

**HOMILY GIVEN BY THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ENTRANCE MASS
IN THE INTERNATIONAL NOVITIATE OF 14 PAULINE POSTULANTS**

INTRODUCTION

This Eucharist, which we celebrate on the day when we commemorate the 104th anniversary of the foundation of the Society of Saint Paul and the beginning of the Pauline Family, becomes the favourable place to thank God for the countless graces poured out by Him on this history.

On this occasion, we also want to remember all those who have preceded us in this project, and also all those who continue today in the challenge of evangelization in the light of the charism that we have inherited from our Founder, Blessed James Alberione.

As a true gift of God for this special date, we welcome with joy the fourteen postulants who begin their “international” novitiate in the Society of Saint Paul. Let us pray that this stage of their formative journey in the Pauline consecrated life be a real time of grace and produce much fruit in their lives, so that, more and more, Christ will be formed in each of them.

HOMILY

Most dear brothers,

with this eucharistic celebration we start the novitiate, a fundamental stage in the journey of vocation to the consecrated life. Regarding this period of formation, I would like to underline at least three aspects which I believe are important to consider on this occasion.

The first concerns what our Constitutions say in article 104, that is, that *«the formation of the novices aims to let them know and appreciate what refers to the kingdom of God, cultivating due detachment from all the rest; know and practice the theological life, humility, assiduous prayer and union with God in availability to the Spirit»*.

This means that the novitiate is a strong time of encounter with God, an experience which becomes ever more profound in the measure that one cultivates due detachment from “all the rest” and thus tries to acquire true freedom. It seems to me that the Gospel of Matthew which we have heard (Mt 19,16-22) sheds light very well on this reality. It clarifies that in following Jesus it is not enough to profess the faith or observe the commandments, but one must do something more: necessary is “detachment from things”. This was rightly the difficulty of the young man of the Gospel, who was observing the law but who, however, is not successful in freeing himself from riches so as to follow more radically Jesus. It is interesting to perceive that the Gospel ends showing that *«the young man went away sad»*, making us see that attachment causes a certain disillusion.

It is important, however, to emphasize that one of the great obstacles in following Jesus is not so much in having much or little, but rather in the dimension of the attachment, because it can also happen to somebody to attach himself to a few things, like to attach himself to some person, to a position or simply to his own “ego”. Regarding this last aspect, our Founder affirmed: «*Novitiate means to leave our ego. As professed persons only Jesus must reign in our sentiments, words, works*».¹

The more there will be detachment from riches – but also from whatever other thing, from thoughts, remembrances or from persons who imprison us – the more it will be possible to come close to Jesus, to receive his Word and to enter into the logic of love, a walk that leads to true joy. In fact, when there is no love, the natural tendency leads us to fill ourselves with things. It is the same phenomenon that we see taking place in our present culture, characterized by many people who throw themselves into an unbridled search for individual happiness in consumerism and individualism. Consumerism can even offer occasional and passing pleasures, but these don't give true joy, that joy that instead is attained in communion which shares itself and participates exactly because it is born of encounter with the love of Christ.

Besides experiencing God, in the prospect of attaining liberty, «*the novices must be initiated in the theology of the religious life, in the study of the constitutions and of the Pauline spirituality, in the deepened knowledge of the thought and works of the Founder, in the history of the Congregation*»². These aspects concern the following of Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life, starting from the particular style of the Pauline life.

This supposes a deep knowledge of the apostle Paul, considering that he, as Blessed Alberione has taught us, «*is our father: from him we must take the spirit, the mentality, the love for Jesus Christ and for souls*»³. Therefore, the novitiate is the time that must help you to acquire the Pauline color, to be saint Paul living today, in the same way as our Founder has interpreted him. The favorable time is this to deepen his person, his faith (which has made him assume in himself the joys of following Christ but at the same time also the dimension of the cross), his pastoral method, the form with which he related and worked with his collaborators, etc. It is time to discover and study saint Paul as a true man of communication (with God, with himself, with others), which generates and tries to announce the Gospel, with audacity and creativity, using all the possible means.

The third and last point which I would like to underline is that the novitiate is also the time of a strong experience of communitarian life, considering that the Pauline apostolate is eminently communitarian⁴. And you will experience fraternity in a multicultural community, which, however, is not always easy. It requires openness, requires looking beyond one's own viewpoints and parameters, breaking away from every type of self-referencing. It also imposes that one overcomes differences to look for what is essential for

¹ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, n. 194.

² *Const. and Dir.*, art. 105.

³ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, n. 654.

⁴ Cfr. *Const. and Dir.*, art. 15.

us, that is, to live Jesus Master, transforming this faith into concrete gestures of love, of mercy and of donation, in the universal spirit of saint Paul.

Most dear young men, we wish for you a fecund novitiate journey. Let yourselves be guided by the Spirit, make a wonderful experience of God, deepen with an inner disposition the charism of our Congregation and of the Pauline Family, help one another until Christ is formed in you.

May Mary, Queen of the Apostles, the Mother of vocations, accompany you with her maternal assistance.

Rome, 20 August 2018

Subcrypt, Queen of Apostles Sanctuary

Father Valdir José De Castro
Superior General