



E-BULLETIN #80

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

item 151

Brother Carlos Zontini sac **ongoing witness of Pallottine brotherhood**

In April 2013 I was on visitation to our International House of Preparatory Formation (Novitiate) in Cornélio Procópio, Brazil. This house, beautifully situated on a small hill, serves as the common Novitiate for candidates from the South American entities of our Society. It is a wonderful work of collaboration, and both formators and formees are very happy with this common endeavour in Pallottine formation.

I was aware of a brother living in this novitiate community. Enquiring about his whereabouts, I was told that the brother was working in the vegetable garden. Someone informed him that Fr General was waiting to meet with him. And then came the brother, neatly dressed, with his favourite hat and a plastic bag full of vegetables. He spoke with great clarity and humility and enquired with me about the Society. I noticed that all the confreres around me, including the Provincial Rector of St Paul Province, Fr José Elias Fadul, held him in great esteem and affection.



This Pallottine brother is named **Carlos Zontini**. He was born on 22nd July 1922 and made his first profession on 2nd February 1953. That means he is now 91 years old, and has lived 60 years as a Pallottine! Amazing! This humble Pallottine brother has served our Society in the most simple ways, but always with great dedication and love for the community. Who else can imitate St Joseph better than Br Carlos? The witness of his life is his contribution to the formation of the novices: Christian discipleship lived with great authenticity in the ordinary circumstances of life.

Once a confrere came to pick me up from the airport during the visitation to one of the entities of our Society. While travelling, I asked him if there were candidates for brotherhood in his entity. The quick reply was: "No, we do not have them. Anyway, what do we do with them"? My prompt answer to him would have been, "I would do with them just as I do with you"! However, I explained to him calmly the vocation and mission of the brothers in our Society and all that we are trying to do today to foster vocations to brotherhood. I have heard many such comments even from well-informed confreres regarding the role of brothers in our Society.

What we tend to forget is that the *Society of the Catholic Apostolate is a community of priests and brothers* (cfr. Law SAC, n.1). There was even a time, soon after World War II, when we had more brothers in our Society than priests! Our Society was built up in many countries with huge sacrifices from our brothers. The contributions of the brothers have been particularly significant in countries like Germany, Poland, Cameroon,

Australia, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Rwanda, Congo, Canada, and India. Many more countries could be added to that list.

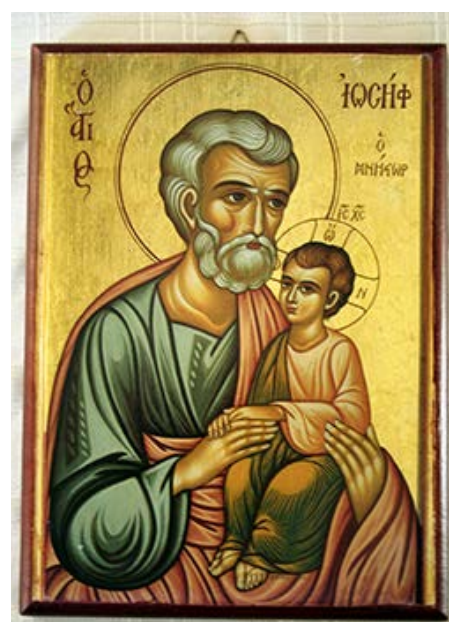
During one of my visits to Cameroon, I had the opportunity to pray for our deceased confreres buried in one of the cemeteries in that country. How many young confreres, including many brothers, had given their lives for the mission in Cameroon! Most of them died of deadly malaria. There was one tomb of a young brother 24 years old, in a place called Kribi, practically covered by bushes. How many more of these unknown soldiers exist in our Society! Certainly, our confrere priests have also excelled in their missionary zeal and self-sacrifice in all these countries.

At times the complaint is heard that, while priestly vocation and mission are clear, we do not have the same clarity regarding the vocation and mission of brothers. To some extent this argument is true. Such an ambiguity can be found in the church too. The vocation of brotherhood is at times defined more by comparison or reference to the clerical vocation. On the other hand, the vocation of a brother is something specific. One should never choose the vocation of brotherhood because one is incapable of assuming a priestly vocation. We are paying for such historical mistakes of the past. There are instances when candidates were advised by superiors and formators to become brothers because they could not pass the exams in Latin or some other philosophical or theological subjects. Though academic qualification should not be the most important criterion, it must be said here that brotherhood is not meant only for those who cannot pass the higher secondary school exams! It is something more valuable and much greater.

Another problem that we face is that the vocation to brotherhood is often identified with particular works, especially with simple, ordinary manual labour. A brother is often considered someone who can only be a gardener, carpenter, receptionist or cook. While there is nothing that is not dignifying about any of these works – a priest too can do such work – the problem lies in saying that brothers are restricted to such works, or that their vocation or identity is intrinsically connected to such activities. It has to also be remembered that we have brothers who are principals of schools, professors in universities, catechists and bursars. So the type of work is not what should define the identity of a brother.

A Pallottine brother is someone who *cooperates* in the Catholic Apostolate, as per the vision of our Founder, St Vincent Pallotti. He cooperates with his brother priests and all the members of the Union of Catholic Apostolate in serving the Church in the spirit of our charism. Catholic Apostolate implies universality of means. A Pallottine brother can, as a matter of fact, engage in a great variety of apostolic activities. In fact, one might ask if it is really necessary that so many of our priests spend so much of their time and energy in purely administrative and economic matters as bursars and administrators when there is so much to do in the administration of the sacraments and in preaching the gospel? Again, this should not lead us to identifying brotherhood with merely mundane activities. A Pallottine brother is a consecrated lay person and he shares the same dignity, privileges and responsibilities as the rest of the members in the Society. It is the Pallottine consecration that binds us together. SAC Law n. 60 states: *“The priests and the brothers in the Society share, with equality, the same apostolic vocation. Both participate directly in the apostolic aim of the Society, each working for this in the manner proper to his state”*.

Indeed, it is all the more gratifying to say that the brothers are those who follow the spirituality of St Joseph, the silent worker. The four gospels do not mention even one word from the foster father of Jesus, yet we know that he played a vital role in the history of salvation.



In the first decree of a liturgical nature of this pontificate, Pope Francis has decided that name of St Joseph should be added to the Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV, as they appear in the third typical edition of the Roman Missal, after the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Decree issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments states:

“Exercising his paternal care over Jesus, Saint Joseph of Nazareth, set over the Lord’s family, marvellously fulfilled the office he received by grace. Adhering firmly to the mystery of God’s design of salvation in its very beginnings, he stands as an exemplary model of the kindness and humility that the Christian faith raises to a great destiny, and demonstrates the ordinary and simple virtues necessary for men to be good and genuine followers of Christ. Through these virtues, this just man, caring most lovingly for the Mother of God and happily dedicating himself to the upbringing of Jesus Christ, was placed as guardian over God the Father’s most precious treasures. Therefore he has been the subject of assiduous devotion on the part of the people of God throughout the centuries, as the support of that mystical body, which is the Church”.

In a world that values so much pomp and splendour, we have this saint, the just man, who bears witness silently to the beauty of silent adoration and care of the Saviour of the world. He is a man of silent contemplation; he is the carpenter who represents all the workers in the world who are participating in the creative activity of God. Here is the greatness of evangelical simplicity, the holiness of littleness! It is to be remembered here that St Francis of Assisi was not an ordained priest. He always remained a *friar*, a *poverello*! He consented to being ordained to the Diaconate but not to the Priesthood. Thus the Pallottine brothers have also the vocation and mission, as **Br Kevin Clark sac** from the Australian Region suggested once, to live the contemplative dimension of the Pallottine charism. In his own words (cfr. Asia Oceania Bulletin, n. 68):

“St Vincent was a contemplative as well as an active apostle. Yet he used the words ‘sacro ritiro’ to describe the atmosphere of our houses. As I interpret this he wished our houses to exude an atmosphere of contemplative silence, and thus provide spiritual refreshment for those living in the hurley-burley of the active apostolate.

Over the years those SAC Brothers whose work, particularly in later life, made it easier to live a life of prayer than priests involved in pastoral activities, contributed to that atmosphere. As Pallotti wished, the contemplative life of some supported the active apostolate of others. I feel sure that there is an ongoing role in the vocation of SAC Brothers who become less active to provide invaluable prayer support to those engaged in more direct apostolates”.

The aim of this article is not just to extol the greatness of brotherhood or to show that brotherhood is better than priesthood. It is to show that there exists in the church and also in our Society, as well as in the Pallottine Family, a variety of vocations and charisms and that we become richer and greater by fostering each one of them. In fact, brotherhood is particularly significant in the spirit of our charism. Pallottine brothers, as consecrated lay persons, become even a sort of link between the clergy and the laity.

In this new and dynamic vision of Pallottine brotherhood, it is important to search for candidates who are willing to choose specifically the vocation to brotherhood. As the *Ratio Institutionis* of our Society suggests, initial formation should be common for all Pallottine candidates. Then brother candidates should also do a sufficient amount of philosophical and theological formation to enable them to be up to date with current trends in the church and the world. It should be followed by professional training



for each brother candidate, always taking into account the needs of the local church, the Society and the personal aptitudes of the particular candidate. Once again, it will not be doctorates or other professional qualifications that will define the greatness of a Pallottine brother. Br Carlos Zontini was neither a doctor nor a distinguished professional in any field; the plastic bag full of vegetables that he carried in his hand for the novices, even at the age of 91, spoke for itself.

Can anything be more effective than life witness – even as we speak so much about New Evangelisation?

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item 152

arrivederci Roma

As I am getting ready to leave for India, having finished the annual course on Pallottine spirituality in Rome, I take back a few fond memories of the Eternal City. I will mention just three of them.

It all happened like a dream. On 28th February 2013, at 20.00 (Italian time), Pope Benedict XVI officially resigned, saying that he now "will simply be a pilgrim" starting his last journey on earth. It seemed as though the church was to enter into an unprecedented crisis. Many Italian new papers predicted the end of the Papacy and many dark days for the entire church.

Then on 13 March 2013, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio took the name of Francis after accepting his election as the 266th head of the Roman Catholic church. Here was a Pope from the "end of the world", insisting on having "a poor church for the poor". Every word and gesture of Pope Francis thereafter became an act of New Evangelization. Thus the New Evangelization advocated by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict found its concrete expression in this man of God - Pope Francis.

Having witnessed these historical events, today I depart Rome with a strong faith in the constant presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the church. The Risen Lord continues to walk with his people. We will never be alone, even in the darkest moments. The Holy Spirit continues the saving mission of Jesus. So we are a people of hope, as Pope Francis reminds us continuously. This was the most remarkable faith experience that I had in Rome.



The second striking experience was that of following the footsteps of St Vincent Pallotti. I have spent much time praying in front of the mortal remains of St Vincent in our church of SS Salvatore in Onda. I find a certain serenity on the face of Pallotti. He is in a state of peaceful contemplation of God. His simple room, the meagre articles that he used, the instruments that he used to chastise himself and, above all, the kneeler in his room where he spent hours in prayer...all these things leave their lasting impressions in my heart and mind. How right Pope Francis is when he speaks of the vital importance of poverty and simplicity of life in Christian discipleship! Has anyone become a saint without living concretely these evangelical values? Indeed, if the Son of God emptied himself and became a servant of all, accepting the way of radical poverty until his death on the cross, there can be really no other way to tread for his disciples as well! In short, St Vincent seems to be presenting us today with two radical options: the call to a life of contemplation and to a Christian witness to evangelical poverty in solidarity with those who are living on the periphery of human existence.

The third striking experience was that of the universal nature of the Catholic church and of the Pallottine family itself. The streets of Rome are a place of encounter with people from around the world. So many times, during the liturgical celebrations at Piazza San Pietro, the persons next to me were either from Africa, South America, Europe or Asia Oceania. Yet we all prayed together to the one God as his children. During the annual course on Pallottine spirituality, I had companions from all the five continents. We were different in many ways and yet we shared so many things in common. In this small world, we are fellow pilgrims with the same destiny. There can be no strangers among us. Such an international and intercultural experience has widened my horizon. I have learnt to see the whole world as the place for my mission. We are all subjected to the same gravitational pull: the love of Christ that impels us to reach out to the most needy!

Arrivederci Roma! May your patrons, the apostles Peter and Paul intercede with God for a true revival of faith in Jesus. May the "Apostle of Rome", St Vincent Pallotti, be discovered more and more and his charism become an effective instrument for the "revival of faith and charity". Thanks to all who made my journey to the Eternal City possible. I shall repay you for your kindness with my work in the garden of the Lord.

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sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented...

on #79

It amazes me (although it should not) how inspiring and effective two pages can be....Thank you so much for getting the Good News out there in a form that can be easily read and embraced.

CF 04.08.13