



THE LAYPERSON AND THE INCARNATION OF CHARISM OF SAINT CAMILLUS IN TODAY'S WORLD

I would like to begin this reflection by defining charism and Camillian charism which we are called upon to incarnate in today's world as a Lay Camillian Family. I will use some paragraphs from the conference "Charism and Ministry", "The Lay Camillian Family" which Father Angelo Brusco presented in May 1992 and from the General Constitutions and Dispositions of the Servants of the Sick.

"The charism of a founder reveals itself as an experience of the Holy Spirit transmitted to one's own disciples to be experienced, conserved, deepened and constantly developed in accordance with the body of Christ in constant growth" (Paul VI *Mutuae Relationis* n°11).

Charism is a free gift, the Holy Spirit gives it to everyone as seen fit. (I Cor. 12, 11).

It is a temporary gift which can be lost if not used or if misused. (So many congregations have disappeared over the centuries, and new ones have been born).

It is given for the common good and will always be judged according to its usefulness for the community. Faithfulness to the spirit of the founder, his evangelical intentions and his example of holiness is important.

Therefore faithfulness to charism is the indispensable condition to guarantee that the Ministry which we are developing is truly Camillian.

Camillian Charism.

"The Church has identified Saint Camillus and the Order the Charism of mercy towards the sick and has appointed him the source of our mission. The Church named the work of the founder a "new school of charity". (Constitutions Art. 9).

This charism therefore, given in a very particular way to our Order and constituting nature and task, is expressed and carried out in the charitable work towards the sick. (Constitutions C 10).

The Order however, in particular circumstances of place and time and the most urgent needs of the Church and fellow men, is available for other activities, specifically dedicated to the deprived." (Constitutions C. 10).

- How to incarnate charism in today's world as a Lay Camillian Family

- Look at the reality



Observe the signs of the times highlighting this reality in the light of God's word, charism and the Camillian spirituality.

A complex and fluctuating reality where we experience situations of suffering, some of which very much resemble those which Saint Camillus experienced in his era, others maybe a little more complex. A society marked by scientific and advanced technology where we acknowledge, despite scientific progress that we live through sickness, suffering and death in a more dramatic way.

A materialistic society which has a tendency to exclude and marginalise he who does not produce, who is not profitable, who is sick, old, disabled, he who is different...

An unfair society where human rights are violated, where the right to health is not recognised in a lot of our countries and our sick die on the doorstep or at home without medical care.

- Returning to the source

To the fundamental experience we speak about today. Taking up the intuitions and the thoughts St. Camillus had in his period, which continue to be valid but need to be updated in order to reply in an efficient manner to the needs in today's world.

- Recreating charism and mercy, which could mean:

Make Christ's love, mercy, affection present towards our suffering brothers and sisters. Proclaim God is living by actions and words which heal. Defend the rights of the poor, the weak, the outcast, the sick. Build healing and caring communities. Create a culture of life and health.

- Assume with interest and determination our vocation as lay people.

As a member of God's people capable of deepening the reality of daily life opening up the world to a contemplative attitude, to be able to understand events and discover at every moment what God is asking us to do. Make present the good news of the salvation of God which Jesus Christ brought us for men and women of all ages.

- Reinforcing our Camillian family vocation

In deep spirituality, centred on Jesus' mercy, founded deeply in the love of God for us, a free and unconditional love which pushes us to communicate it and to spread it to all those we meet on our way. A spirituality which calls on us to perceive in every suffering person, the suffering face of God "*be Christ for the sick and see Christ within each sick person*" (sacrament of the presence of God).

A spirituality which leads us to cultivate a deep relationship with the Lord, drink permanently from the source of the Gospel, nourish it through prayer, contemplation, nourish



it through the sacraments, the Word of God, worshipping Mary, the writings on the life of Saint Camillus.

Without this constant and explicit reference to God, to his Word and to Camillian charism, our proclamation will lose its identity and its efficiency. We are called upon to combine mysticism and engagement, contemplation and action.

Challenges

Here are some challenges we are called upon to assume as Camillian Lay Families:

- The vast sea of charity

Camillus realizes that hospitals are a “*small sea*”, whilst the assistance to sick in their homes is a “*vast sea*”, “*the ocean is bottomless and everlasting*” as everywhere we suffer and die. Today perhaps, due to advanced science and health policies, the sick and especially the poor, are at home and their close ones are confronted with multiple opportunities and limited situations due to lack of means, of preparation to care for them.

It is in this “*vast sea*” that we are called upon to take up this intuition, organise pastoral parish health groups, encourage volunteers, impregnating them in the Camillian values to accompany, care for, assist the sick and the old and so that their families find in us the support they require.

- A new school of charity (Camillian Centres)

“*Why do I not have one hundred hands and one hundred feet to save so many suffering brothers and sisters*”, Camillus searches for the collaboration of all and his contagious influence surpasses his hospital. He founded a real “School of Charity” towards which all those feeling the concern to give to the “Privileged members of Christ” a little of their time, lots of affection and attention of quality.

This intuition finds its response in the pastoral Camillian centres where, as Camillian Lay families, we have a field of action: to be promoters, educators and trainers, taking on teaching tasks, coordination, project development, training programmes, leading pastoral health activities on a national, local and parish basis, as well as collaboration with ecclesiastical organisations.

- Accompanying the sick and dying and their families

Since the beginning of its foundation, Camillus organised assistance at home to the sick, both night and day. People appreciated this ministry and started to call them “fathers of a good death”. People exclaimed: “May God permit me to die with your assistance, Father Camillus!”.



Nowadays, in a special way due to the complexity of the world we live in, this intuition presents us with some solid challenges:

Training multidisciplinary teams inspired by Camillian charism which can give this service in hospices where a large percentage of sick and dying people live their final days, many without help, without medicine to relieve their physical pain, with a minimum of well-being ; let's think about the solitude and the neglect they experience and about the anguish of their families who do not know how to accompany or how to help them.

- Accompanying mourning.

Perhaps at the time of Camillus, we were not so aware of this need but nowadays the death of a loved one, broken families, solitude, suicides, maybe due to social, economic and family connotations, all this generates a lot of pain and anguish for people. It is necessary to answer this need to accompany people who experience loss and mourning : families of drug-addicts, alcoholics, suicidal cases, prisoners... through mutual help groups and Counselling Centres.

- Counselling Centres (Pastoral Care)

One of the greatest fears people experience today is solitude, having nobody to speak to, to share your small and big sufferings with, your difficulties, your fears. It is perhaps due to the fast pace of the life we live that we have no time to listen, to accompany. Here is a painful cry that our brothers and sisters throw at us today, which we are called upon to reply and react to. The counselling relationship is a very useful pastoral tool but we are aware that we need preparation and training in this field.

- Camillus a reformer of help towards the sick and the humanisation of health services. « *More heart in your hands, brothers* ».

Camillus found himself immersed in a reality of dehumanisation in the quality of care for the sick and with those who were responsible to care for them. His sensitive and stubborn character did not allow him to passively tolerate everything he experienced and saw without feeling repulsion. He realised everything had to be redone and began by setting the example.

One of the most important intuitions he had in his time, was for the suffering caused by dehumanisation, abuse, lack of devotion and human warmth towards the sick, and today it is one of the greatest problems the world of health must face.

For those who work professionally in an institution, a medical centre, a retirement home and who follow the charism of Saint Camillus through their profession, on a daily basis they are called upon to be witnesses of his example, of his signs of affection and of God's love « *caring for the sick as a mother would care for her only sick child* ».

Another way to react is to work for humanisation in institutions, developing projects for training health workers, in values, in ethics and principles, to change their attitudes. In the



respect for the rights of the sick, in order to create health institutions « centres serving life so that we receive care of human warmth and quality ».

Ethics and bioethics present themselves as a solid way to react, pronounce words to enlighten situations and problems concerning the big questions in life, abortion, euthanasia... in a view of faith based on Christian principles and values, in the light of Camillian spirituality.

- Spiritual support for the sick, their families and those who work in health institutions.

Camillus dedicated himself more and more each day to the service of the sick and discovered little by little all their needs. He realised that spiritual assistance was not sufficient enough because it was carried out by priests who thought solely of their salary, with the phenomenon of secularity which the appointments and presence of chaplains in the institutions had to face. It is a challenge for us as Camillian Lay Families. To develop a project, offering training to a pluridisciplinary team where professionals, pastoral agents, volunteers, clergy, chaplains, ensure this service together.

- Option for the poorest and the outcast.

Camillus also understood and discovered, at his time, who were the outcast, the drop-outs, the lonely and he made the decision to take the risk, even when faced with the danger of death, to care for the sick suffering from the plague and other contagious illnesses. Today, we experience the same phenomenon of exclusion and the outcast are referred to as: carriers of AIDS, drug-addicts, alcoholics, the mentally ill, orphans, victims of violence, of natural disasters... we need to be creative, inventive, in order to give concrete answers to this reality of marginalisation and exclusion, I'm thinking about shelters for orphan children victims of AIDS, centres for alcoholics, drug-addicts...

- Hospital assistance reform – affect on organisations where health policies are defined.

Camillus was aware that it was not sufficient to humanise hospital assistance but that it was necessary to call into question and to bring elements together to develop sound health policies for the poor. It is a very large challenge that we must assume and we must commit ourselves without fear, denounce injustices done, act in public policies, speak up in defense of the rights of the sick, the old, the outcast.

- Health promotion and education.

The world of health has changed and today it is one of the priorities to work on, the promotion of health education and illness prevention. It is a specific area where we are called upon to incarnate Camillian charism which can be applied in accompanying communities with



work on awareness of the right to health care and the duty to fight for life and health conditions, by developing programmes, large projects on illness prevention, inspired by legal values, equality and solidarity, nature preservation, ecology, rights to land, rights to work, at home, in education and to basic services.

- Social work.

There are numerous medical centres, clinics, hospitals, shelters, retirement homes which are inspired and oriented toward Camillian spirituality. Here too, working professionals are free to provide a service which is not only recognisable due to its high technical and scientific level but also in a very particular way by the style of the professionals' presence, human treatment, quality of service. It appears to me that these centres must be places of reference, examples to follow, models for other institutions.

Having said that, I cannot claim to cover the numerous fields of actions where we are called upon to work and to serve as a Camillian Family. It is necessary to always remain open to discover new realities, emergencies and needs which, in our countries, in our towns, come up day by day and to find the way to address them. John-Paul II (in *Nuovo Millennio Inneunte* n°49) invites us to build on charity and tells us: « It is time to imagine a new type of charity » which puts forward not only the efficiency of the support given but also the capacity to become close and supportive to the one who suffers, so that our action of charity is not felt as a humiliating almsgiving but as a brotherly sharing.

I would like to conclude this reflection by quoting the text of *Gaudium and Spes*, n°1:

“The joys and hope, sadness and anguish of men of our time, especially the poor and all those who suffer, are also the joy and the hope, the sadness and the anguish of the disciples of Christ. [...], led by the Holy Spirit [...] the Christian community thus recognises itself as realistically and intimately supportive of human kind and his story. »

And the text of the Testament letter of Saint Camillus.

“I send you all one thousand blessings, for as long as our Lord God grants me to do so: not only to the present brothers but also to the future brothers who, until the end of time, will be members of our saintly Order ».

Dear Camillian Lay Family, we have reached « the fine pearl, the pearl of charity ». May this gift that we have received from the Lord and which Saint Camillus, our founder, entrusted us with, bring us to live our charism with a new impetus, a new ardour, a new enthusiasm.

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