



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of June 3, 2016,
Feast of Sacred Heart of JESUS

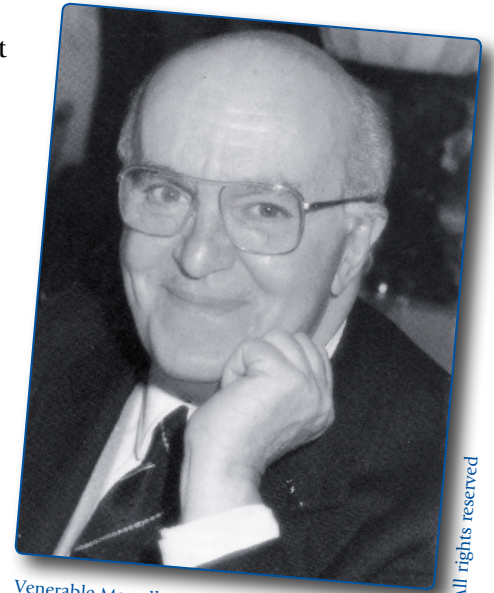
Dear Friends,

“WHEREVER there is joy, enthusiasm and a desire to bring Christ to others,” wrote Pope Francis, “genuine vocations arise. Among these vocations, we should not overlook lay vocations to mission. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the lay faithful in the Church, as well as a recognition that they are called to take an increasingly important role in the spread of the Gospel” (Message for World Mission Sunday 2014). In the twentieth century, the life of Marcello Candia illustrates these words. After having lived a life of ease in a wealthy Milanese family, he became active with the missions as a lay person and built, with funds from the sale of his property, a hospital for the poor in Brazil.

Marcello Candia was born in 1916 in Portici, in Campania, Italy, the third of five children. Camillo, his father, was an industrialist—he had founded a succession of carbonic acid factories, first in Milan, then in Naples, Pisa and Aquilia. He did not practice his religion, but had retained from his Catholic upbringing a deep sense of honesty, respect for others, and professional and social justice. He was a company head completely devoted to his family and his business, a man of duty and responsibility. He was opposed to fascism from its beginning, and enrolled his children in private schools so that they would not be tainted by the prevailing totalitarian ideology.

Passion for the poor

Marcello learned the first rudiments of the faith from his mother, Luigia Bice Mussato. A cultivated woman endowed with great human qualities, she devoted herself completely to her family, as well as to the poor through charitable organizations, especially the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Marcello gladly accompanied his mother; with her, he visited the poor, but not without first stopping at a church to greet JESUS in the Eucharist. A true passion for the disadvantaged and the suffering developed in his heart, which would remain the fundamental orientation of his life. When he was twelve, he began helping the Capuchin Fathers on via Piave in Rome, giving out soup to the poor. But on February 7, 1933, Mrs. Candia died, at the age of 42. Marcello was seventeen years old; his grief was so profound that he fell ill. From that day on, he would suffer from frequent headaches and insomnia.



Venerable Marcello Candia

All rights reserved

Marcello’s profound piety was noted by those close to him, who accused him of leading a “double life”. Indeed, on the one hand he seemed to be a rich young man, elegant, sought after, a brilliant student and good friend, but on the other, all saw that he was immersed in a constant dialogue with God. In 1939, Marcello earned his PhD in chemistry. At the beginning of the Second World War, he was employed for a while as a chemist in an explosives factory, then was demobilized. Afterwards he continued his studies, while working for his father. In 1943, he received doctorates in biology and pharmacy. In this time of war, he participated in the resistance against the occupying Germans, on several occasions risking his freedom and even his life, and, alongside the Capuchin Fathers, took part in efforts to assist Jews threatened with deportation. At the end of the war, he helped deportees and prisoners who were returning to the country. With three friends, he organized a medical and humanitarian welcome center at the train station, and had installed, largely at his own expense, temporary prefabricated shelters in the park of the Palazzo Sormani, which had been made available to him. One day, a domineering chaplain announced: “The Mass is about to start. Those who do not attend will not eat.” Marcello grabbed the microphone and corrected him: “No, everyone will eat!”

So that he might devote all his time to easing the sufferings of others, Marcello decided not to marry. With Elda Scarsella Marzocchi, he founded the House of

Mother and Child, to help young women in crisis pregnancies. At first, he hid this initiative from his father, knowing that he would not be in favor of it. But later on, his father became aware of all the good his son was doing, and approved of it. Mr. Candia was demanding, but he respected his son's choices. He thought his piety and his attachment to daily Mass were exaggerated, but he did not interfere. However, Marcello's spiritual director did not approve of his collaboration with Elda Marzocchi, because a home for teenage mothers was not a suitable environment for a young man who had chosen celibacy for the Kingdom of God. So, in obedience, Marcello ended his involvement, and threw himself into aiding the missions, at first by sending medicines to poor countries and starting a magazine titled *The Mission*. With Archbishop J.B. Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, who at that time was archbishop of Milan, and Professor Lazzati of the University of Milan, he founded a school for students from overseas. Bishops in mission countries began to send priests to Italy for further priestly formation; these students were destined to become professors in seminaries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Often, the first contact was made directly between the bishop of the country and Marcello to secure accommodations, obtain a scholarship, etc. The young man also participated in the founding of multiple charitable organizations and associations to support the missions.

“Come!” and “Go forth!”

In 1950, at the age of thirty-four, Marcello inherited his father's business. Little by little, the desire grew in him to leave everything to become a full-time lay missionary. But to fulfill this dream, he would have to wait until 1961. His presence in the factories was valuable, even necessary, given the difficult circumstances of workers in the post-war period. Moreover, his spiritual director was opposed to the plan.

“[M]ission is ... something essential for those who listen to the voice of the Spirit who whispers ‘Come’ and ‘Go forth’”, wrote Pope Francis. “Those who follow Christ cannot fail to be missionaries, for they know that JESUS walks with them, speaks to them, breathes with them. ... Who are the first to whom the Gospel message must be proclaimed? The answer, found so often throughout the Gospel, is clear: it is the poor, the little ones and the sick, those who are often looked down upon or forgotten, those who cannot repay us (cf. Lk. 14:13-14). Evangelization directed preferentially to the least among us is a sign of the Kingdom that JESUS came to bring: There is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them” (Message for World Mission Day 2015).

In 1955, the accidental explosion of a tank of 60,000 liters of carbonic acid killed two people and destroyed a factory that had just been entirely renovated. Marcello saw his plan to leave everything blocked by this accident.

He gave money out of his own pocket to help the families of the victims, and assumed responsibility for reconstruction, as well as deliveries, so that no worker or client might be wronged by the disaster. Nevertheless, his primary interest was in the poor in Brazil. He had met Father Alberto Beretta, a Capuchin, and brother of Saint Gianna Beretta Molla, who was getting ready to leave for Brazil. In 1957, Marcello made his first visit to Macapà, at the mouth of the Amazon River. At that time, this small town numbered 18,000 inhabitants, some of whom lived in poverty, with no material or spiritual assistance. With the bishop of the diocese, Bishop Aristide Pirovano, from the Foreign Missions of Milan, he studied the local problems. He had a beautiful church constructed for the parish of Saint Benedict. He then felt inspired to build a huge hospital, disproportionate in relation to the size of the town at that time. The future would prove him right, for the population is now over 400,000 (2010). The facility, equipped with 150 beds, would also include a leper hospital.

Sell all you possess!

Marcello began construction in 1961, with the money he got from selling the factories he had inherited from his father. He wanted the hospital to be dedicated to saints Camilla and Louis, to honor the memory of his parents. At this time, Bishop Pirovano was recalled to Milan to assume leadership of his Missionary Institute. In 1965, on the day after Blessed Paul VI received them in a private audience, the prelate himself gave him the missionary cross. In June of that year, Marcello Candia moved to Macapà. After having been for many years a factory manager in a period of great economic prosperity, he was approaching his fiftieth birthday. The change in his life was radical—from a life of ease, he went to a life of poverty among the poor. Truly following the faith, he abandoned everything for God and answered his critics saying one “must give the poor not only economic assistance. We must share their life as much as possible. It would be too easy for me to stay here in this peaceful and comfortable life, then to say, ‘I will send what I don’t need over there.’ I am called to live with them.”

However, Marcello encountered misunderstanding and objections among the missionaries themselves, which greatly affected him. “Why build such a big hospital in this place,” some asked, “when with the same money you could have built a dozen local health care clinics? Is this boss from Milan really going to persevere and stay,” they whispered, “or after having begun a colossal construction project, is he going to go, leaving the work unfinished?” In Bishop Pirovano's absence, Marcello found himself spiritually isolated. The government, won over by the critics, refused him the necessary permits. Several years later, when his perseverance had obtained a bit of goodwill, a civil servant said of him: “I’ve studied this Candia for years and I have yet to understand him. He must be a little crazy, even though

he seems sane." The folly of the Cross will always be a mystery for those who do not have the faith. But he did not allow himself to become discouraged: "The good Lord wants me to do a little penance!" he confided. Learning to be poor cost him a great effort—he had to accept the lack of comfort, the food the poor ate, close quarters with unrefined people in wretched living conditions. One of his Italian friends reported, "Candia was dynamic, sure of himself, used to being in charge and speaking as the boss... but each time he came back from the Amazon, I found him changed. He realized that he needed the help of others to carry out his great plans, something he was not accustomed to." In fact, by nature Marcello was stubborn, impatient, perfectionistic, excessively demanding, and convinced he was always right. But his missionary spirit and his dedication helped him to correct these faults, bit by bit.

No longer necessary

In 1967, he suffered a heart attack. His health began to decline. Nevertheless, after he had recovered, he courageously continued his work. In 1969, the hospital in Macapà was opened. At the outset it included a pediatric ward, then, several months later, a research center for tropical diseases with a special focus on leprosy, a community center, and a walk-in center. Marcello had conceived it all, financed it nearly all by himself, and seen it to completion through thick and thin. The initial inspiration, however, had come from Cardinal Montini: "If you found a hospital in Brazil, make it truly Brazilian," the prelate had advised him. "Avoid all forms of paternalism, and do not impose your ideas on others, even with the best of intentions. Make the hospital not only for the Brazilians but also with the Brazilians, and make it your final aim that you will no longer be needed. When the moment comes that you feel useless, because it can all function without you, you will have achieved a real work of human solidarity." This advice cost Marcello a considerable amount of patience, because in this country, most of the permanent staff he employed at the hospital were inclined to apathy and irresponsibility. The cardinal had also recommended that he make it a teaching hospital; in mission lands, caring for the sick is important, but it is even more important to teach others how to care for them. The cardinal had added: "This must be an establishment that never turns anyone away." Marcello applied this principle very exactly—he made it a rule that the patient, at the time of admission, never be asked whether he was able to pay for his care.

In the world you will have tribulation, JESUS warned us (Jn. 16:33). In 1973, the generous friend of the poor was summoned by the federal government to respond to the accusation that he had illegally imported medicines into Brazil. He also had to watch continuously that the hospital remain in the service of the most needy. Luckily, his experience as the head of a business greatly helped him manage resources wisely. Being generous was not

enough—he also needed to act with competence and prudence.

"The lay faithful should act according to the dictates of prudence, the virtue that makes it possible to discern the true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means for achieving it. ... Prudence makes it possible to make decisions that are consistent, and to make them with realism and a sense of responsibility for the consequences of one's action. The rather widespread opinion that equates prudence with shrewdness, with utilitarian calculations, with diffidence or with timidity or indecision, is far from the correct understanding of this virtue. It is a characteristic of practical reason and offers assistance in deciding with wisdom and courage the course of action that should be followed, becoming the measure of the other virtues. ... In the final analysis, it is a virtue that requires the mature exercise of thought and responsibility in an objective understanding of a specific situation and in making decisions according to a correct will" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 547-548).

A different logic

As an industrialist, Marcello was accustomed to maintaining, and having others maintain, rigorous accounts. But in the works of God, one must sometimes go beyond this: "Little by little," he would later say, "I realized that when you deal with God, you must apply a different logic. We did the bookkeeping quickly because the patients who could pay for their care were around one in ten, and 40% of patients had insurance. The others could bring nothing but themselves to be cared for. This was the way I learned that, in order to operate smoothly, a hospital for the poor must always be in the red. You would have a hard time understanding what it was for me to enter into this logic... And when my funds were exhausted, contributions would begin to arrive from my friends, from workers in the factories that had been mine, etc." He also witnessed another marvel: the transformation of certain people in Macapà, who showed themselves capable of helping and in so doing, rediscovered their dignity and faith.

Marcello Candia gives us a beautiful example of judicious use of wealth. In his *Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee of Mercy*, Pope Francis writes, "Do not fall into the terrible trap of thinking that life depends on money and that, in comparison with money, anything else is devoid of value or dignity. This is nothing but an illusion! We cannot take money with us into the life beyond. Money does not bring us happiness. Violence inflicted for the sake of amassing riches soaked in blood makes one neither powerful nor immortal. Everyone, sooner or later, will be subject to God's judgment, from which no one can escape" (April 11, 2015, no. 19). Indeed, "Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic*

Church, no. 1022). What is more, JESUS assured us that on the last day, He would come to judge all men: *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations ... Then the King will say to those at His right hand, 'Come O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and You gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me' ... Then He will say to those at His left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' ... And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life* (Mt. 25:31-46).

A humble instrument

In spite of the many oppositions he encountered, Marcello was praised and applauded even in his lifetime. In 1975, a widely read Brazilian magazine dedicated a long article to him titled "The Best Man in Brazil". In the face of such compliments, he responded: "As to me, I am nothing. I am but a humble instrument of Providence... It is not I who have given something, but the poor, who give to me... He who has received much in life, must give much." That same year, in consideration of what Cardinal Montini had told him, Marcello decided to give over his work to the Camillian Sisters. He would affirm, "It is not Christian to seek oneself in a charitable work. It is in God that it must come about... I thank the Lord for being able to begin the work with

the means He had given me. But afterwards, one must make oneself unneeded. Those who come after me also must be able to bring a contribution to the initiative... So I have pulled back, and now am content with seeking funds so they can continue the work."

The lepers' cause had always greatly touched his heart. In 1967, he organized a leper hospital in Marituba, lost in a virgin forest 400 kilometers south of Macapà. Until then, these ill men and women were confined to an area forbidden to non-lepers. The colony contained a thousand lepers, surviving in conditions beyond miserable, where solidarity and hygiene were unknown. When he visited the place for the first time, with special permission, Marcello understood that he must first enkindle hope in the hearts of these castoffs of society, establishing among them a community of religious, with a priest. So Marcello built an urban center with separate houses, running water, a sewer drainage system, a dispensary, a community center run by the patients themselves, etc. Other leper hospitals and prayer communities (including two Carmels, where he loved to go for his periods of daily prayer...) were founded in other villages. In 1980, Pope John Paul II would go to visit these charitable works. Deeply impressed, he would establish the Doctor Marcello Candia Foundation. This was a great joy for all of Marcello's collaborators, but Marcello himself regretted that his name had been given to the foundation.

In 1983, he returned, gravely ill, to Milan. He had had four heart attacks since 1967. A skin cancer metastasized to the liver, and he died on August 31st. On July 9, 2014, Pope Francis recognized his heroic virtue, and in doing so conferred the title "Venerable" on him. His beatification process is currently underway.

JESUS of Nazareth, according to the testimony of St. Peter, *went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him* (Acts 10:38). May Venerable Marcello Candia obtain for us the grace to follow Christ in devoting ourselves to the care of those who suffer, while keeping in mind, as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta declared, that "the worst poverty is not to know Christ" (Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2006).

Dom Antoine Marie o.s.b.

- To receive the Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey newsletter (free of charge), contact the abbey.
- We gratefully accept the addresses of other potential readers.
- Donations : we are able to accept cheques in US\$, Can.\$, GB£, Euro, Swiss Francs. Credit card donations can be made through our website www.clairval.com

Abbaye Saint-Joseph de Clairval (English ed) ISSN : 1956-3906 - Dépôt légal : date de parution - Directeur de publication : Dom Antoine Beauchef - Imprimerie : Traditions Monastiques - 21150 Flavigny-sur-Ozerain.

ABBAYE SAINT-JOSEPH DE CLAIRVAL – 21150 FLAVIGNY-SUR-OZERAIN – FRANCE

Fax : + 33 3 80 96 25 29 – email : abbey@clairval.com – website : <http://www.clairval.com/>