

James Alberione: A successful vocation

It is not difficult to frame James Alberione's vocation along the lines of the great biblical vocations, in which God calls certain people, at specific moments in history, to carry out concrete plans within the eternal plan of salvation intended for all men and women of all times.

The protagonists are always two: God, the main one, who has the initiative, and the person who, with more or less difficulty, depending on the case, accepts the invitation and tries to respond by putting his energies at the service of God.

Born into a family with strong Christian roots and educated as a child in the faith and practice of Catholic life, it is not surprising that the fifth child of the family considered at some point the possibility of becoming a priest. The seminary at Bra was his first destiny, though not his definitive one, because shortly afterward he had to abandon it: a hard blow, which certainly gave rise to a strong sense of failure in the young James and an accumulation of doubts about his future.

After a few months of uncertainty, thanks to the help of his good parish priest, he moved to the seminary in Alba, where he would later receive the revelation that would mark his entire response to God's plan for him, called to be the father of a multitude of men and women who in the new century would share their apostolic charism in every corner of the world. From the strong experience of the invitation of Jesus: "Come to me all..." in the night of the passing of the century (cf. AD 15), a process of energies was unleashed that would produce very different fruits in time and form: all aimed at giving a concrete response to the invitation of Jesus.

In this process, it is possible to distinguish some key moments that have marked the trajectory of the Founder's response and that, at least to a certain extent, should mark the response of all those who "feel what he has heard" in the night of light, as he calls it. It is an itinerary, a typical style of vocational response, which will help to avoid deviations, polarizations or alterations in the scale of values, which can stop and even cancel the fruits of the Spirit in the Pauline Family.

To summarize, we can divide this itinerary into four stages. The first is the moment of the experience of the challenge: the reality of the world and of the Church requires mobilization to give concrete answers to the needs of humanity. James Alberione felt that he had to "do something for the Lord and the men of the new century with whom he would live" (AD 15). In this way, he gave life to a complete and internally coherent Family that can only be explained by listening attentively to the voice of the Spirit and by a diligent willingness to respond to his inspirations. Always to give a full and all-encompassing response - total Christ for all men, for all mankind, by all means - to the invitation of Jesus in today's reality (mission, apostolate).

Once he had discovered the objective, the first urgency that the young Alberione felt was the need to prepare well for the mission entrusted to him (cf. AD 20). (integral formation, study). He was able to direct everything in that direction (cf. AD 9). He was already at the head of a large group of enthusiastic people who, sharing his ideal, would help him to achieve it for the good of the Church and the world of his time.

However, at a certain point he realized that if he wanted to give unity, stability, continuity, and supernaturality to his initiative, he had to provide it with some elements that would

guarantee all this: religious life was the answer. People who gave themselves in body and soul, with a total spirit of gratuity, united in a community of consecrated persons, in an evangelical way of life in fraternity (total renunciation, poverty).

James Alberione was deeply convinced that such an important mission, so innovative and predictably difficult, needed a higher than usual source of energy. Only a deep spirit of prayer, a strong union with the source of grace could guarantee the fulfillment of his apostolic ideal and its continuity in time (life of prayer, piety).

This itinerary that the Founder lived in his vocational response was translated into his pedagogical task in the image of the “four wheels”, the four fundamental elements of the Pauline life that must be lived in balance. What really interested him was the integrity of all the dimensions that, lived with intensity and harmony, will lead to the full realization of the personality, that is, Pauline holiness, at the top of which is Jesus Christ the Master, the way, the truth and the life that expresses the “full maturity” of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:13) to whom we are all called.

Abandoned to that source of grace, James Alberione received the great inspiration: Jesus, the Master, who is the way, and the truth, and the life. A discovery which he always considered the culmination of his inspiration, which he then left as a precious inheritance to his sons and daughters (AD 93). He, together with Saint Paul, his best interpreter, the “form” on which every Pauline must be modeled, and together with Mary, who embodied him in her womb and in her heart, and gave him completely to the world, are the pillars that give meaning and depth to the whole building. It is Pauline spirituality that informs, gives life, energy, courage, meaning, and enthusiasm to all dimensions of life: to the relationship with God, to preparation, to total donation and to the specific mission to which everything is ordained.

Welcoming with an open and generous spirit the successive inspirations of the Spirit, Blessed James Alberione was able to respond fully to God’s plan for him, bringing to fullness his humble and hidden life, a masterpiece of grace, which Paul VI did not hesitate to describe as “a miracle of our century”. Undoubtedly, one of those three or four figures that God gives every century to humanity to ennoble it and renew it.

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