



E-BULLETIN #175

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"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 334

Pallottine profile

While it is not customary to idealise or canonise one of our confreres, especially publically, I am tempted to do that while living here at St John the Baptist church, on the outskirts of Mexico City. The person in question is Fr. Kazimierz Czulak, a member of the *Annunciation of the Lord* Province [Poland], presently working here in the Mexican capital.



It is interesting to list the numerous pastoral works in which he has been engaged: Rector and formator at our seminary in Poland, spiritual director in the formation house in Cameroon, General Consulter, Provincial Rector and now, once again, a pastor in a parish. He has transitioned from one appointment to another, always as required of him by the Society and without hesitation. His current posting followed soon after his tenure as Province leader. And while none of us knows what awaits in the future in his case the response will no doubt not be any different.

I had the opportunity to work beside Kazimierz in Rome. At one stage he was the reference person for our General Secretariat for Formation, of which I was the General Secretary. We worked very well as a team and together published the SAC Ratio Institutionis.

Among his many good qualities I will highlight just four: his profound spirituality as a priest, his deep love for our Founder, his childlike humility and his easy sense of humour. If we wish to see the joy of the Gospel lived in a confrere, we find that in Fr. Czulak.

I am sure he will be deeply embarrassed by these words and will refute them. That is the mark of someone who is genuinely humble. However he cannot ask me not to be inspired by him.

Such living witnesses are very important today. We all draw inspiration from saintly people, often acknowledging it when they are out of sight. We hesitate to say something openly good about another, thinking we may be misunderstood. Yet I believe there is nothing as beautiful as acknowledging what others are for us and what great works they have done for the Society while they still walk with us on this earthly pilgrimage. So often that recognition comes too late!

Once I heard about a fellow member in Germany who was suffering from cancer. I decided to write a letter of gratitude to him and to assure him of my prayers for his health but he died on the same day that I posted the letter. I am sure it will still be preserved in the files of the Provincialate – but how nice it would have been if he had read it before he left us. I was too late.



The real purpose of these few lines is somewhat different. The profile of a Pallottine priest or brother, or even other members of our family, has to be defined not from theory but from the lived experience of their availability and generous self-giving to the Lord and his people anywhere in the world. Examples of that are abundant within our ranks. It is with such a spirit of gratitude that I requested our General Secretariat for Formation to initiate special prayers for our diseased confreres in all our houses of formation. The young members must honour that memory and ever remain grateful for the historical figures who built up our community.

The church here in Mexico, regardless of its numerous social challenges, remains very vibrant. People still come in numbers to the services, together with their children, parents and grandparents. It even happened today that, during Sunday Mass, a dog entered the church, following an elderly lady in a wheel chair. It remained seated until the service was over, except that it accompanied her when she was brought up for communion. Another visible sign of fidelity to the end, even among animals!



The people here have no difficulty in expressing their faith in front of the many colourful statues they have. I am sure their prayers are expressions of their existential situations, very much like the psalms. Probably they are not too much influenced by all the doctrinal and theoretical issues that people are bothered about elsewhere. This church is situated 20 kms away from an active volcano. Their life could be compared to this situation. No doubt they pray everyday to St Jude and others to protect them from this natural fury!

I get the feeling that faith in God loses its real sense if we are not challenged by the existential situations of life. When most of our daily needs are met free of cost, even though we have professed poverty, chastity and obedience, we have to find other distractions to give us a sense of, or even thrill in, life. This is the sort of existential emptiness that today's young people so often experience. They go to extraordinary lengths to give themselves a thrill, while just a biscuit or an apple is enough to bring much joy to a poor, hungry child. Such existential challenges exist in the lives of all of us, regardless of our economic circumstances.



It is in this sense that Pope Francis said once: we understand reality more from the periphery than from the centre. Many might think that the Pope perhaps wanted to say the reverse and made a



mistake. But that is not the case.

A visit to a mission like the one in Mexico gives a new freshness to one's soul. The three men here are fully occupied with their pastoral works. The people of God need them for the celebration of holy Mass, for confession, for the blessing of vehicles, for marriages etc. They are happy despite their workload.

All these facts show us how important it is to return to the simplicity of the Gospel! How great is its wisdom when it says that unless we become like little children we will not enter into the Kingdom! For a mind which takes pride in its rational or technological achievements, these words probably sound too simplistic! But true joy will evade them!

Congratulations to Fr. Kazimierz Czulak and numerous other confreres who dare to be humble, generous and joyful. It is Gospel-in-action! It reflects the true meaning of the saying of our Founder that the Gospel must be our only rule of life!

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item 335

Pallotti and the Year of Mercy

“God is always gracious toward your weakness. Your weakness is the object of God’s goodness and mercy”.
St Vincent Pallotti

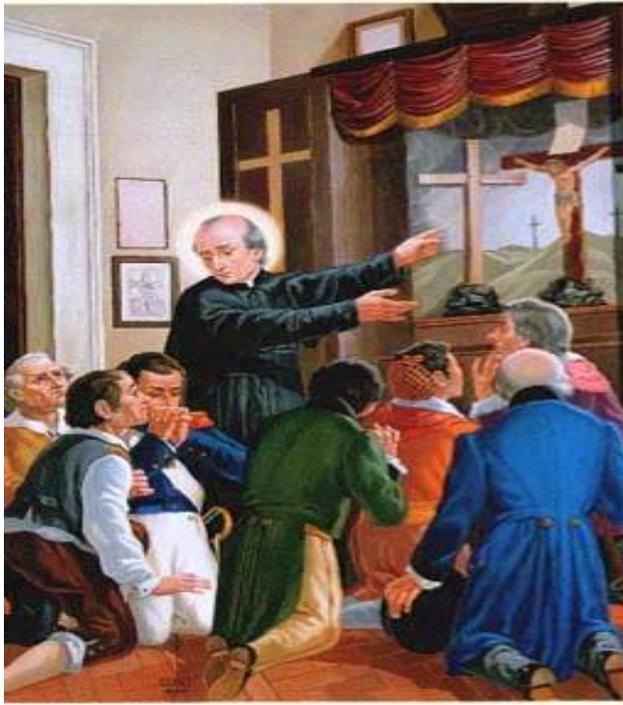
As Pope Francis has announced, the coming year has been declared an *extraordinary holy year* – a Jubilee of Mercy.

The word “mercy” reveals vertically the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity – the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Horizontally it is the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. Pope Francis said he is ‘convinced that the whole church can find in this jubilee, the joy of rediscovering and making fruitful the mercy of God, with which we are all called to give consolation to every man and every woman of our time.’

As we are Pallottines, this Holy Year of Mercy will be a great opportunity to look at our founder’s life and his teaching. Pallotti exhorts: “God mercifully feeds me, and makes the love of God live in me, stay in me and operate in me”.

He formulated his unwavering conviction of the infinite mercy of God in the following manner. “God in his essence is eternal, infinite, immense and incomprehensible mercy and everything he created followed his most beloved designs of infinite mercy.”

We can trace the recurrent appearances of the term “mercy” in his writings: “O infinite love! O infinite mercy, O abyss of ineffable miracle of mercy.”



Pallotti perceives the infinite mercy of God as the capacity that moves God towards humanity with cords of compassion. It is God's capacity to feel with human beings. It is a visible sign that he seeks us out constantly, reaching out unceasingly to humanity.

It is an act by which God lifts man, damaged by sin and nothingness, from his misery.

Pallotti often connects mercy with human sin. He considers sin and nothingness as part of the existential reality of the human person, originally created in the image and likeness of God. Man therefore stands as if within a paradox, he lives between the two opposing polarities of sin and virtue. Sin is the darkest ingratitude and rejection of God's love. However, to balance that, Pallotti stresses God's mercy. He prays: "My God, my Father... I am sure that you will look upon me and be moved to compassion on my deformed soul, poor image of yours." He often repeats the words of Jesus: "Those who are well have no need of a physician

but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mk 2:17). He therefore urges: "Trust, rather believe, that the more you see yourself as a poor sinner, the more God will come to you and pour his mercy and holiness on you."

God's mercy prompts him to bend over to his children benevolently. Pallotti writes: "This same mercy moves him to redeem, to sanctify and glorify for all eternity the people whom he has created. We must pray that we will always acknowledge and keep in mind the infinite love and mercy of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and thus be able to derive the greatest possible benefit from his love. This is the will of God for us, his most gracious and merciful plan."

I wish and pray that Pallotti's insights on God's mercy in the Year of Mercy may be sowed in the soil of our human hearts and that it may produce a harvest of thirty, sixty or hundred fold.

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