

From me the individual to us the community (Piarist community life)

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For some, those from the Northern Hemisphere, these months of July and August are months of school holidays; for others, those from the Southern Hemisphere, they are months of normal activities. This cordial and brotherly greeting goes to one and all alike: good health, fervent encouragement, fortitude, both in difficulty and in success; that the daily effort for a piarist life and a well accomplished mission does not lapse.

Now that we have reached the equator of this six year term, I return to a theme that is always of interest for our life and to the one that the Order has wanted to give priority treatment to in the course of this six year term. In the general lines of actions highlighted in the General chapter of 2003, we find these operative plans. “To make testimony in the piarist life, in the following of Christ, putting special attention to taking care of the people who make up the communities”. “ To grow in the experience of the Calasanz spirituality and in the fraternal life of the community; to favor among us experiences of faith, with attitudes of listening and silence, in order to grow in our awareness of being communities of faith”. All of this of course has to do with the life of the community, just as it is described in our piarist project. (Constitution, chapter III: Our communal life, and Chapter IV: Community of prayer). This topic in itself is not a problem. The problem arises, sometimes, in people who find themselves questioning how to insert themselves individually into the community and who can't find the reason or the way. This questioning is addressed to all simply due to the fact of wanting to be piarists. The will to be one is in the asking of forming part of the piarist community. This is how everyone confronts the road to pass from me to us for the piarist life.

I warn right from the beginning, that the Order speaks about this topic in a way that integrates different aspects. It doesn't remain in the sociological and psychological or in the purely anthropological. Besides this, it speaks about spirituality and of communities of faith. The chapter of the Constitution about community life actually follows the chapter on the community of prayer.

As the individual self follows the process of personalization, that everyone carries out, almost fine, in order to get to a free and responsible self, the communal self similarly needs to go through a process that goes from the first to the second. Here of course, there is no chronological itinerary; because personal maturing goes hand in hand with community maturing and vice versa. However, we can remain all our life concentrating on the individual self without opening up to our communal self. We adamantly want to refer all that happens, either near or far, to our own self. One's own self becomes the center of all. A thing or an occurrence is good or wonderful, because in them

my own self is recognized; on the other hand, they are bad and unworthy of credit, because in them I feel that I am not recognized or appreciated. Are things so simple when we judge people, facts, and procedures? Surely not. Because only the individual me is behaving. We have to take ourselves out of that and put ourselves in other people's shoes in order to acquire the just reflection of our judgments. We must consider our communal self. On the other hand everything matters or doesn't matter if it is about me or my usefulness or if it is not about me or me convenience.

In proposing this I don't intend to make a philosophical speech about individualism or communalism. Of course, we would have to talk about both at the same time. Actually, it is about, being people of the healthiest individualism, which is not obsessive individualism, neither egomaniacal egocentrism, nor a diffusive impersonal state. It's about being a community, an integrated us, that isn't communalism, nor collectivism, nor sheep-likeness. Anyway, I am not going to enter into an abstract consideration about personality and community. Community life is made up of everyday minute things.

There are some people who act freely, even though there are with others. In the past there was a tendency towards self fulfillment in the formation that tried to forge ones own personality even outside of the community. This tendency became a circumstance that could be or not. The important point was to be oneself, even without the community. The new formative style, that the new generations respond to better, has another focus point, in that it tries to balance personal things with the communal, putting the two realities in close alignment and complementing each other. So, we are talking about, ways of being, of sensitivity or talent to make work, along side the personal, the communal us. It is this talent which is an important requirement, if we put forward, as the piarist life project does, a communal life. We become sensitive to the communal if we are able to come out of the me in order to pass on to the us. In order to achieve this, a whole army is needed to put themselves in the place of others, it isn't to be indiscreet, or to interfere where one is not asked. It is necessary to realize that, being in a community, my me alone doesn't work, but also and next to my me, the you of others. It is like changing from a solo to a chorus.

In practice it is possible to distinguish from those who have acquired communal habits and those who have not. It even occurs in everyday prayer; the individualist, who participates in everyday prayer, in fact really carries out his personal acts of mercy besides others and not with others. The warning signs are apparent many times in the tones, rhythm, and attitude. He plays the part of a soloist or a voice outside of the chorus. On the other hand, the we leads the choral voice, the voice of all, that which unites in one single common voice the voice of many. The one that tries to listen to the one beside and not to sing out of tune. Clearly, it's a parable. But we sometimes sing out of tune because of excessive egomaniacism not only in everyday prayer, but also in our work, in life at home, in interpersonal relations, in community meetings, in celebrations...

What happens, if we enter into, as also occurs often, into communal conflicts? This is the worse thing that could happen. Often, good communal relationships break down. The communal atmosphere has become strange

because of postures that are intolerant and almost uncommunicative are adopted.

I also recognize- appreciating and with joy- that our communities are abundant with good brothers who really love each other and are models in communion and mutual love. However, we cannot hide behind this, because sometimes the differences of opinion in some of our communities even transcend outside our communal circle. How do we get over this in order to get to brotherly communion? How do we avoid that the conflicts, as well as being a bad example, end up impoverishing the quality of our piarist life and that the mission feels halted and impoverished?

Here there aren't any recipes to offer. What remains is the healthy orientation to invite to progressively pass from an individual me to a communal us. Are there pedagogic strategies or methods in order to achieve it? Yes there are. We find help in sociology and psychology. These show us how our human mechanisms are both personal and of the group. Knowing them and knowing ourselves we can more easily go towards healthy and positive communal experiences. But we cannot just remain there. I said that at the beginning that it is true that our piarist life project in the communities is made up of all the dimensions of life that we live (human relations, virtues and values, evangelical references, prayers and treatment). I am going to underline just one dimension. Taking it very much into account, we usually put it into a corner when conflicts appear. In my opinion, it's a terrible mistake. I refer to the brotherly strategy that religious life itself offers us, that is inspired by the evangelical. Here, I am in agreement with what Saint Paul wrote: "When we explain spiritually truths- adding: which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Co 2, 13-14). I state my spiritual consideration to spiritual men as you are. I take it from one of the antiphonies of the celebration of the Holy Trinity. "The father is love, the Son is grace, the Holy Spirit is communion, Oh holy trinity" If all in God is communion. How can one maintain a posture that is backed up- so to speak- in Him, when this creates a division between brothers? Our divisions are healed by spiritual balm or they are never healed.

The evangelist invites us to show ourselves as conciliators "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him" Matthew 5, 25. That means, immediately come to an agreement with those you consider being against you. The human justice is avenging, that is to say, you have to pay everything without any mercy, because in clemency there is always some vengeance. God's justice is not like that, it is revealed so that we can imitate it. God's justice invites to repent and suggests pardon. It would be better for us, what we all need to do, to opt for the second with an act of love, reconciled as soon as possible, because that's how God will pass above our sins.

From me to us, a spiritual itinerary that I invite you to follow, whether during a vacation period or normal work.