

Mundelein Seminary
1000 East Maple Avenue
MUNDELEIN IL

MARCH 19, 2017
Solemnity of St. Joseph
[Letter for APRIL]

Dear Stigmatine Lay Member,

Now that we are about half-way in Lent – and with the coming of the new springtime, with its joy-filled celebration of Easter, the Ascension and the Pentecost, the reflection by Fr. Bertoni for this time may be his appeal for totality! This is already included from Old Testament times, in the wording of the First Commandment: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your minds.*” [Dt 6:4; Mt 22:37; Lk 20:27 = CCC # 2083]. One of the great enemies of holiness is mediocrity. We were reminded of this for more than a generation by the Papal Motto and personal example of the late Saint Pope John Paul II: TOTUS TUUS.

Most of us Stigmatines, glad for the existence of the Lay Stigmatines in our lives, find much inspiration in the lived example of the Laity. By their fidelity and reverence they inspire us by the Faithful Witness. While perhaps St. Gaspar did not ever expect that there would ever be such a structure as “Stigmatine Laity” I think today he would say that we truly need such a group:

From his Dec. 2, 1808 entry Spiritual Diary:

[this whole month of December 1808 provides a rich source of spiritual inspiration]:

[80.] It is most unfortunate and a shame to see so much holiness in the Laity and so much imperfection and vices in a priest.

This is a stimulating reflection for the work of personal progress in holiness. It reflects at the same time a grace and a disgrace most evident in the times of Fr. Bertoni. Bishop Innocent Liruti, at the end of his first year as bishop of Verona, had to write a very strong Decree of correction... However, he went on to say that *The deplorable life of some who depart from the good example of others, cannot take away the honorable reputation that our Clergy justly possesses.*¹

When Fr. Bertoni was just 33 years old, he was called by his Bishop to take on an official apostolate among the Clergy², in 1810, he will present the same stimulating thought during the Introductory Meditation of the Spiritual Exercises on *The End of Man*:

... Many secular people fulfill this goal better than the Clergy. Their lives are full of good works while ours are full of hot air. Their lives are spiritual , while the lives of

¹ Bishop’s Letter, Septuagesima 1809, in: *Raccolta di Lettere Pastorali*. Verona 1817.

² With this apostolate, Fr. Bertoni indeed merits the title: *Apostolic Missionary to the Clergy*.

many clergy are unfortunately not so ... The Church, in these times, cries bitterly over this disorder which brings down scourges and gives scandal to the people more than ever... If you are already deacons or priests, then weep, weep! With penance wash away these stains. Begin with your own before which, perhaps, "we have sinned without knowing"... Let us put our lives in order. Let us learn from many secular people how to live properly. "The unlearned come to the fore and snatch the Kingdom of God for themselves" [cf. Lk 16:16]. And we ourselves with all our learning, where shall we go?...³

He gave a similar teaching to the Seminarians in Jan. 1811:

... There, in the good example of secular people: in the faithful observance of religion and the perfect charity of many secular people, Divine Providence supplies His chosen ones with a powerful stronghold against the scandal of worldly priests... Therefore, whoever clings to this help, will strive to make an effort as do the secular people in progressing towards perfection. Such a person has sure signs of a genuine ecclesiastical Vocation...⁴

It goes without saying that Fr. Bertoni preached these things to himself before preaching them to others.

... For Christ I am nailed to the cross... and it is the same cross of Jesus Christ. In Greek it is more clear: [*Christò synestàuromai*], i.e., together with Christ I am nailed to the cross. It is as if I am grafted and planted together with the tree of the Cross of Christ. I possess in communion with the same tree its sap and its life: namely Grace and Charity...⁵

So, in inviting both to self-denial and to the cross, Fr. Bertoni was sure that as far as the Lord is concerned, He will never fail. On the other hand, he also saw the cooperation of God with so great an amount of Grace that human cooperation - as spontaneous as it can be - did not seem to him much more than a simple acceptance of an invitation. Furthermore, the cross was consequently so much lightened, to be able to say It is not us, but Jesus who, out of love for us, carries it in the end.

Here is the concluding prayer, which referred to Gal 6,14 and Mt 16,24:

... Lord, we have experienced the tribulations of Your Church, in which we see the enhancement of both Your wonderful providence as her Spouse and the prudent and virtuous behavior of Your Bride. We highly respect Your most wise governance. We pray that You may make Your Spouse to imitate You in following and carrying out what You said: *He who wants to follow me let him carry his cross*. Grant that we may carry the cross, not to drag it. That we may carry it so willingly that we boast of it. That we may carry it with so much love that we end up in boasting in nothing else but in it. This cannot happen unless first the world should be crucified to me and

³ *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. I, pp. 119, 120.

⁴ Meditation 11 on *Primum Regum*, January 1, 1811 – MssB ## 5182-5939.

⁵ Panegyric I, Point 2: MssB ## 1795-1842.

myself to the world. This will never happen until the world becomes a cross to me, as I am to the world, because of the irreconcilable opposition of feelings...⁶

7th DECEMBER 1808:

[83.] When God calls people to some projects of spiritual life, one has to seize the opportunity of the moment. *And at once they left the nets and followed Him.*

We can trace the thought of Fr. Bertoni in a Meditation from DaPonte which is entitled: *The Calling and Vocation of the Apostles*. The text is from St. Matthew 4:20. Fr. Bertoni summarized the 4th point as follows: *The obedience of the Apostles to God's vocation was most perfect with regard to:*

1. *the intellect*
2. *the will*
3. *the execution.*

Da Ponte wrote⁷:

... Consider the excellent obedience with which the Apostles answered their calling. In fact... while Peter and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea and Zebedee's sons were mending their nets in the boats with their father, when Christ called them immediately and at once, they left their nets and their father and everything and followed Him.

... With this kind of obedience the apostles showed the three excellent properties of this virtue. The submission of intellect and judgment: making them obey Christ and subjecting them to His orders without making any excuse⁸. The submission of will⁹: subjecting it completely to that of Christ, dispossessing themselves of the love they had for their wives, children, fathers, relatives and their own properties. The perfect execution: which was - as Saint Chrysostom says - prompt, punctual and cheerful, without delay not even for a moment and without contradiction. Oh, the miracles of God's power! Oh, what changes can God do!

Fr. Bertoni often spoke of our Divine Vocation. His teacher here, Fr. DaPonte, has stated that it comes "through the grace of the Holy Spirit, not depending on our merits, and that with it all other necessary goods are given for our salvation...; then it was really the case to exclaim: I fear Jesus passing by! This is seen in the traditional sense, i.e. "Woe to those who let Him pass without following after Him! Woe to those who do not seize the opportunity of the moment!

⁶ 5th Meditation on *Primum Regum*. December 9, 1810. MssB ## 4963. [All students of St. Gaspar remember his beautiful insight in considering the Church as 'a Model of Holy Abandonment' [cf. *Epistolario*, Letter 38, October 26, 1813. p. 99.

⁷ Meditation 6.

⁸ St. Gaspar puts this among his Grades of Obedience in his *Original Constitutions* - CF # 144.

⁹ Noted in St. Gaspar's *Original Constitutions* - CF # 141. The qualities Fr. Bertoni notes here, based on St. Ignatius, are: *integra, prompta, fortis, humilis*.

20th DECEMBER 1808

[87.] In the spiritual enterprises it is of great advantage when two people find that they can share the same perception.

Fr. Gaspar found this advantage from the outset with Fr. Matthew Farinati (ordained in 1802) and afterwards also with Fr. Cajetan Allegri (ordained in 1805). Fr. Giacobbe¹⁰ wrote that ... *these priests, animated by the zeal and spirit of Fr. Bertoni, formed, as they put it, a threefold cord of admirable harmony among themselves...* This principle held not only collaborating in the youth apostolate (to which Fr. Giacobbe seems to refer) but also in common study for their mutual spiritual growth. In addition to many other indications, we have a witness of this in the various extracts of quotations which the three priests drew together from the Life of St. Cajetan of Thiene and above all from Rodriguez' *Exercise of Perfection*.

Very revealing are the words which Fr. Farinati wrote on the inside page of the hard cover of that book: *There are excellent ideals contained in this booklet!* These words are followed by a quotation from the prophet Ezekiel: *I sought among them for a man that might set up a hedge and stand in the gap before me in favor of the land so that I should not destroy it: but I found none. (Ezk 22:30).* It seems that Fr. Farinati recognized in that prophetic text a common vocation of the *three* friends to be just that man. This was what stimulated them – as priests belonging to no Order - applying to themselves the whole exercise of perfection which was reserved for the Religious. It was also in the strength of the principle which Fr. Bertoni will support strongly, i.e., that what in the Religious is a *tension* towards Perfection, in the Priest should be *acquired* perfection.¹¹

†

[88.] While we feel called to some high degree of Perfection, we should pay attention not to underestimate those who do not want to follow us. They might perhaps be of equal and greater merit in front of God. We all have the same purpose. Not all use the same means.

This maxim is a development on that of 12 Oct: He who is drawn by the Spirit to a way of greater perfection... should not resent others who are of lower virtue and use lesser means as long as these are good. We were saying, there, that such is the spirit that filtered through the meditation of *The Kingdom of Christ*, according to St. Ignatius and Da Ponte. Different people are freely called to militate under the banner of Christ. It is clear that each person must imitate Him in the condition to which each has been called, for himself following those different invitations.

Fr. Bertoni intended to keep the commandment which regards our neighbor: *Do not judge*... and to preserve one's own meekness and humility of heart. We can see an

¹⁰ *Summarium Additionale*, Document 26, p. 342.

¹¹ cf. his Retreat to the Clergy, in 1810, in: *Collectanea Stigmatina*, Vol. 3, p. 129, 'The Purpose [End] of the Priest'.

encouragement in reminding ourselves that merit does not depend on the greater or lesser excellence of a vocation. This is God's gift. It depends rather on the greater or lesser correspondence to such a gift. It could therefore happen that somebody with a lesser gift of God would correspond to it with greater perfection than others with a greater gift.

As for the variety of ways and means to reach the same Ultimate End, this is but a logical consequence of the variety of the same vocations.

†

[89.] - *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you (John 15:16). We have to pay much attention not to set ourselves against the Lord with our sins and lack of mortification.*

The text from St. John's Gospel could have been applied also to the preceding entry. But Fr. Bertoni wrote it with a dash separating it from the previous note. He admonishes the *each one* - i.e. no one other than himself - not to put obstacles against the action of God with sins and the lack of mortification. He saw also here the connection between two undertakings: that of his personal sanctification (cf. 12 Oct) and that of the promotion of the greater glory of God through a life dedicated to the Apostolate (cf. 15 Sept). We could have expected a hint at the Ignatian principle which is at the base of everything, as we have said in the note of 12 Oct: very few are those who... And also the encouraging sentences of 2 and 3 Dec.: "Take care that we do not fail the Lord, because He will surely not fail us. The Lord, just *shows* us the cross...".

+++

St. Paul tells us that we are all Temples of the Most High, of the Holy Spirit – still under construction – being built up by one another. As the Pierced Side of Christ provided an opening into the sanctuary of the Trinity –and invites us all into the celebration of the Eternal Celebration of thanksgiving by the Merciful High Priest forever in the Celestial sanctuary - let us all look into our own personal efforts to live this Lent, and to witness to the living of the Charism, unique, otherworldliness of St. Gaspar Bertoni. By God's infinite mercy, this is a gift for us all. Let us seek to inspire one another on how we strive to follow the lord, through the daily picking up our Cross through life.

Respectfully submitted:

Fr. Joseph Henchey, CSS
Acting Spiritual Director

[p.s.: In my letter for last month, I mistakenly quoted the date of the death of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, op – he died on February 15, 1964].

Appendix I:

St. Gaspar Bertoni and the “Depths” of the Human Soul – by Rev. Joseph Henchey, CSS

Appendix II:

Some Titles of Jesus Christ: The Lamb – by Rev. Joseph Henchey, CSS