



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE CAMILLIAN FAMILY ON THE 450TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR FOUNDER'S BIRTH**

*To Fr Angelo Brusco*

*Superior General of the Order of Clerics*

*Regular Servants of the Sick (Camillians)*<sup>1</sup>. The joy that accompanies the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation has a special resonance for the Camillian family, which is preparing to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the birth of St Camillus de Lellis on 25 May 1550 in Bucchianico. I gladly join in the thanksgiving of this order which he founded, as well as that of the Congregation of the Servants of the Sick of St Camillus, the Daughters of St Camillus, the Secular Institutes of Missionaries of the Sick Christ Our Hope, of the Kamillianische Schwestern and of the Lay Camillian Family, born later of the charism and spirituality of this great saint from the Abruzzi. This anniversary has particular importance for the world of health care and suffering, not only because of the generous commitment to the sick of St Camillus' sons, but especially because your founder was proclaimed patron of the sick and of hospitals in 1886 by Pope Leo XIII, of health-care personnel in 1930 by Pope Pius XI and of the Health Services of the Italian Military by Paul VI in 1974. The fact that this celebration coincides with the Jubilee Year also gives it a very special significance, because the human and spiritual journey of St Camillus *took place in the context of the great Jubilee events*, from which he drew a deep desire for conversion and generous intentions to serve Christ in his sick brethren. Born in the Holy Year 1550, he had a conversion experience in 1575 and, during the Jubilee of 1600, completed his guidelines for living the charism of merciful love for the sick. These coincidences are a special invitation for this order and the religious families associated with it to accept the graces of the Great Jubilee and of their founder's anniversary as an occasion for renewing their fidelity to the Lord and to the Camillian charism.<sup>2</sup> St Camillus de Lellis lived in a particularly complex time, in which a deep longing for holiness but also a tenacious resistance to Gospel-inspired living were widespread. With his rich personality and his witness of charity, he offered the society of his time valuable encouragement for spiritual renewal, thus contributing in an original way to the project of Church reform promoted by the Council of Trent. His life, under the influence of the Spirit, appears as a marvellous story of the love of God, the Creator and Redeemer, who reveals in a special way *his tender compassion as the physician of souls and bodies*. His work at the service of the suffering appears as an authentic *school*. Pope Benedict XIV recognized the *newness* of its service given *with love and skill*, that is, combining scientific and technical knowledge, actions and attitudes filled with that caring and sympathetic humanity which is rooted in the Gospel. In his *Disposizioni e modi che si devono seguire negli ospedali per servire i poveri infermi*, which he wrote in 1584, he offers insights and advice most of which would be adopted by the science of nursing in our day. He maintained that it was important to consider all the dimensions of the sick person with attention and respect, from

the physical to the emotional, from the social to the spiritual. In a well-known passage of his Rule he invites us to ask the Lord for the grace "of motherly affection for our neighbour", so that "body and soul can be served with true love. Indeed, with God's grace we want to serve the sick with the affection that a loving mother is wont to show her sick only child". However, it is especially by his example that St Camillus teaches us how to make the service of the sick an intense experience of God, leading us to seek the Lord constantly in prayer and the sacraments. His life seems to repeat the action of the woman described in St John's Gospel (cf. 12:3). He too anoints the feet of Jesus, present in the suffering, with the *precious ointment of merciful charity*, filling the whole Church and society with the fragrance of his apostolic zeal and spirituality. Today his witness remains a forceful call to love Christ present in our brethren who are burdened by illness.<sup>3</sup> Down the centuries this call, heard by so many generous souls, has amply demonstrated the fruitfulness of Camillus de Lellis' charism. Thus this order, fulfilling the promise of its holy founder's boundless love, has spread its branches to the five continents, extending itself in the last 50 years to 20 new, mostly developing, countries. Recently, in response to the wishes of Peter's Successor, it has made the cross of St Camillus shine in Armenia and Georgia, proclaiming the Gospel of charity to the sick among those peoples oppressed for so many years by regimes hostile to the Christian religion. And what can we say of those who embraced St Camillus' ideals and way of life and reached the heights of holiness? Here I would like to recall in particular the chosen members of the great Camillian family whom I myself had the joy of raising to the honour of the altars: Enrico Rebuschini, a religious of this order; Giuseppina Vannini, foundress of the Daughters of St Camillus, Maria Domenica Brun Barbantini, foundress of the Servants of the Sick of St Camillus. At the same time, however, I cannot forget the Camillian religious who down the centuries "have given their lives in service to victims of contagious diseases, confirming the truth that dedication to the point of heroism belongs to the prophetic nature of the consecrated life" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 83). How can we not see in this flourishing holiness a confirmation of the validity of the Camillian charism as a way to the perfection of charity?<sup>4</sup> The celebration of the 450th anniversary of St Camillus' birth is an important invitation to his children to meet the challenges of the contemporary world with fidelity and creativity, and to show the timeliness of his teaching and his charism with renewed commitment. At the beginning of the third Christian millennium, Camillians are called in a special way to bear faithful witness to Christ, the divine Samaritan, through a holy and fervent life sustained by constant prayer and the joyous experience of divine mercy. In this way they will help the Ecclesial Community to seek the face of the crucified Lord in everyone who suffers. It will therefore be necessary to cultivate a sound spirituality in order to overcome the ready dangers of a soulless pragmatism which forgets the fundamental truth that the salvation of the suffering and the dying is the work of God's grace. After the holy founder's example, may every Camillian be a true *contemplative in action*, continually joining consecration and mission.<sup>5</sup> Such an option will enable this order to instil in health-care structures a strong Gospel inspiration, which is particularly necessary today in the world of health and health care, threatened by the enormous ethical conflicts caused by a troubling separation of science and technology from authentic respect for the rights of the human person in the various phases of his development. In these difficult contexts, Camillian religious are called to strive with generous dedication so that the sick in health-care institutions are always seen as "lords and masters", according to St Camillus' apt expression. They will also be particularly concerned that the sick person becomes aware of his ability to play an active role in evangelization by offering up his own suffering in communion with the crucified and glorified Christ (cf. *Christifideles laici*, nn. 52-53; *Vita consecrata*, n. 83). May they also be concerned to foster a culture of respect for the rights and dignity of the human person through academic institutions, particularly the "*Camillianum*", and the pastoral centres and health-care structures which already exist in various countries.<sup>6</sup> The children of St Camillus know that they are called to give a special place "in their ministry to the poorest and most abandoned of the sick, such as the elderly, and those who are handicapped, marginalized or terminally ill, and to the victims of drug abuse and the new contagious

diseases" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 83). The option to be at the side of the poor, to further the health of the community and to show the Church's love for the least ones is particularly urgent in developing countries, where indigence aggravates the population's health conditions by encouraging the spread of new social diseases, particularly drug dependency and AIDS, expressions of the moral degradation of civilization and of social injustices, causing many human and ethical problems. I know of the institute's considerable effort in assisting the victims of these diseases and the related work of training and prevention. In expressing my satisfaction with the noteworthy results achieved, especially in recent years, I hope that the children of St Camillus will be more and more concerned about these critical situations and dedicate themselves generously, skillfully and systematically to them.<sup>7</sup> In your institute a hope-filled chapter has also been recently opened, because many lay men and women have chosen to live their Christian life in the light of the Camillian charism and spirituality. In expressing my encouragement for this promising collaboration, I hope that the formation process and participation in the order's life will bring "unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 55). I extend my special greetings to the *Lay Camillian Family*, the new fruit of the great tree born of the faith and love of the saint from Bucchianico, and I invite them to deepen their own fidelity to Christ by generously serving the sick, especially the very poor. I offer the entire order my heartfelt wishes for the 450th anniversary of the birth of St Camillus, in the hope that it will be celebrated with joy and apostolic commitment and, as I entrust its hopes and plans to the Immaculate Virgin, *Queen of the Servants of the Sick and Health of the Sick*, I hope that the Jubilee Year will be an occasion of fervour, holiness and grace for each Camillian, as it was for your founder. Dear Father, with these wishes I affectionately impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to the religious who are your confrères and to those who form the great Camillian family, as well as to all who benefit from their skilled and charitable service. *From the Vatican, 15 May 2000.* © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana