

relationship between Father and Son, is also the sign of being a disciple. In fact the Gospel always distinguishes between “*those outside*” and “*those inside*.”

When he speaks of man’s relationship with God, Fr. Guanella continually speaks of “*intimate language*,” “*intimate discourse*,” “*intimate thoughts*”; intimacy is the proof and secret of closeness and also the perennial newness of a relationship, because without intimacy there is no change, even in friendship or marriage. Although people may spend time together, perhaps even share rather difficult experiences, without intimacy they do not move forward along their journey, they do not change.

An accurate reflection on Fr. Guanella’s prayer life would support this claim, like the renowned window of his room overlooking the tabernacle of the Sanctuary in Como, which bespeaks this conversation between Father and son, in which they explain things to each other and even simply talk to one another. The window of the room facing the Eucharist says: you see, I am with you, day and night; I almost sleep with you to renew trust while You are silent, to receive trust when I do not know how to speak.

Just like a child, who is “*infans*,” that is incapable of speaking, yet feels his parent’s presence, such a non-explicit relationship touches a sublimity never reached between adults. In fact, the mother-child relationship is the prototype of intimacy, where the secret is to let oneself go, to be spontaneous, to almost play, with a more affective communication, that is, bodily, emotional, as well as mental. Much could be said to us here about the quality of Fr. Luigi’s spiritual life in terms of affectivity. It appears evident that we are in the realm of a difficult analysis, if not superficial or mere reflection: who will ever be able to enter into what was said or asked between the two of them, Fr. Luigi and the Father? If we speak about it it is because some photographs remain; certainly it is one thing to be a photo, but another thing to be reality; the photo does not capture the whole reality. Much that occurred between them escapes us and his prayer is a realm in which little can be perceived because he barely spoke about it, thus one is left to guess rather than analyze. Certainly, one point is undeniable, which becomes part of our program: the intense frequency of his conversations with the Father which interiorly inspires his choice for the poor, a choice which although demanding is not enough for him, it does not altogether satisfy him.

Yes, the certainty of having come into the world by God and finding all the rest unsatisfying, even the best of things, allows us to perceive an almost emptiness that is the sign of our greatness: only God fills us...

How much a man’s journey changes when he is certain of God’s closeness! So certain that he is able to say things which in another context would seem arrogant, like when Fr. Guanella affirms his certainty of “*already having Providence in his pocket*.”²⁵ Intimacy influences the quality of affection and builds characteristics of an authentic relationship: it is lived with honesty, transparency, harmony and generosity. There is a sense of feeling as equals even if the levels between the two are very different.

²⁵ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza. Autobiografia di un santo*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2011, p. 66.

From it is born an experience of prayer which is quite intriguing: he and his God discuss, speak, and almost enter into contracts; and the movement of this prayer reveals a real living man, as in a contract with a man who wants to buy and pay the least amount possible, very humanly speaking. This occurs to the point of establishing pacts: *"Up until midnight I will take care of it... after midnight God will,"*²⁶ according to the proverbial response Fr. Luigi gave to Pope Pius X who interrogated him, amazed by the secret of his tireless pace.

Thus at the end of his life Fr. Guanella can straightforwardly say to his God: I was in a pact with You, and You with me, and this made me strong at every hour: *"I was never afraid of my obligations, nor for life, nor of anything!"*²⁷

4. The Child Loves with the Father's Love

When a child experiences his parent's sincere and authentic love he knows how to reproduce that quality of relationship and knows that *that* is love, what he experiences, nothing else. He learns to love with the Father's love and recognizes all the poor imitations of it out there.

Fr. Guanella feels the preferential love of God the Father for little ones, those he seeks and those destined for all of his care. He spends his patrimony for them, all of which comes back to him. I believe it would be useful in the future to study the value of Fr. Guanella's charity in economic terms, because it would place us before two phenomena: how much good people trusted him by putting in his hands mind-boggling sums of money; what amazing holiness to remain generous and detached in the midst of so much potential seduction.

The Father's love itself, made up of tenderness, presence, broad-mindedness, extreme trust, and above all clothed in joy, will be the uniform he will ask his religious to don. The child knows about this love because if he stands up and faces the world it is thanks to that love that he is never alone, never far away. He could pass through sadness or confusion, could work hard, fall into weakness or distraction, but the strength of that love sustains him and he need not beg elsewhere.

When he deals with the world the child can be faulty in everything, but one thing has absorbed him and all revolves around it: a language which he learned and of which he already has sure command, the love of the Father. Here lies the whole of Fr. Guanella's asceticism, of his morality, to use strong words, as well as the quality of his human touch, which is always presented as encouraging, thoughtful, direct, very personal, and above all gratuitous.

In his autobiographical memoirs Fr. Guanella gives a surprising account of his opponents and many spiteful others: despite certain breaches in trust, he never lowered himself to their level, but always played the only card he had in his hand, mercy.²⁸

²⁶ L. GUANELLA, *Fragmenta vitae et dictorum sacerdotis Aloysii Guanella*, Manuscript, XLIII.

²⁷ L. GUANELLA, *Fragmenta vitae et dictorum sacerdotis Aloysii Guanella*, Manuscript, XXXVIII, 2 June 1915.

5. The Child is Free

The freedom of children... If the basic certainty is being loved, one lives without limitation, without fear; he never has to resort to expedients to cover wounds or flaws. He is free to move, risk, walk a little on the edge and go against the grain. Yes, the child is free because he is not extorted nor extortable; he only has one love that has captured his heart and he is faithful to it. Why fear?

From this is born Fr. Luigi's radical freedom. Before his superiors and inferiors he will express both freedom of the spoken and written word, for which he will pay dearly as he did with his very unfortunate first book.²⁹ He who is free always maintains his dignity in the world, no matter whom he may find himself up against. We should meditate on Fr. Guanella's courage beginning with this freedom, which is the "*parresia*" proper to the children of God. It is manifested in his humble self-assurance, before the Pope as well as before the little Leonardo Mazzucchi, then a young boy of nine years old with whom Fr. Guanella maintained a serious and faithful correspondence.

In his biography no ghosts or specters, shackles of fears or scruples of any kind ever emerge; but a free and self-assured man, sometimes a little blocked in difficult discernment, but always calm and autonomous in judgment.

The vision he presents of himself is usually detached and disillusioned: a man who knows and recognizes his innate and insuperable defects, his incapacities, and even his excesses. His going in February 1912 to set himself straight with Fr. Bacciarini at the Trappist Monastery of *Tre Fontane* in Rome where the latter was cloistered implicitly reveals even an admission of guilt; perhaps he exaggerated with Fr. Aurelio, underestimated him. How come that situation got out of hand? So he chases after him, opens up dialogue again capable of piercing the impenetrable walls of the Trappist Monastery, and practically apologizes. He is free even in respect to himself, to his role; he continually recognizes his weaknesses and questions himself.³⁰

He requests this same freedom of his religious men and women, with the invitation for them to speak openly, express their sentiments, recalling that obedience is always owed, but that first everyone has the right to express his dissent if it be the case, just as he himself was used to doing with the Lord and with all the lords of this world.

²⁸ Even relationships with many Bishops and with his various confreres of the Como Diocese may be read in this light; even with those he helped, like his longtime school companion Don Nicola Silvestri, whom he proposed to go to Traono and who revealed himself to be ambiguous at least at that time...

²⁹ See L. GUANELLA, *Saggio di ammonimenti famigliari per tutti ma più particolarmente per il popolo di campagna [Review of Familiar Advice for Everyone, but Most Especially Country Folks]*, *Opere edite e inedite*, vol. III, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1999.

³⁰ An accurate study of his correspondence with the brothers and sisters of his Congregation would shed much light on this; a reading of his correspondence with the beloved co-foundress Sister Marcellina Bosatta, comprised of more than one hundred letters in our possession, would be without comparison.

His freedom basically comes, above all, from the certainty that everything else is of little worth, at times, none at all; only the Father counts, his will, his love, those in his care. There are no others to show off to and impress, and he is not painstakingly obsessed with the opinion of others regarding his ragged clothing or worn out shoes, as well as the important choices he makes. This freedom is the secret to peace.

6. Children are Concerned about their Brothers and Sisters

The Son realizes that the best way to enter the Father's heart is through concern for his brothers and sisters and in particular through the care and toil employed to *lead* the other children back to the Father.

Fr. Guanella's mission is born from sonship: what kind of child am I if I do not care about my brothers and sisters? My Father has other children and some no longer see him; marginalization has created much obscurity between them and the face of the Father. They are in such misery that instead of rejoicing in praise they risk abandoning themselves to blasphemy or in any case risk letting themselves be overcome by desperation or rebellion.

This is why the guanellian mission is always summed up by the characteristic expression: "*Bread and the Lord.*" Bread is the first provision, but joy gives it the face of the Father, and we are called to expend ourselves for this threshold of grace so that every man may feel he is a child.

Our response to poverty is work, our daily Cross is work, untiring, exhausting, and hidden. Moreover, if it is also unappreciated and contested, then we are on the right path. It is intriguing to discover among the Founder's writings an animal upon which he often reflects, the donkey; the same animal which he will use to call his children: "*asinelli.*" Not reverends, but donkeys, which were the horses of the poor, less striking, less elegant, less costly. He used this term without any disdain, but with the accent placed on the load the donkey carries and its inferiority.

At the same time, the donkey has the advantage of being able to make it on mountainous paths, which the majestic horse cannot. Our work of bringing back to the Father children who have not found a home is the redemption we continue to write: the work is hard because the redemption brought about by the Lord Jesus was hard, sorrow after sorrow. For this reason the theme of our work always involves the guanellian meditation on Calvary, which is the great proof of love, the only thing capable of crushing the pain from within because it is a great love like that of the Father. With a love like the Father's guanellian men and women respond to the pain of the world, above all, where this pain is cried out loudest because it is defenseless, innocent and often unaware.

In this perspective I would read Fr. Guanella's special love for the mentally disabled, in which *the why* of human precariousness is so manifold.

7. The Child is Recognized

In catechetical and spiritual writings Fr. Guanella pauses time and time again on what biblical theology calls “*eudokia*,” above all, in the Gospel passage of the Jordan.³¹ It means to be recognized by the Father, to hear him say: I love this one, he is mine, I am pleased with him.

In the same vein, who could forget the renowned page in which Fr. Guanella speaks of the judgment of the Servants of Charity at the end of their lives. He sees them pass on towards glory under the astonishment of all who ask: “*Who are they?*” And they go up, recognized by the Father who knows them.³²

The child is one to whom the door is never closed and to whom it is never said: “*I do not know who you are,*” as in that tragic page of the Gospel,³³ where they remain children, but are not recognized, which is hell. The child is always admitted and re-admitted.

For this reason he has the right to sustenance, honor, the name and inheritance because he is a child. To seek this recognition without considering being adopted by other fathers, points to the heredity of this Father: disregarding other benefits; glorying in this name without concern for obtaining titles; and enjoying this honor without interpreting life as a career. He is recognized by the Father.

In this light, Fr. Guanella’s idea of death could be studied further, above all his own death, as well as the idea of suffering, both physical and non-physical. It could give us the impression of entering hell, but even hell can be passed through if deep down there is the Father’s embrace. You trust and journey along because you know that his hands are there and that he recognizes you as his child. With the same trust even the Lord Jesus will enter “*into hell,*” says the great von Balthasar in line with the whole Christian tradition in his trilogy of the three days...

It seems symptomatic to me that Fr. Luigi’s best literary production on God’s fatherhood and perhaps even the clearest explanation of charism were written during the period of his life spanning between two symbolic dates: the death of his father Lorenzo Guanella in 1874 and the death of his mother Maria Bianchi in 1897. This phase is the

³¹ Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Paradiso. Brevi esortazioni in massime ed in esempi che accompagnano ciascuna risposta del catechismo [Let Us Go to Paradise: Brief Exhortations in Maxims and Examples Accompanying Each Response in the Catechism]*, Opere edite e inedite, vol. III, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1999, p. 462; Id. *L’angelo del Santuario [The Angel of the Sanctuary]*, ibidem, p. 229; Id., *Da Adamo a Pio IX [From Adam to Pius IX]*, II, ibidem, pg. 118; Id. *Vieni meco*, ibidem, p. 281; Id., *In tempo sacro [In Sacred Time]*, Opere edite e inedite, vol. I, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1992, p. 887; Id., *Nel mese del fervore [In the Month of Zeal]*, ibidem, pp. 1193, 1209, 1210, 1212; Id., *Un poverello di Cristo [One of Christ’s Poor]*, Opere edite e inedite, vol. II2, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1997, p. 50; Id., *Regolamento Figlie di Santa Maria della Provvidenza 1911 [The Rule of the Daughters of Saint Mary of Providence 1911]*, manuscript, Opere edite e inedite, vol. IV, Nuove Frontiere Editrice, Rome 1988, p. 576.

³² Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Regolamento dei Servi della Carità 1910 [Rule of the Servants of Charity 1910]*, Opere edite e inedite, vol. IV, Nuove Frontiere editrice, Rome 1988, pp. 1233-1234.

³³ Cf. Luke 13:25.

most critical and the richest. Fr. Beria, without softening the expression, will call it “*The great confusion*” and the fruitful period that flows from it “*The great summer.*”³⁴

His Daily Life

The attentive reader of the Gospel is struck by Jesus who speaks of “*our Father*” only when he is addressing his disciples, never to outsiders. For Jesus does not consider God’s fatherhood as something natural, as if it were the prerogative of all men, but the distinctive feature belonging to the disciples. Therefore, only in the realm of the Kingdom does it make sense to speak of God’s fatherhood...

I wonder, at the conclusion of many words, what meaning the word Father and the certainty of being a child may hold for Fr. Luigi in daily practice.

First and foremost, I believe that this point of reference in the soul – as we said in the beginning – gave him **the certainty of taking part in the future salvation**; for Fr. Luigi this is the real reason for life. Every creature must do everything possible to avoid losing Paradise and to belong forever to God’s family. Certainly, like the Father, the child can also be disowned and offended, but without fear: he, the poor thing, who must sadly sleep on a cliff the first night of ascending the distressing slope of Olmo, ends up doubting everything, even himself and his discernment, but not the Father. The Father gives love alone, he cannot give anything else.

Another aspect of this discussion is **trust as the basic certainty in daily life**: the Father knows what Luigi needs, and his Providence, besides being good, is unlimited. Even little things are needed, but for God nothing is too small. You may work today; tomorrow the Lord will take care of everything or as Psalm 40 says “*the Lord cares for you.*” Today you work, tomorrow he provides. This trust is the root of tranquility, because no one is serene if he does not trust anyone. Certainly, if one trusts he exposes himself to the risk of being deceived or disappointed, but entrusting oneself is the only condition for serenity. We can imagine that the well-known proverb “to trust is good, not to trust is better” could not have been farther from Fr. Guanella’s soul because it reveals a miserable meanness, since a useful measurement of human greatness is its capacity to trust. Otherwise it would be a life in which one continually holds his breath and is suspicious. Fr. Luigi prefers to trust and be betrayed rather than distrust by maintaining a distance.

In this certainty, Fr. Guanella finds **the courage to bow before the Father’s unfathomable plan**. Enigmas and obscurities are not eliminated, but every trial along the road becomes an occasion to deepen intimacy with his God. He knows and repeats that sufferings, almost all of them, serve the glory of God. In other words, he knows what God is made of and how important he is.

³⁴ A. BERIA, *Il Beato Fondatore don Luigi Guanella sintesi vivente, spirito e carisma*, Pro manuscript, Chiavenna, 1969, pp. 10-11.

The charism also gave Fr. Luigi a reason for his loneliness, for there is a loneliness tied to the very fact of being called by God on a mission. In Fr. Guanella this experience has two faces: first and foremost, isolation from public officials, the local clergy, his superiors, and even his relatives; at a certain moment, then, he even appears alone before God, who with his silence seems to fail to keep his word. In this situation he questions himself about his vocation: *"...To Fr. Guanella"- he writes to himself - "was reserved the peak of Olmo because there he could not exercise dangerous influences, and he went there, as was said, spent a few months studying theology, in solitude and also in prayer, because he felt the strong need and saw the timid figure of discouragement approaching ... then he closed himself up in the melancholy of his heart, not without receiving from heaven a glimmer of light about his future."*³⁵ In this incommunicable suffering lies a sign of Fr. Luigi's holiness, because when one enjoys being a prophet too much there is perhaps reason for suspicion... This solitude weighs upon him and even appears unjust to him. Nevertheless, it is useful for opening up a door to dialogue in which he says to the Father: "you told me one thing and something different happened; you sent me to speak and do things in your name and nothing was accomplished." He is very tempted at that time in Olmo to leave everything and return to Don Bosco, but it is a matter of a momentary temptation because the Word he carries within him is too deep. Thus, the thought of giving up passes through his mind, but lasts only an instant and then he comes back to his senses. In the meantime he seeks consolation from God. In similar situations many think: at least my superiors, the bishop and my community would understand me, but instead at times like these they find the worst disappointments. Even Jesus sought understanding and company one evening, to no avail. We should form our community to be a place of understanding where one can express oneself without being left alone because of it. However, it is very difficult to be understood in one's own environment, especially when certain values are defended! And what does Fr. Guanella do in his moment of perhaps greatest confusion and temptation? **He distresses himself, not God**; it is not the Father who has to change, it is he who must be converted.

Gradually he will understand that is was precisely there where God waited for him to be truly faithful. His first assent had only been mental, when God had flashed the task in front of him and he, Fr. Luigi, had left everything to carry it out. Now a total acceptance is needed, now that he left everything, he gets to work and feels he is unable to accomplish anything. The splendid letter to Don Bosco written from the hermitage of Olmo in September 1881 is like a relic to us; he begins it with his sad soul citing the renowned Gospel passage of the failed fishing excursion: "Most Reverend Don Bosco,

³⁵ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza. Autobiografia di un santo*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2011, pp. 70-71.

three years have passed since I left your dearest Paternity to begin an institution in my province and Diocese, but "*tota nocte laborans nihil cepi.*"³⁶

It is a wearisome moment; he has just received the bitterest of threats from his Bishop and risks losing the greatest treasure he possesses, his priesthood: a probable suspension is in the air. At moments like this it is easy to recall the past when everything was simpler and involved less suffering. It is a matter of a moment, a long moment. He starts talking about it with God and slowly, in dialogue, rediscovers the light.

Without knowing it Fr. Luigi secured his best teaching post for us, up there in those four cottages surrounding the seventeenth century Church of the Most Holy Trinity. Every time what counts most is at stake, even in our small embarkations, the silent peak of Olmo and the shudder of the Founder's solitude resolved in the struggle of prayer will suggest a way to us...

Fr. Fabio Pallotta

³⁶ Luigi Guanella's letter to Don John Bosco, Olmo di Chiavenna, 5 September 1881, AG, Como.

III Part

Guidelines and proposals for the Church on the world

ASIA

Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in Asia

Message of X FABC Plenary Assembly Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

16 December 2012

In this Year of Faith, in the second decade of the new millennium, and on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the FABC, we appeal to all in the Church in Asia to nurture a special passion for New Evangelization.

We should not be led into lethargy or pessimism by Asian social mega-trends which threaten the fabric of our society, the stability of the family and the faith-vision of the Christian community itself. Hidden in them might be the inner resources of the Spirit veiled within Asian values, the seeds of a new humanity hungering for fullness of life in Jesus.

-The mission of new evangelization, new in its ardor, its methods and its expressions, is urgent.

-It calls for renewed evangelizers with a renewed spirituality, the spirituality of communion, of mission, of new evangelization.

-Every parish, every community, every family should be a school of this spirituality.

-It requires the new evangelizer to experience deep conversion, a change of vision as well as conformity with the attitude and the mind of Christ, and communion with God.

-It requires a living faith in the Lord, the entrustment of oneself to God, a following of Jesus in mind, heart, and deed.

The "small flock" of Jesus should not be timid or fearful among Asia's billions, more than 60% of the world's population. For we have the singular resource of our faith, Jesus Christ himself, the unique gift of God to humanity. He journeys with us just as he did with his disciples on the way to Emmaus (*Luke24:13-32*). At every Eucharistic celebration, he keeps opening our eyes and warming our hearts with the fire of love for a New Evangelization in Asia.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, accompany us as we walk the roads of Asia, to "tell the story of Jesus." We are not to fear. We have the Lord's assurance, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" (*Matthew14: 27*). And we have his guarantee, "remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (*Matthew28:20*).

AMERICA

"Crossing the threshold of faith"

Letter of the Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, SJ

Archbishop of Buenos Aires, for the Year of Faith

Beginning this Year of Faith is a new call to deepen in our lives this faith that we have received. Professing the faith with our mouths implies living it in our hearts and showing it in our works: a witness and a public commitment. The disciple of Christ, son or daughter of the Church, can never think that believing is a private act. This is an important and intense challenge for every day, since we are convinced that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). Considering our reality, as missionary disciples, we ask: "What does crossing the threshold of faith challenge us to do?"

Crossing the threshold of faith challenges us to discover that although it seems today that death reigns in its various forms and that history is ruled by the law of the most powerful or the most cunning, and although hatred and ambition operate as driving forces of so many human struggles, nevertheless we are absolutely and decisively convinced that this sad reality can change and must change, because "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31, 37).

Crossing the threshold of faith means not being ashamed to have the heart of a child who, because he still believes in impossible things, can live in hope—the one thing that is capable of giving meaning and transforming history. To ask for it without ceasing, to pray without fainting and to adore so as to be transfigured by what we contemplate.

Crossing the threshold of faith leads us to beg for each one of us the "mind... which was in Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:5), so that we may experience a new way of thinking, of communicating, of being in the family, of planning the future, of living out the virtue of charity and our vocation.

Crossing the threshold of faith is acting, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit present in the Church and who also manifests himself in the signs of the times; it is accompanying the constant movement of life and of history without falling into the paralyzing defeatism that regards any time in the past as being better; it is a sense of urgency to think of something new, to contribute something new, to create something new, kneading into life "the new leaven of justice and holiness" (cf. 1 Cor 5:8).

Crossing the threshold of faith implies keeping our sense of wonder and a heart that has not lazily settled into a routine, but is capable of recognizing that every time a woman brings a child into this world she is logically betting on life and on the future, that when we protect

the innocence of children we guarantee the truth of a tomorrow, and when we act as caregivers for an elderly person we perform an act of justice and cherish our roots.

Crossing the threshold of faith is work performed with dignity and a vocation of service, with the self-denial of someone who in either case goes back to daily life to begin again without slackening, as though all that had already been done were just one step in the journey toward the kingdom, the fullness of life. It is the silent hope after the daily sowing, contemplating the fruit gathered and thanking the Lord because He is good and asking him not to abandon the work of his hands (Ps 138).

Crossing the threshold of faith demands striving for freedom and peaceful coexistence even though everyone around us is faltering, in the certainty that the Lord is asking us to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

Crossing the threshold of faith entails the ongoing conversion of our attitudes, the manners and the standards by which we live; voicing our thoughts in new, unvarnished terms, without papering over differences; offering the new form that Jesus Christ imprints on anyone whom He has touched with his hand and his Gospel of Life, encouraging one another to do something unprecedented for society and for the Church; because "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17-21).

Crossing the threshold of faith leads us to forgive and to be able to put on a smile; it is drawing near to everyone who lives a marginalized existence and calling him by name, it is caring for the frailties of the weakest and supporting their tottering steps, certain that whatever we do for the least of our brethren we do for Jesus himself (Mt 25:40).

Crossing the threshold of faith means celebrating life, allowing ourselves to be transformed so that we become one with Jesus at the table of the Eucharist celebrated in community, and being there with our hand and our heart busy working on the great project of the Kingdom: all the rest will be given us as well (Mt 6:33).

Crossing the threshold of faith is living in the spirit of the [Second Vatican] Council and of Aparecida [Brazil, site of the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in 2007], in the Church of the open doors, not only so as to receive the Gospel but fundamentally so as to go out and fill with the Gospel message the streets and the lives of the people of our times.

Crossing the threshold of faith for our Archdiocesan Church means to feel that we are confirmed in the Mission to be a Church that lives, prays and works in a missionary key.

Crossing the threshold of faith is, finally, accepting the newness of the life of the Risen Lord in our poor flesh so as to make it a sign of his new life.

Meditating on all these things, we look to Mary, that She, the Virgin Mother, might accompany us in this crossing of the threshold of faith and draw down upon our Church in Buenos Aires the Holy Spirit, as in Nazareth, so that just like her we might adore the Lord and go out to proclaim the marvels that He has done among us.

Buenos Aires, October 1st. 2012

Feast of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

IV Part

Guidelines and suggestions for the Servants of Charity Congregation

Introduction to Lectio Divina

The 'lectio divina' is meant to be an encounter with God, who speaks to us; an encounter for us and our life – aimed not at preparing a sermon, though it can certainly help us provide a more deeper, more profound level of preaching.

The following is a brief summary of the traditional steps of the 'lectio divina'.

There are certainly easier ways to do the 'lectio divina', but the quiet reading of the Word of God is always recommended: a moment for deepening our understanding, and for silence – a listening of the Spirit that, above all, includes the prayer of repentance, of praise and of thanks.

1. Lectio

a. Read the text carefully

Read the text carefully, respecting both what it does and does not say – this is the teaching that comes to us from the rabbinical tradition. Nothing may be added or subtracted from the Holy Scripture.

This means that the Lord speaks to us through and in those words, not outside those words. Therefore, the first concern to have is specifically to not go off-message, to not expect to know more, nor to do without anything expressed in the Holy Scripture. Jesus said: "Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Mt 5:18).

Ancient fathers were fully conscious that every expression of the Sacred Scripture holds a mystery, a message from God for men. Even St. Gregory the Great has developed a series of reflections on the conjunction "et" found at the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecy (Ez 1:1 etc.).

b. Study the Scripture faithfully and humbly

The second step is to study and scrutinize the Scripture. This was the real daily and ascetical commitment for many generations of monks. It is a spiritual commitment to humbly accept the need to learn the ABC in order to read and understand the meaning of a text: this is what it means to obey with the Word of God. Accuracy in seeking the literal meaning of the Word of God is one of the necessary factors for a true lectio divina. If we do not lay good foundations, our lectio may become an imagined, altered or spiritualistic. The Word of God, instead of being the owner of our life, would be reduced to a servant of our momentary feelings.

Such research into the meaning of the Word of God has to be carried out in an atmosphere of attention, made easier thanks to the combination of fasting and vigils, which opens the eyes of the mind by removing the burden of a disorderly life. To that attention we must also include the purity of the heart as a guarantee to be able to encounter Our Lord, Jesus Christ, who has clearly affirmed that the pure of heart will see God. Ancient fathers also knew that a superficial reading was insufficient to catch the meaning of the Scripture. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the text, monks would use particular techniques such as the grammatical, logical and analysis of the period, always seeking out the meaning hiding behind the form of a specific word or period. Little by little, our lectio begins to bear fruit. It is not necessary to be an expert; only to have great humility and faith.

2. Meditatio

The text, respected in its literal sense, has an infinite variety of meanings. The Bible always remains an open text, and anyone may attain from it as much as they are capable. Such "ability to attain" is also the basis for the ability to meditate.

According to the most ancient traditions, meditation is composed of three phases:

a) The first is the collection phase: while reflecting on a text, a word, through the above-mentioned techniques, other passages and characters from the Bible come to our mind. We have to gather the fruit there, where our mind stops. This harvesting must be personal; we cannot rely upon the harvesting of others.

b) The second phase is the meditation itself. When the entire harvest has been

taken in, it is time to lock oneself in a cell and then process it all.

The Fathers had absolute faith in the Word. Jesus himself stated that the most important thing is to sow in a field disposed to receive it. Once the Word has been sowed, the farmer may even go to sleep. The Word will take root, germinate and let the plant bloom by itself.

c) The third phase is the comparison. It is a discernment, a reciprocal clarification

of the words we have received, and ourselves, who keep and observe them. While words clarify each other, the light arising from them also cannot help but enter us, the keeper of this Word. When something prevents light from permeating everything, then the crisis begins.

It is the crisis that arises from the Word and shocks us. It may last just a moment, as a

lightning bolt illuminating our personal entirety in an instant, but it may be also a more stable, constant light.

At this point meditatio may become oratio.

3. Oratio

The brightness emitted by the comparison sheds light on the situation in which we find ourselves. The experience of oratio begins.

a. Oratio compunctionis

Oratio assumes different forms according to the needs each one perceives within himself. So the Fathers described the oratio compunctionis as like the piercing of the heart.

Let us consider Isaiah in the temple. He hurled himself on the ground after having felt the impurity of his lips. This is the first manifestation of the 'lectio divina'. The oratio compunctionis is of course personal, since everyone carries his life, betrayals and state of sin with him.

b. Oratio petitionis

Jesus said: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock, and the door will be opened unto you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Lk 11:9-10). What is important is to ask for the good news of the Holy Spirit, and the answer will certainly come.

This is also the fruit of the comparison with the Word of God. Though we must acknowledge our frequent indolence, and our lack of faith, let us try to save at least our confrontation with the Word of God. So, sooner or later, His Word will "force" us to change our life. Even if only this faithfulness to lectio remains, our entire life can be founded upon it, for it is He himself who stands at the door and knocks. Every moment of our lives, even our infidelities, will become moments of salvation. Exile and sin are never the last word: that belongs to the Lord.

The last word is the victory over sin that He grants us when we don't succeed in doing so ourselves.

c. Oratio eucharistica

In becoming aware of this, our prayer becomes a eucharistic oratio – that is, an oratio, a prayer of thanksgiving, because, in a state of wonder, we realize that our lives have been guided by someone who followed us with a fatherly provident, affectionate and attentive regard. Where we fell, He turned our weakness into an experience of maturity. We became stronger, wiser, and perhaps also more aware of the gift to offer the Lord.

d. Oratio laudativa

Finally there is an ecstasy, typical of childhood, that we find again when the Word of God simply fills us with joy, so that we can say nothing more than "it is beautiful"!

It is a taste that we have all certainly savoured during our childhood, but it is the taste of the Word of God that we savour again when we find in particular moments of gratuitous spontaneity, creativity, in our taste for beauty and goodness. It is a kind of experience that we usually don't discuss with others. It is the moment when prayer becomes a laudative oratio: it is a song of praise that is thanks, request, compunction, that is everything, or that is simply a praise that is always with us. Wherever we are, we feel we stand in the light of the Lord.

4. Contemplatio

The next step of the lectio is traditionally defined as the contemplation step. Everyone attempts to put what seems more precious to him on this step, so we have different definitions, or ways, of viewing contemplatio. Some people believe that the word is formed from two words: cum, and the noun, templum. Now we all know that cum means 'with' and that templum can be translated as 'temple'.

This leads us to say that contemplation is to merge as perfectly as possible the heaven and earth, the divine and the human, the vertical dimension and the horizontal one. He who could make a synthesis of these two realities would then be the true contemplator. Others, instead, believe that he who has the gift of contemplation is always a person who holds the mystery of Christ crucified as the backbone of history, as the Word that all history has revealed and reveals still today. In this case, the contemplator would be the one who looks at everything from this vision of the crucified Christ, a man who sees in every corner of human history and of the world the proclamation and demonstration of Christ crucified. Also, in this case, we see that the contemplator is not outside of history and does not refer to things external to history: on the contrary, he is the one who is in the very heart of things and events. At the root of contemplation, in all these forms, there is, ultimately, the transfiguration of man determined by his compliance with the Word of God.

When the Word of God has chiselled enough away to make us perfectly similar to it, we witness the birth - as we well know - of the new man who lets himself be guided by the Spirit. The root of contemplation is the birth of the new man.

5. Actio

Fr. Guanella in his concreteness, that arose from contemplation, wrote that "Christ must be loved with an intimate, clear and strong feeling," and that "to study Jesus Christ, God and Man all together, means to comply with his examples".

The lectio closes the circle of life when one decides to act concretely in order to establish the kingdom of the Father. Jesus in his Gospel clearly states that it is not enough to say, "Lord, Lord" to be admitted to His kingdom, but it is necessary to bring forth actions worthy of the benevolence of God. If we still want to draw on the wealth of our spirituality, let us hear Fr. Guanella encouraging his spiritual daughters to act, by writing: "Do as Jesus Christ himself did. Jesus Christ, who is the fire of charity itself, who has come to bring the world the fire of charity from his divine heart. And now what does he crave,

except that this same fire burns in the hearts of his creatures? You must be in fire and flames of desire to do good to your poor neighbour. Become fire and flame in the heart, eyes and tongue, in your entire being, and then you will become like burning firebrands. Nothing can resist fire. Fire melts the hardest boulders and reduces to liquid the most resistant metals. (SpC 430, 1911).

I. Who do people say that I am?

Lectio Divina (Mk 8: 27-30) – For the Lenten season

The reflection concerns the passage from the Gospel of Mark (8: 27-30), which we will approach in a spirit of prayer, and will be our lectio divina today! We intend to train our ability to “hear” God speaking to us through the Bible and to “answer” him in order to testify to the extraordinary strength emanating from our being to influence the daily life of everyone.

Every day we dare to ask in the Lord's Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread”. Now our bread is the Eucharist and the Word of God as well. I need the Word and the Eucharist to be nourished by God, to become his son, to conform to the image of Jesus, to revisit, to better express and fulfil my vocation.

Only in this way can I understand who I am, what I want, what God wants from me, and what I want to do for myself and my future.

The practice of lectio divina gives us the ability to listen to the Lord and answer Him enlightened and strengthened in a very special way, because it involves the discernment of each of us and that of the community as a whole.

Our work is organised as follows:

- 1) **lectio**: reading and re-reading of the “suggested” passage;
- 2) **meditatio**: searching for the message = kairòs (the time when God acts)
- 3) **oratio** or **contemplatio**: the time when each one contemplates the Teacher who is speaking and revealing his Word beyond what the verses say.

Lectio (Mk 8: 27-30)

“Then Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages near Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ And they replied, ‘John the Baptist, others say Elijah, while yet more say you are one of the prophets.’ And he asked them,

‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter replied, ‘You are the Messiah.’ Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.”

It is only four verses, right in the middle of the Gospel of Mark (16 chapters in all). So even in terms of quantity, the 8th chapter acts as a bridge between the first and the second part of the book of Mark. It therefore plays a very important role, because it summarises all that precedes it and prepares for what will follow in the revelation. What is specific to this text is that while in the other books Jesus teaches, exhorts, heals, or acts, here he mostly asks questions: He questions! Furthermore, He asks truly enigmatic questions: the answer is unknown.

Another relevant aspect is that the Teacher wants to flush out the disciples, especially through the second question, in order to declare themselves, to express what they feel in their hearts about him!

The didactic-relational method focused on clarity is suggested to better understand oneself.

1. Simply put, we divide the passage into parts understanding its dynamism, structure, and the process by which it develops:

- Jesus asks,

the disciples answer;

- Jesus asks a second question,

Peter answers;

- Jesus concludes.

2. The individual moments of the episode.

“Who do people say that I am?”

This first question helps the disciples stop, to consider a synthesis of their many experiences, and remember!

They were present together with the people at many of Jesus’ miracles, have heard many of Jesus’ own words, exhortations, threats, didactic explanations, and parables. Therefore, is it right to ask what idea people got about the Lord? This is a preliminary question, which requires recollection and attention in order to be prepared for the next question, the decisive one.

The answer to this preliminary and informative question is simple: the three designations that people give the Lord: John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet.

The answer is not new, since in the 6th chapter of Mark's Gospel, we read: "King Herod heard about Jesus, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, 'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him.' Others were saying, 'He is Elijah'; still others, 'He is a prophet like any of the prophets'" (verses 14-15). It means that disciples had been hearing the opinion of people for some time. However, we wonder: why just these three designations? Why not Abraham, Moses, or Isaac? To better understand, we must remember that Mark begins his book by talking about Jesus, who above all preached conversion: in this he was similar to John the Baptist, who preached repentance! But, unlike John the Baptist, Jesus performed miracles, by calling to mind the great figure of Elijah, who performed great works of power, such as by resurrecting the son of the widow, letting fire come and burn the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, or causing droughts and rain to in Israel. Moreover, since chapter 1 of Mark's Gospel, Jesus preached forcefully: "He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes" (v. 22). So, he had traits of the prophet. Therefore, people gave three possible interpretations of Jesus from the religious perspective of the time: that looked for templates and reduced new events to those same templates.

Here lies the misunderstanding: instead of getting open to the new, it is 'boxed'; it is put next to what is 'already known', to what is obvious, without understanding the reality before us and that we are forced to experience!

For this reason Jesus is not satisfied with their answer! So here is the second question: 'Who do you say that I am?'. As if to say: 'What have you learned about my inner life? Do you also do nothing but see just the outward appearance? Do you apply cognitive schemes that are commonplace and "out-dated", if not from history? Or have you understood something more or deeper?'. Let us notice the strength of the pronoun 'you'!

You, who I called first; you, who I wanted with me on the mountain; you, my disciples; you, who have listened closely to my words and seen my miracles; how do you relate to me? What does your following me mean? Have you not learned anything?

You are following me as you would John... Do you feel that in your life there is a greater calling, that here and now is a fact so decisive that determines your life in a unique and unrepeatable way?

Before such a provocation comes the formidable answer from Peter: 'You are the Messiah! Four words that recall the entire biblical hope. In brief, Peter says: 'We understand that you are not only a Prophet announcing the Kingdom to come';

- 'You are not just one who performs great miracles by the power of God, like Elijah;
- 'You are not merely one that exhorts to conversion, like John the Baptist. We understand that you are the King';
- 'that the Kingdom is already here with you, that you are the King proclaiming the Kingdom in You, that You are the hope of Israel!'

'While the previous figures announced something for the future, You, Jesus, are already in the present time for us; being with You is the fulfilment of God's plan and we don't need

to wait for someone else; every hope, desire and dream of us is in You'. Therefore, Peter's answer is truly illuminating as it reflects a profound understanding of such an event: in Jesus is the definitive characteristic of God – that is, the full and final revelation of Himself; God is already with us, in Jesus Christ.

For this reason, we are amazed that Jesus did not reply to such completeness of Peter's answer by saying: 'Well done, Peter!' On the contrary, he warned them not to tell anyone about him. (This was what really happened!).

He did not deny to be the Christ, the Messiah, in so doing He acknowledged that Peter said the right thing, however made them understand that, actually, there is still a long path for Peter to understand the implication of his assertion; it is better to keep quiet since he cannot understand it yet!

Peter has spoken sincerely, he got something of God's plan, however, expressed only the truth of it, not its depth! From this episode on, Jesus can start explaining the meaning of 'the fulfilment in Him as the Messiah, of God's plan and what it means to Peter, the disciples and to each of us today, here and now according to the difference of our functions'.

Meditatio (starting points)

There are two possible starting points to follow in our meditation:

1. The two questions Jesus asks are unavoidable.

The first underlines that Jesus cannot be erased from human history. Everyone has been talking about it for two thousand years and this will be discussed more and more. There are many different views about Him and we know what is said within the history of Religions, through Catechesis and Theology.

It is our duty to deepen our knowledge of Jesus ever further through Catechesis, in the School for Training to socio-political commitment, in explaining the Social Doctrine of the Church, through the spiritual meetings, preaching, our personal study of God's Word, and in our continuing education, and so on.

This, however, is not enough if we do not answer to the existential question: 'What do you say about Jesus?'

2. The answer we can give (the most authentic one, that is: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!') is still to be clarified! Not in the sense that 'it is not true' but rather in the sense that 'I have yet to fully understand what "Jesus is the Messiah!" means.' And I won't be able to understand it until I love Him as both crucified and risen; until I find him in our midst as suffering in the multidimensionality of a multi-faceted poverty that surrounds us everywhere; until I see him made bread in the Eucharist I daily celebrate, until I see him made bread in my daily life, until I realise that this Messiah is not far from me, but dwells in my human condition and the same places of my maturation as well as the same themes of my life!

The achievement of this goal in an existential, appropriate and integrated way, is a long journey. Peter deceives himself by stating: 'You are the Messiah!' because goodness knows what a glorious destiny he thought was held for Jesus and himself. It is the same also for each of us. We are going to understand it only when we actually succeed in following Jesus, who from chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel on, wants to explain to His passion what kind of Messiah He is: what does it mean being the Son of God: what is the Kingdom that comes in Him and that it is already in me.

Contemplatio

This constitutes the third phase of the exercise of lectio divina. The following prayer is a way of exemplification: Jesus, who do I say you are? Who are you to me? Are you really the One who reigns in me? Has the Kingdom of God come in me? Oh Lord, how much confusion and sadness in speaking of You with You, and you with me! Lord, I do not know you! Please, open my eyes and make yourself known to me.

Actio

This is the practical commitment that derives from all the preceding, as strong as our will: to listen with intensity and curiosity anyone speaking of Jesus, to better know Him and better stand before Him...

Lord, let me know you, let me know myself. Lead us individually and as a Community in this path until we feel you present in us and among us.

II. Witnesses of the Risen One

Lectio divina (Jn 21: 1-14) - For the Easter season

To see

The present situation of our communities is described 'positively' by our general Chapter, specifying the goals to be achieved, highlighting limitations and things to be improved.

Three moments we consider as fundamental in our community life:

a) Togetherness

- it is necessary at least to live community life by sharing faithfully with our confreres our times work.

b) Walking together

- it is our duty to break down the wall of indifference or excessive privacy, often due to shyness, but sometimes also to selfishness, by fostering a true friendship, helping one another to grow to full maturity, sincerely valuing the capabilities of each confrere and the excusing of their limitations.

c) Planning and operating together

- The mission is never addressed to a single person: the whole community is responsible for it, though to a different extent; therefore: listening, regular communication, dialogue, sharing and solidarity in responsibility, by individually and collectively re-appropriating the purpose, function and validity of our centres, in collaboration and co-responsibility with the laity, and open to the territory as well.

To judge

The Gospel pericope of the manifestation of the Risen Christ to the Apostles on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Jn 21: 1-14) judges the quality of our community life and ministry, by showing us the path to follow to get closer to the ideal of an apostolic community dedicated to the testimony of the new life that Christ has inaugurated through His Passion and Resurrection.

It is impossible to list all the suggestions and indications this passage contains within itself, but we will highlight a few.

a) 'Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias' (Jn 21, 1-14)

First of all we notice the verb, 'revealed'. The evangelist uses this verb only two more times. The first time on the occasion of the Wedding in Cana (Jn 2) where, after Jesus turned water into wine, he concludes by saying: 'Thus Jesus... revealed his glory' (v. 11). The second time Jesus uses this verb is during his discussion of the Last Supper, when he says: 'Father, I revealed your name to Man' (Jn 17: 6). To reveal means to make visible the mystery of God, make visible what cannot be seen but that is the root, the substance of what is seen. Therefore, the evangelist is telling us that Jesus made himself known, understood, and revealed himself as a friend, the Saviour and Risen Lord, as the truth of Man, as one who is needed.

'He revealed himself again' means that he manifested himself once again. He had already revealed them, but he reveals himself once again since having been caught by their everyday needs and with sadness in their heart because of the disappointment they suffered, they are no longer able to recognize him alive and operating in their midst.

We too, as communities walking through time, really need this revelation and continual revelations of Jesus. Our community life is often sad and dark if it is not continuously enlighten by Jesus' revelation. We often live in situations and moments in which we really feel like we are sinking or groping. We are gripped by the desire to so rowing go with the flow, almost waiting for the end to come. We are lacking in joy in carrying out our mission and we are no longer able to attract. We urge Jesus to reveal himself as truth, justice, light and fullness of meaning.

b) 'He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathaniel from Canaan in Galilee, Zebediah's sons, and two others of his disciples'.

Peter is named first because he is the foundation stone of the Church, the shepherd to whom Jesus will entrust the flock of God, right in this chapter (21) of the John's Gospel.

But other apostles are named, too: we know the character and personality of each one: Thomas is hard, suspicious, stubborn; Nathaniel is a simple man, for whom things easily go well; Zebediah's sons, James and John, are choleric (= sons of Thunder) and have difficult characters, two other apostles remain unknown and are hard to define.

Everyone is present when Jesus reveals himself, without exception. Jesus reveals himself to all members of our communities, as they are, in reality, with their particular way of being. It is useless to be seized with the wish of brothers with different characters, or the dream of being surrounded by brothers who can understand, esteem and help us.

c) 'Children, have you caught anything to eat?'

The question asked by Jesus brought his disciples to a serious reconsideration of their lives, to become aware of frustrations they are experiencing, and realize that things go wrong when He 'is not in their midst'.

This question shakes us as too, for Jesus tells us: 'Is there something sound you nourish your life with, your praying, your reading of Scripture and serving the poor? Or are these just empty actions made out of habit?'

Jesus tells us as a community: 'Do your duties, your sermons, your catechesis, your service, nourish the heart, spirit, faith and courage? Are your actions meaningful, able to feed people who hunger for serious things? Or are you just showing off? Are you able to give bread and justice?'

d) 'They answered him, "No!" So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something"'.

The sincerity and honesty of the disciples allows Jesus to 'reveal his power': when we are weak, it is then that we are strong. The power of God is revealed in man's weakness. Jesus' command: 'cast your nets' tells us at least three things:

1) There is something to do.

Jesus shakes us from our idleness, he loves the recognition of our weakness, limitations, poverty and suffering for what still lacks, but he does not want this to turn into useless complaining. There is something to do.

2) The thing to do is to listen to His Word!

Disciples did not have to relearn the trade of fishermen, they just have to trust Jesus, act on his Word, keep Him central to all their actions: they were lacking in such things! Not our experience, our abilities and certainties, but Him at the centre of everything.

3) His Word invites them to perform an action, which they had performed who knows how many times before.

Jesus calls us to rediscover the meaning of the simplest acts done together with Him, to understand that it is not needed to climb the sky or penetrate into the depths of the earth, but rather to do the same actions together with Him, in order to be credible witnesses, fishers of men, 'doers of the Word' even more than being messengers. The general chapter exhorted us to let us ourselves be evangelized in order to evangelize others!

It is thus not to acquire some kind of culture or expertise: but to let Him send us and obey Him, to put Him alone at the centre and origin of everything we do or say, all our human efforts are needed to improve and make more effective our service when it is lacking in sense, when I am not in obeisance to God. It is therefore necessary that we welcome our life and service as obedience to the Risen Lord, so that our every action and word derives its completeness of meaning only from Him.

e) 'So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord...he jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat...'

It is the Lord! It is the cry of faith that breaks the sadness, the boredom, the fatigue. It is the cry of one who abandons himself and his false securities, by abandoning himself to God and putting himself into the hands of God. It is the Lord of our lives who drives us; only by surrendering to his love do we give meaning to our actions. Our actions will get definitive and everlasting meaning only in Jesus: the meaning we are stumbling towards, because we live on meaning and need meaning, since the human universe is a network of

meanings. But all these meanings have their roots, their foundation and fullness in Jesus who is the Lord. If I reject Jesus the Lord, if I do not recognize Him as the Lord of my life, my actions will be meaningless, they will consist in raising and lowering an empty net. Acknowledging the Lord as present in our lives leads to different behaviours: Peter throws himself into the water, the other disciples drag the boat to shore. In our communities we have different roles and tasks, but each one is focused on the only Lord. Each one of us responds with his time, with those measures and enthusiasm that befit him, but what is important is to see the Lord and go towards Him. The Lord does not necessarily reveal himself primarily or in a particular way to whoever leads a community; on the contrary, we often read in the Gospel that he who first recognizes Jesus is not the first of the Apostles. Even in this passage it is John, the one the Teacher loved the most, and not Peter. Often in our communities as well it is the spiritual man, the holiest one who reveals to us the presence of Christ. It would be great if this person was the Superior! On the contrary, these roles and ways often measure, study and misunderstand one another. So, instead of going toward the Lord, they stop themselves and start discussing their distances and different roles.

To act

What should we do?

Putting forward suggestions and initiatives may be relatively easy, but is it really useful? Maybe could we run the risk of perceiving them as 'something imposed from above' and for that reason to be set aside? If we abandon ourselves to the action of the Spirit and the reflections proposed hereby, it wouldn't be onerous or difficult to identify what we have to change, as individuals and as a community too, in order to be in the true communities which proclaim by Word and actions the Risen One. Best wishes!

Outline For

A Community

Prayer Meeting

The Creed

Learn with living faith what is in the Creed, a holy collection of all the blessed books of the Holy Scripture, either of prophets or of apostles of the Divine Saviour. The Creed is a fighting program and a banner of battle under which the right of the Almighty described the ever-loving Person of the Eternal Word assuming the human flesh, suffering, dying, rising, reappearing to the whole world to forgive the sins of all and conducting them safe to Heaven.

Saint Louis Guanella

Introduction

I believe

Exposition chant: **Te Iodiamo, Trinità** (or other appropriate chant)

Leader: What is faith?

We begin our profession of faith by saying: "I believe" or "We believe". Before expounding the Church's faith, as confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy and lived in observance of God's commandments and in prayer, we must first ask what "to believe" means. Faith is man's response to God, who reveals himself and gives himself to man, at the same time bringing man the illumination he needs search for the ultimate meaning of his own life.

1st Reader

Man is “capable” of God

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for. The Lord created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, if you become aware of your miseries, then God will derive the beauty of a soul that far surpasses the splendour of the stars in the sky. And yet you still delay in humbling yourself and recognizing all this? The world was created by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as well. I ask: who is doing good in the world? And I answer: not the most powerful, but the humblest of us. Similarly, in a religious or domestic house, who prospers is the humblest soul. So what are honours for? The Gospel says: ‘Obeying is better than commanding.’ Consequently, he who most hates to command is the worthiest Superior. You must say: ‘Who am I to be able to say to others: Obey me?’. And if we must say it by reason of office, show – at least in your heart – that you yourself feel more regret in your heart in ordering instead of having to do it yourself.

(L. Guanella, *Il Fondamento*, 1885, 1914, pp. 889-890)

2nd Reader

Man's response

Faith is a supernatural gift from God and is a personal adherence of the whole man to God. It involves an assent of the intellect and will. "Believing" is a human act, conscious and free, corresponding to the dignity of the human person; and it is an ecclesial act, since the Church's faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. "No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother".

(St. Cyprian)(CCC 176-181).

(from Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Proclamation of the WORD

(Jn 6: 26-29: the bread of life)

From St John's Gospel

Jesus answered them and said, «Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.» So they said to him, «What can we do to accomplish the works of God?» Jesus answered and said to them, «This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.»

The Word of the Lord

Silence for personal prayer/adoration

Section I

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth

Leader:

The **Creed** begins with God, for God is “the First and the Last” (Is 44,6), the Beginning and the End of everything; it begins with God the Father, for the Father is the first divine Person of the Most Holy Trinity; it begins with the creation of heaven and earth, for creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works.

“I believe in God” is the most fundamental affirmation of our faith: the whole Creed speaks of God, and when it also speaks of man and of the world it does so in relation to God.

Believing in God, the only One, has enormous consequences for our whole life:

- we must love and “serve God first” (St. Joan of Arc).
- living in thanksgiving: everything we are and have comes from Him.
- knowing the true dignity of all men, made “in the image and likeness of God”.
- making good use of created things.
- trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity (CCC 222-227).

God shows His **Fatherhood**: in the way He takes care of our needs; through the filial adoption; by freely forbidding our sins.

Catechesis on creation makes explicit the response of the basic question of men: “**Where do we come from?**” “**Where are we going?**” “**Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?**” The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions.

The divine Providence consists of the dispositions by which God guides all his creatures with wisdom and love to their ultimate end (CCC 270-321).

Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches because you have revealed them who are eternal truth and wisdom, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. In this faith I intend to live and die.

Silence for personal prayer/adoration

Chant: **Symbolum** '77 (or other appropriate chant)

From the writings of Saint Louis Guanella

1st Reader

Oh faithful soul, enter the sanctuary of your heart, converse with God and rest tranquil with him. By reawakening yourself, lift up thine eyes unto the universe: you will see it as very beautiful. Then you, in an ecstasy of joy, exclaim: "Great God!" and be happy in your meditations on what God, in his goodness, has done in you and around you. The fact that God is in the tall skies above and you are in a miserable valley below does not prevent you from looking to the Lord; indeed, you will love Him with even deeper fervour. But in the meantime make this resolution: 'God is present before me; is it possible that the Almighty does not give help me to grow and become an ever more faithful soul?'

2nd Reader

God is your Father who created you, redeemed you, and teaches you in the school with His advice and gladdens you at the table with His Sacraments. Come, exclaim with living faith: 'The Lord is the whole of my soul, I will not be afraid of anything Man could threaten me with.' Then go even deeper unto such reflections. The more you study, the more delight you will have in your mind, and virtue in your heart! God is the Almighty: but if He is such, can He not look upon your misery and sanctify you? Or can He not take advantage of you for a task performed in His glory? Remember to be faithful by fully recognizing that you do not have any merit, and then entrust yourself to the Lord. When you can declare, 'I have made a firm resolution never to sin again, either in great matters or in small', demand and give glory to God. A faithful soul should never sin, and can say joyfully: 'I do not fall as the virtue of the Lord sustains me.'

3rd Reader

Out of nothing the Lord created the heavens and the earth. If you become aware of your miseries, then God will derive the beauty of a soul that far surpasses the splendour of the stars in the sky. And yet you still delay in humbling yourself and recognizing all this? The world was created by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as well. I ask: who is doing good in the world? And I answer: not the most powerful, but the humblest of us.

Similarly, in a religious or domestic house, who prospers is the humblest soul. So what are honours for? The Gospel says: 'Obeying is better than commanding.' Consequently, he who most hates to command is the worthiest Superior. You must say: 'Who am I to be able to say to others: Obey me?'. And if we must say it by reason of office, show - at least in your heart - that you yourself feel more regret in your heart in ordering instead of having to do it yourself.

(L. Guanella, *Il Fondamento*, 1885, 1914, pp. 889-890)

Silence for personal prayer/adoration

Chant: **Il Signore è la mia salvezza** (or other appropriate chant)

Section II

I believe in Jesus Christ

His only Son

Our Lord

Leader:

At the center of our faith is Jesus

At the center of our faith and its proclamation we find in essence a Person: Jesus Of Nazareth, The Only Son Of The Father, who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever in the Blessed Sacrament.

To evangelize is to:

- reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design;
- seek to understand the meaning of the Christ's actions and words;
- put in communion with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity

(John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*).

Only by believing does faith grow and be strengthened: Moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: «You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.» (Mt 16:16). On the rock of this faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built His Church.

Let us spray to the Lord - **“You are Christ, the Son of the living God”**.

1st Reader

The name “JESUS” means “God saves”. The child born of the Virgin Mary is called “Jesus”, «for he will save his people from their sins» (Mt 1:21): «There is no other Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved» (Acts 4:12).

2nd Reader

The title “Christ” means “Anointed One”, “Messiah”. Jesus is the Christ -for God «anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power» (Acts 10:38). He was the one who was to come, the object «of the hope of Israel» (Acts 28:20).

1st Reader

The title “SON OF GOD” signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father: he is the only Son of the Father and God himself. To be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1 Jn).

2nd Reader

The title “LORD” indicates divine sovereignty. To confess or invoke Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity. «No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit» (1 Cor 12:3) (CCC 422-425).

Silence for personal prayer/adoration

Let us pray with St. Louis Guanella's words

Refrain **I believe in You, Lord, I believe in you:
the mystery is great here, but I believe in You!**

(or other appropriate refrain).

'Jesus Christ is the true Son of God and is also the only son of the Immaculate Virgin. You believe this, oh faithful soul, but in practice show that you believe in your Rule, to that office that God has granted you; believe also that God wants you to resemble Jesus in perfection and that you persevere with a firm resolution.'

Oh Jesus, we ask you, help us to be consistent with the creed we profess.

Refrain **You are gentle light - perfection.**

I believe in You, Lord. I believe in You.

'The Son is begotten of the Eternal Father. It is best that you, faithful soul, study with great fervour the mysteries of the most holy faith, and that from this meditation falls into your heart a torrent of holy joy and a river of divine virtue.'

Oh Jesus, we ask you, fill our hearts with your consolation.

Refrain **I trust in You, Lord, I trust in You:**

I am always weak, but I trust in You.

'Only the Son of the Eternal One is by nature the Only Begotten of the Father. Only the holy acts, namely those which, being good, have within themselves the sole purpose of pleasing God, will please the Lord. And as long as you endure your works, although good, are not mixed with the rust of pride, with the bruises of envy?'

Oh Jesus, we ask you, give us a true conscience and a clear gaze.

Refrain **You are gentle light, perfect joy.**

I believe in You, Lord, I believe in You.

'Jesus's name means Saviour. Faithful soul, God wants to save souls through you. But when will you become an instrument without blemishes, and therefore ideally suited to cooperate with God's plan for salvation?'

Oh Jesus, we ask you, make us docile instruments of your Providence.

Refrain **I love You, Lord, I love You:**

o crucified Love, I love You.

'In Jesus dwells the heavenly Godhead. In the heart of the faithful soul dwells the grace of God. Therefore, what can't you do with the help of the Lord in your heart?'

Oh Jesus, we ask you, cover our weakness by your power.

Refrain **Stay with me, Lord, stay with me:**

bread which invigorates, stay with me.

'See how Jesus with a loving smile says: "Call me Father, for I am your father and lord." Now answer Him with full affection: "Father, oh Father!". And while saying this, put yourself at his feet to listen to Him and obey Him in everything and always.'

Oh Jesus, we ask you, make us always smiling to you with the confidence of children.

Refrain **You are gentle light, perfect joy.**

I believe in You, Lord, I believe in You.

(L. Guanella, *Il Fondamento*, 1885, 1914, p. 891)

EUCCHARISTIC BENEDICTION

Blessed be God.

Blessed be his holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

Blessed be the name of Jesus.

Blessed be his most Sacred Heart.

Blessed be his most Precious Blood.

Blessed be Jesus in the most holy sacrament of the altar.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.

Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.

Blessed be her glorious Assumption.

Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.

Blessed be St. Joseph, her most Chaste Spouse.

Blessed be God in his Angels and in his Saints.

Leader: 'Like Mary, you must live by faith. Mary had such a great consolation for herself. What a comfort in thinking: "I think what the saints who have gone before me have longed for! I want what those eminent people and the prophets who have illuminated the earth wished for themselves!"

Mary would also say: "What joy is mine: I own the saviour of men himself!"

And as for you, who may exclaim even more: "What an utmost joy is mine! I look to the Old Testament saints who yearned for Jesus; I look to the saints of the New Testament, who have seen and heard Him. I look to the saints in heaven who now possess Him in an eternal bliss. And here in my heart I welcome the gladness of the prophets, the joy of the Holy Apostles, and with high confidence I look forward to enjoying the glory of the saints in paradise".

What a stimulus for you to follow that crowd of your saints!

You are the son of saints; is it possible that there is a lot of sadness in you?

Commend yourself to the Virgin Mary and tell Her again: "Sweet Heart of Mary, be you my salvation." Then comfort your mind by thinking, as much as you can, of true life that awaits you where Jesus triumphs with His saints.'

(L. Guanella, *Nel mese dei fiori*, 1884, p. 1013s.)

Final chant: **Magnificat**

Conclusion

Faith is the eye of the Christian

With the light of his eyes, the child recognizes the features on his father's face and for a long time is delighted with the smiles of his mother. With the light of faith the Christian is not late in recognizing God, the Father who adopted him, and the Mother Church who supports him. Indeed, as by his mother, the child recognizes his father, so through the Church you know with the most ardent affection your heavenly Father; through It you know teachings and the will of God your Lord. Jesus, who is the spouse of your Mother, clearly and unfailingly shows you His will, so that, by following His teachings, you may get to heaven. The father who is good, who knows and who has the power to save, wants nothing more than the salvation of all His people. Jesus, the great, wise Father and God the Almighty, has said: "My Church perseveres forever, and those who follow its teachings obey my commands."

(L. Guanella, *Andiamo al Paradiso*, 1883; pp. 574-575)

St. Louis Guanella: a witness of faith

(Witnesses from: "Positio super introductione causae Servi Dei Aloysii Guanella", Volume I, Rome 1937)

His lively faith shone through his whole life and his every action, as I have witnessed for many years. Fr. Guanella would often speak to us priests about the incomparable preciousness of the gift of faith, and not only while preaching, but also while conversing. He was delighted with childish enthusiasm at the faith of the simplest, the common people, the mountain people, who he would say to be much more worthier than the science of the most profound theologian.

(Msgr. Aurelio Bacciarini)

I can say with all certainty that Fr. Louis Guanella was so grounded in the theological faith that one could not wish for more: I say this from my personal experience. I also remember how often he would incite to faith, by warmly repeating expressions like these: 'Have faith! Have faith!'. I can say that all his foundational and other works bear the imprint of the great virtue that guided him. I assure you that this Servant of God always showed the greatest commitment to preserve and expand the works of faith through example, books he published, letters, and especially through his sermons, instructions and everything he made others do, too. In particular, I saw the Servant of God dealing with catechetical and pastoral instruction of children and adults, since his time in Pianello, and I would also add of the roughest and most deficient people; and also in recommending especially to us Sisters to educate ourselves to be able to instruct others. I recall that he strove with great zeal for the religious good of heretics and others who were outside of our holy Faith, by erecting several houses which he usually provided with a little church or oratory assisted by some Servant of Charity and Sisters. He instructed them to bring their aid to those stations... With regard to his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament I offer this: I had never seen him in his room or at the director's office reciting the Holy Office, but I saw him reciting it in church and on his knees. On the occasion of carriage trips I made with him I remember that as soon as we settled he would start praying the rosary beads of Providence or some other devotion to Providence, Sacred Heart and so on. I also remember that once, having just come back from the church to the director's office, after having celebrated the Holy Mass, he heard the sound of the bells for another Mass that was being celebrated, he exclaimed: 'This is the ring, ring! It is calling us; it has just finished playing and here they go again!'. I replied: 'remain here, since you have already celebrated the Holy Mass and can devote yourself to other things.' But he replied: 'To stay here is good, but it is better to go and hear mass'. He could not live without visiting the Most Holy Sacrament and as often as he could, he made such visits with devotion.

(Sister Marcellina Bosatta)

In all the conversations I have had with him, and they were many, I can attest that they were always about supernatural matters and he incited me through simple but effective words to serve the Church with great faith without worrying myself about difficulties. He inspired in me great confidence in Providence, which he advised me to trust completely. Particularly in the struggle among Catholics, about modernism, he recommended to remain faithful in absolute obedience to the Church, without discussing the limits of obedience.

(Fr. Agostino Gemelli)

In Fr. Guanella I witnessed his supernatural faith in God hundreds and hundreds of times, so that I declare without doubt that he lived by faith: he also demonstrated it in both word and deed, and though his writings, in a truly uplifting way. I repeatedly witnessed the zeal of Fr. Louis in teaching the catechism to children and uncouth people, by showing himself as tireless, always speaking quietly, in the manner best suited even to the most deficient. I remember in this regard how the venerable archpriest of Bettiga di Morbegno after the Lenten preaching held by the Servant of God in that church, exclaimed: 'The preaching of Fr. Louis has brought so much fruit in my parish because even the children understood it, and it was clearer than any others'.

(Fr. Giovanni Battista Trussoni)

Fr. Louis Guanella was a supernatural man. I met him in the outer life, in the many meetings I had with him in Rho and his Houses; I knew him even better in his inner life, in contacts I had with him in the Spiritual Exercises, which I gave him twice and in an all-spiritual intimacy of a friendship which keep our souls together, and that left me, a young priest, so many entirely supernatural impressions and memories. The first impression one might have of him, even a socialite, was and could not be anything but a priest different from others. There was something supernatural in him that immediately struck you from his smiling face, his serene expression, from his way of being a person of noble goodness, or the words he weighed and which inspired fatherly charity. His features, those of a seasoned mountaineer; his dress sometimes threadbare, but never dirty; his occasionally inelegant language, could make someone believe of being before a chaplain of little or even insignificant ability; but if you started speaking, you would immediately realize that this priest had great ideas, lived for charity, and sought only God and the poor. He had a spirit of faith.

The Gospel was, for Fr. Guanella, not some bright theory to be scrutinized with an intellectual attitude and preached with literary elegance: it was the practice of life, his life. Divine Providence was for Fr. Louis not a palliative or a figure of speech, but a divine

reality: it was inspiration, help and the driving force behind the works he thought and decided before the Sacramented Jesus.

When he knew that it was a work that God wanted, he would put his heart and soul into it, certain of succeeding, even if he had to incur debts or run into obstacles of any kind: criticisms, slanders, mocks and evil hostilities. However, Fr. Luigi Guanella was not a simpleton, a careless man. He was cautious, prudent as few others are, he knew very well to keep his accounts and business, in buying, exchanging lands, or purchasing and building Houses. He told me once: 'You, father, always talk about holiness, heavenly life; mind, however, that the Saints are not nor should they be ingenuous or gullible, but cautious and cunning for their part.' So, for inspiration of God, and of the inner life of Fr. Guanella, rose his Houses, his Congregation and the miracles of his charity. He told me that he did not even know how his Houses could live and even thrive.

(Witness from padre Giustino Borgonovo from Rho

in "La Divina Provvidenza", 1959)

PROPOSALS OF INITIATIVES

TO CELEBRATE THE YEAR OF FAITH

The General Council, after the dialogue with the Provincial Delegate of Africa and on the occasion of the meeting held in January, suggests the following in order to highlight the Year of Faith:

1. Each community shall take part in the initiatives organised by its own Diocese for the Year of Faith.
2. It is important that everyone pays special attention to the preaching, catechisms and education within our communities and works, including outside the pastoral ministry.
3. At a time, and in the manner, each community deems convenient, they shall live the moments of the two Lectio and for prayer offerings by the Aid prepared by the General Council.
4. The Province of "San Giuseppe", in Rome, shall organize a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is open to the whole Guanellian Family, in order to renew our faith on the same spot where our Redeemer lived. It will take place from 23rd to 31st August 2013 at a cost of 1,350.00€ per person. Entries must be received as soon as possible at the headquarters of the same Province.
5. Two courses of Spiritual Exercises have been organized. The first is open to the whole Guanellian Family and will take place in Barza d'Ispra (Varese, Italy) from 5th to 10th August 2013; the second, designed for the two General Councils, the Provincial Councils of the Servants of Charity, and for the Italian Daughters of Saint Mary of the Providence, will take place in the "Casa Santa Rosa" of Rome from September 30th to October 5th, 2013.

6. Every Province shall organize a Pilgrimage to a shrine or a significant place of their own nation to profess their faith in the Lord.

7. On the occasion of the Year of Faith, from 1st to 19th September 2013, an international training course for novitiates, philosophy and theology teachers of our Congregation will be held in Rome.

8. From 20th to 22nd September 2013, Rome will host a conference on our Charisma organised by the Guanellian Study Centre. This will end in St. Peter with the Mass and profession of Faith at the tomb of the St. Peter the Apostle.

O, Christ, our one mediator, you are necessary to us:

to come into communion with God the Father;

to become with you, who are the Only Son and Our Lord, his adopted children; to be regenerated in the Holy Spirit.

You are necessary to us,

O sole true master of the hidden truths indispensable to life,

to know ourselves and our destiny, and the way to reach it.

You are necessary to us, Our Redeemer, to discover our wretchedness and heal it; to grasp the concept of good and evil and the hope of holiness, to deplore our sins and to be forgiven.

You are necessary to us, O first-born brother of the human race,

to re-discover the true reasons for fraternity among men, the foundations of justice, the treasures of charity, the supreme good of peace.

You are necessary to us, O great sufferer of our pain,

to know the sense of suffering and to give it a value of expiation and redemption.

You are necessary to us, O conqueror of death,

to deliver us from despair and from negation and to give us the certainties

that do not eternally betray.

You are necessary to us, O Christ, O Lord, O God-With-Us,

to learn true love and to walk in the joy and strength of your charity,

along the road of our wearisome way, until the final encounter with you, so loved, with you, so awaited, with you, so blessed in the centuries.

Paul VI