“SIGNUM FIDEI: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE”

Letter nº 5.

On the feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle 2017

1. BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

Saint John Baptist de La Salle asks us Lasallians to be able to “touch hearts” as he knew how to "touch" the hearts of so many children, and of so many teachers, of so many BROTHERS because he had his heart centred on God, centred on the first Associates the Brothers, centred on the mission of "providing a human and Christian education for the children of artisans and the poor".

To this he directed all his efforts, all his energies and with them he COMMITTED himself to the adventure of the "Christian Schools" endeavouring at all times to "Do good" with a coherent LIFE, allowing God to speak through his own life and that of the first Brothers, discovering in the events of his life what the will of God was for every moment and responding to whatever happened with his "I adore in all things ...".

In this way he engendered a whole new life that has endured and lasted through our 300 years of history, of LIFE. Surely today likewise our Fraternities would form part of his attention; we would be part of his focus.

Surrounding the celebration in our Lasallian world of the Feast of our Holy Founder, I share my reflection with all Fraternities with an eye to the future: in this case to the year 2019, in which we will be celebrating the Tercentenary of his death, which coincides with our 300 years of life, and on the occasion of Lasallian Vocations Year mandated by our 45th General Chapter. I will do this by means of questions that help us to reflect, discern and perhaps also to act.

My reflection seeks to be based on the slogan adopted for this celebration and I am making the invitation for it to be internalized personally and likewise at the level of each Signum Fidei fraternity.
“DELASALLE: ONE HEART, ONE COMMITMENT, ONE LIFE”

2. A HEART

Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4, 23

The consecrated life in the Church has always been and remains a grace story for the world.\(^1\)
It is a salvation story for those fortunate enough to live and drink from the sources of each of the "charismatic families" that the Lord Jesus He has raised up by means of his Spirit.

The beginning of our Lasallian Family was made possible thanks to Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He was a person open to the action of the Spirit of God, allowing “his heart to be touched” by the Lord and, consequently, he knew how to respond to whatever He was asking of him in everyday events. His heart beat to the rhythm of the heart of God and of the first teachers and Brothers, to the rhythm of the children and young people most in need of his time.

Pope Francis reminds us that "charism is a grace, a gift lavished by God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit.

It is a gift moreover that is given to someone not because he/she is better than others or because he/she has deserved it: it is a gift that God makes so that, with the same gratuity and the same love, it can put it to the service of the whole community, for the good of all"\(^2\).

The Lord set his eyes on our holy Founder, knew that his heart was noble and mouldable by love, knew that he lived passionately his priestly vocation and that he was willing to listen and accept Him, ultimately to "adore" His will. That is why He touched him in the depths of his being and guided him to "move the hearts" of those who were walking with him. He gave him the grace to be the heart of a new charism in the Church and for the world.

Today, let all of us who feel part of the Lasallian Family also be "touched by the Lord" and feel the renewed call to be, together and by association, "heart, memory and guarantee of the Lasallian charism". In our Lifestyle we recognize that "today we can say that the Signum Fidei Fraternity was born thanks to a new ecclesial vision and to the vitality of the Lasallian charism. In this sense, it has been and remains a paradigm for those who today want to live Lasallian Association "\(^3\).

This is our commitment inherited from the past, to incarnate it today and make possible many more years of life because "The Lasallian charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the

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\(^1\) Cf Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. 2015
\(^2\) Pope Francis. General Audience of 1 October 2014.
\(^3\) Style of Life. Our Origins.
Church with a view to human and Christian education. The Brothers share the same mission with laypeople who identify and live the Lasallian charism. Together they ensure the vitality of this charism, by creating and developing structures of animation, formation and research, where each one can deepen the understanding of his/her own vocation and the Lasallian mission.

Looking to the future we ask:

- Do we acknowledge Saint John Baptist de La Salle as inspirer of our Lasallian vocation? What importance do we give to our Founder in our personal life? How is he present in our fraternities?
- To what extent do we let the Lord "touch" our hearts? Do we truly allow Him to be the centre of our lives?
- How can our fraternity achieve greater vitality? How do we care for our "spiritual heart", our interiority?

3. A COMMITMENT

Lord, make known your ways to me;
show me your paths. Ps 25,4

Indeed, the whole life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle was oriented toward God. His heart "touched by the Lord" led him to love Him and to love, to serve Him and to serve. His life was a constant response to what He was inspiring in prayer and from hearing the needs of his environment without concern about "changing course" and redirecting his life of service while overcoming natural fears of change.

His response to Him led him to a life of commitment to others: "... God, who governs all things with wisdom and gentleness, and who is not accustomed to force the inclination of men, wanting to commit myself to taking care entirely of the schools, he did it in a totally imperceptible way and over a long time; so that one commitment led me to another, without having foreseen it in the beginning."

With his witness he gradually transmitted to others with whom he was sharing, the "spirit of faith and zeal" and creating the "Christian Schools" Community as expression of his commitment and mission.

- He accepted the responsibility of accompanying the beginnings of the free schools with the mediation of Adrian Nyel.
- He took on being involved in the formation of those first "masters" full of goodwill but having few educational resources, becoming one of the pioneers in the founding of Schools for Teacher Training.
- He transformed the education of his time with his group methodology,
participatory style, teaching in the vernacular and setting the student as the real centre.

- He attended to all educational needs not only with primary schools but also with special schools for young people with judicial sentences, technical schools and secondary schools for modern languages, literature and sciences.
- He shared all his intuitions and pedagogical experiences not only with the Brothers but with many other educators who drank from his source through the numerous scholastic and spiritual works born of the concrete experience discerned with the Brothers.

His commitment turned Christian education into a true Church mission and educators into "ministers of Jesus Christ" all aimed at proclaiming the Good News of Jesus and the salvation of children and young people.

He continues to challenge us today: "Have you ever thought of the commitment you have undertaken to take care of those whom God entrusts to you, so as to make a response to Him? Are you as careful of their salvation as of your own? To procure it, you must not only put all your efforts into it, but dedicate your whole life and your whole person"6.

His commitment led him to discover "the dignity and grandeur of the educational commitment and concern for the young, especially the poor"7 and to transmit it to us across the years, these 300 years of LIFE.

The spirit of our Founder lives on in us and impels us to make it a reality today, to live committed to responding to the needs of so many children, youth and adults who continue to need "salvation" and to make our shared charism a reality because "Today the Brothers continue the Lasallian mission sharing it with men and women who recognize the importance of the Lasallian charism"8.

We affirm that "All Signum Fidei endorses the basic characteristics of Lasallian Association:

a) A vocation to live in accordance with the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle and his values;
b) A life of faith that discovers God in daily life, in the light of Scripture and for people of other religions according to their own sacred texts;
c) A community experience, lived in different ways and in accordance with the identity of each one;
d) A mission that associates in the service of the poor and that implies a certain duration;

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6 MF 137,3,2
7 Cf R 11
8 R 13
e) A universal opening that opens to dimensions that go beyond the personal and the local situation "9."

Looking to our future we ask ourselves:

• How do we look after our vocation? Do we live according to the Lasallian charism?
• Do we discover the face of God in the concrete reality of our lives? With the eyes of faith?
• How is our fraternal life? What should we look after more carefully?
• What is our mission? How do we express it? Are the poor the first for us?
• What new challenges do we face in the immediate future in terms of serving the poor?
• In what way(s) do I feel part of the Lasallian Family?

4. A LIFE

Anyone who finds his life will lose it,
anyone who loses his life for my sake, will find it. Mt 10,39

A committed heart is only possible based on a full, meaningful, constantly searching life, capable of overcoming contradictions and inconsistencies because it knows it is in the hands of God.

Our Founder lived in, with and for God: a life centred on the important, the essential - "Here you ought to seek only to establish this reign of God within your soul"10, he writes, pointing to what needs to be the most fundamental and that gives meaning to what we do and are. His life challenges us today more than ever when, consciously or unconsciously, we live so far from God.

It is not easy today to live a coherent life in our world but neither was it in his. It was not easy for him to leave his house to go and live with the teachers. Neither was it to abandon his canonry and distribute all his goods among the poor - all! - nor when he experienced abandonment, deception, betrayal or misunderstanding. However, his life speaks to us about overcoming, about struggle, about hope, about possibilities and about allowing himself to be moulded like clay placed in the hands of the potter. None of this would have been possible without being convinced that "We are in this world only to love God"11 and when we love the Lord with all our heart and live committed to the mission that He puts into our hands, nothing is impossible!

9 Lifestyle 9
10 MSF 67,1 1
11 MSF 90, 1,1
From his spiritual experience, from his daily life we can understand when he writes that "This is how we must be born in the spiritual life, dispossessed and deprived of everything" and this torpedoes our thinking because we live in a world where what is valued is having real than being and we often forget the vision of our Founder when he says to us: "Because God in the next life is the purpose and the goal of all your actions, he ought to be the same also in this life".

We are convinced that "Signum Fidei is inspired by the itinerary of St. John Baptist de La Salle, integrating those elements that give unity to one’s life: following Jesus, belonging to a community and commitment to the mission: Faith, Community and Service." These are the three dimensions that we must take pay attention to in our life and doing so in an integral way. Certainly in every moment of our life we will have to adapt to possibilities because circumstances are different but none of this can be renounced by any Lasallian and less so by a Signum Fidei.

There comes to my mind a Bob Marley song that says: "Open your eyes, look within. Are you satisfied with the life you are living? I hope our answer is yes!"

Looking to our future we ask ourselves:

- What is our life like? Do we witness by our deeds to what our words are saying?
- Do we respect the three constitutive dimensions of our Lasallian vocation?
- Is it God who inspires our actions, our decisions?
- What elements of our life should we pay attention to more and/or better?
- How do we promote our vocation as Signum Fidei? What about the other Lasallian vocations?

5. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to prepare at the level of each Fraternity and to collaborate with other Lasallian men and women in whatever events are organized in your surroundings.

May we live with passion our Lasallian vocation, that is to say, with joy and dedication since this will undoubtedly be a means by which others feel challenged by it and likewise decide to follow it.
We are all called to renew ourselves continually. To the extent that this renewal is effective, it will enable us to continue cultivating and enriching with greater depth our common Lasallian vocation.

I have been able in this time since the last letter to verify the life and commitment of our Fraternities of Madagascar. In them I have found many signs of life, many desires to continue progressing and of course, many challenges for those who are aware of how much remains to be improved. To this I encourage you with all affection united to all the other Signum Fidei of the world, to all the Brothers and Lasallians.

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LETTER 5 SIGNUM F. SPANISH