

LETTERS OF ST. JEROME

1

Venice, at the Trinity, July 5, 1535.

To Agostino Barili, Servant of the Poor.

1 Father, beloved in Christ. With the last ones I sent you the answers to your letters from Como and from Giovannantonio. 2 As far as freeing myself from my commitments, it seems that it will take a long time and only God knows the manner and where. 3 In regard to the help we have requested several times, I do not see other remedy but two: one, that we pray to the eternal Father to send workers because here there is the same if not greater need, believe me; the other, that we persevere until the end, that is until the Lord will show a sign and we will understand that it is really his. 4 As to my absence, know that I never abandon you through the little prayers I know; and, though I am not in the battlefield with you, I hear the clash and raise my arms in prayer as much as I can. 5 But the truth is that I am nothing. And you must also believe that my absence is necessary: the reasons are infinite, but if the Company remains with Christ, the goal will be reached, otherwise everything will be lost. The thing is debatable, but this is the conclusion. Therefore, pray to the pilgrim Christ by saying: Remain with us, Lord, because it is nearly evening. 6 If you do not understand the reason why my absence is necessary, write to me: I will give you a satisfactory reply. 7 Tell all the "places" to write to me often and in detail, and to send the letter first to you. Once you have read them, send them to me; however, in the meantime, do not fail to make provisions according to what God is inspiring you. 8 Command sir Giovanpiero to continue in his two special tasks which seem to suit him well; and to report to me often and in detail, always in the way we stated, and always by sending to you the letters which are addressed to me. The two tasks

mentioned above are: that he has not to forget to use the best ways God inspires him in order to strengthen the people of the Valley in their religious devotions; the other, that he has to assume the responsibility to find work for the Company.

9 Recommend Giovannantonio from Milan to firmly maintain the Company in peace, in observance of the good traditions, and devotion; and to send to work in the hospitals those who do not work with peace, devotion and modesty.

10 Tell the seven to remember to take care of strengthening themselves in the love of God and neighbour, to go to confession and communion at the proper time.

11 Recommend the Twelve to confirm themselves and their brothers in the works* of Christ, to be careful not to turn back, nor allow others to turn back.

12 The guardian is to make sure that the good traditions be preserved, to spare reproach to no one, and to see that no one be idle.

13 The lector is to urge that reading may be done more often than has been done so far.

14 The prayer leader is to be sure that prayers are said at the proper time; to continue to read during meals, explaining what he understands and asking for the meaning of anything he does not; above all, he is to make sure that everything is done early in the morning and he is to keep the Company in the devotion: if devotion is lacking, everything is lacking.

15 The steward is not to let the children become gluttonous nor let them be deprived; he is to calculate well the amount of bread needed, so as not to let any lack of food occur in the house, and he is to bring some order in the begging, so that the Company may not lose the way of staying in solitude.

16 Tell sir priest Lazzarin to take good care of those sheep, if he loves Christ. When it is time for confession, not to wait that the children will call him, but he himself must warmly invite

* The word "works" correspond to the Italian word "opere" and it would be translated best as deeds (of God or men), institutions, apostolate or apostolic activity depending on the context.

them to go to confession and communion according to the usual good devotion. And not to let the fire of the spirit cool down in order not to let everything go to ruin. And to go often to eat with them and to often ask who wants to go to confession. And after confession, privately or publicly to give them that advice the love of Christ will inspire him. And the same thing he is to do for the people of the Valley; he is to continue the good devotions.

17 The supervisor is to urge that nobody be idle, provide some work, ..., keep in order the hermitage, with discretion have everybody work; is not to forget work, devotion, and love, those three things are the foundation of the "work." 18 See that Giovannantonio from Milan follows the rule of working because, not working, confirms little our brothers in the love of Christ.

19 The mule-drivers are to take care of the donkey; they are to provide something good for her food; they are to keep the house clean.

20 The nurse is to have love for and take care of the sick; for the first days he is to pay particular attention to the sick; later, should their condition become worse, they are to be sent to Bergamo. He is also to take care of those who are well so that they may not do something disorderly and get sick, even though it has never been customary to give such a task to nurses.

21 Remind sir Giovanni to take a very good care of the "work," not to get discouraged, nor to cool down in providing that they continue working.

22 Above all, tell sir priest Alessandro that this time he has to make the effort of strengthening that "work" with the modesty Christ inspires him with, especially by restraining a little those procurators from Milan, and by keeping Romiero at heart.

23 I cannot write any longer. I am looking forward to a detailed answer from all the above mentioned people.

Venice, at the Trinity, July 5, 1535.

Jerome

2

Venice, at the Trinity, July 21, 1535

To Agostino Barili, then to the Company

1 Dearly beloved brothers and children in Christ of the Company of the Servants of the Poor.

2 Your poor father greets you and encourages you to persevere in the love of Christ and the observance of the Christian rule, as I showed so much by deeds and words when I was with you, that the Lord has glorified Himself in you through me.

3 Our goal is God, source of every good, in whom alone - as we say in our prayer - we must have confidence and not in others. Our benign Lord has wanted so in order to increase in you the faith, without which - as the evangelist says - Christ cannot perform many miracles, and to answer your holy prayer to Him. He also wants to make use of you, who are poor, troubled, afflicted, wearied, despised by all, and even abandoned by the physical presence, but not by the heart of your poor and so loved and dear father.

4 And certainly we cannot know why He did so; however, three things can be considered.

5 First is that our blessed Lord wants to show you that He wants to put you among the number of his dear children, if you persevere in His ways. He has done so with all his friends whom at the end he has made saints.

6 Second, He wants to increase your faith in Him and not in others, because - as it is said above - God does not work His things in those who have not put all their faith and hope in Him alone. Those in whom there is great faith and hope, He has filled with love, and He has made great things in them. Therefore, if you are not lacking in faith and hope, He will make great things of you, exalting the humble. For this reason

He has taken me away from you together with every other instrument that gives you satisfaction, and has brought you to these two choices: either you will be lacking in faith and go back to the things of the world, or you will be steadfast in faith and in this way He will put you to the test.

7 Third, He wants to test you as gold is tested in a furnace: the dross and impurity that are in the gold are consumed in the fire, while the good gold is preserved and increases in value. So it is for the good servant of the Lord who hopes in Him: he remains steadfast during tribulations and then God comforts him, giving him both a hundredfold in this world for the things he leaves behind out of His love, and eternal life in the next. So He did with all the saints. So He did with the people of Israel: after many tribulations in Egypt, not only did He led them out of Egypt with many miracles and fed them with manna in the desert, but He gave them the promised land.

8 Even you know it, since it was assured you by me and by others, that God will do the same things of you, if you are steadfast in faith. And right now I repeat it and affirm it again: if you remain steadfast in faith and during temptations, the Lord will console you in this world, will lead you out of temptations and will give you peace and tranquillity in this world. In this world, I say, temporarily, and in the next for ever.

9 And of this I have some visible certainty, of having our Company here in this world as a place of peace. The reason of sending you this letter is for you to send us two youths so that I may show them the mentioned promised land we call "place of peace." And this paragraph is to be confidential and not read but to the members of the Company of the Servants.

10 Therefore, send me two youths of the Company of the Servants; and those who stay back are to be steadfast in the way of God, that is love and humility with devotion.

11 Be on guard that no scandal or disruption may occur in the Company or in the places you minister in. As far as those two you are sending, it does not matter if they are from the more experienced or new, grown-up or younger, first or the last. 12

Pay particular attention to two things: First, that for no reason you have to disturb the Company in the above-mentioned places, rather, give them more care than ever. I cannot tell you other: give them more care than ever and do not spare any trouble in order to keep everyone in the way of God. Second, as far as those whom you are sending, make sure that they have the intention to stay in the Company and observe our good Christian traditions, and that they come willingly.

13 Again I beg the whole Company to give this task to sir priest Agostino and his assistant Giovannantonio; and everybody is to be content with those whom those two will agree to choose, after consultation and prudent examination, because there is no hurry. However, when God sends an opportunity, we must not waste it.

14 For another reason I remind you not to hurry. I would like that they may be instructed by sir priest Agostino on everything and by Giovannantonio on the Company, and also by sir Giovanpiero, so that they may be able to answer about what I will ask them, in addition to the letters those three will write to me. Therefore, start immediately writing and do write extensively all three.

15 Nothing else. I want that all of you believe this my word: know for sure, sure, sure that my being far away will be for the great honor of God and the benefit of the Company, if you do not fail. But if you fail, God's honour will not fail, as it is said, but in others. Therefore, everything depends on you because God will not fail.

16 Give them those two white collars Giovannantonio and I used to wear, and tell them that they should go to the hospitals to lodge, saying that they are carrying important letters for me, and that they beg them on my behalf to give them some bread for God's love, in order not to waste time in begging food. However, they are not to trust in that, but in the Lord, and are to be willing to suffer. To everybody they are to tell that, besides the letters, they have to tell me directly and confidentially something on behalf of sir priest Agostino.

17 Sir priest Agostino, after having read this letter, please send it to the Company, comforting everybody in the Lord.

Jerome wrote

July 21, 1535, in Venice, at the Trinity.

18 Again I remind you to be careful, and especially I remind you, my dear sir priest Agostino and Giovannantonio, your assistant, to have great care that the Company be maintained in peace, a care better than when I was there, the best you may say. And should anyone refuse to be guided, do not hesitate to take provisions, without any regard, because it is better that one person suffer rather than have the entire Company be troubled or any bad habits be adopted. 19 The same also, should Giovannantonio wish that someone not be taken away from him; about this detail, make a decision among yourselves for now, until God will show you a different way.

3

Brescia, June 14, 1536

To Lodovico Viscardi in Bergamo

1 Sir Lodovico, dear beloved in Christ. With your patience you will save your souls. What advantage would it be to man, in fact, if he gains the entire world? I know that you can understand me: unfortunately, we are like the seed sowed among the stones, like those who believe for a certain time, yet they give up in the hour of temptation. 2 It is up to us to bear with our neighbour, excuse him and pray for him within ourselves, and without, try to talk to him with some kind Christian words; pray that the Lord may make you worthy, with your patience and gentle talking, to tell him such words that he may be enlightened about his error on the spot. The

Lord permits such an error for your and your neighbour's benefit, so that you may learn to be patient and know human frailty, and he, through you, may be enlightened, and the heavenly Father may be glorified in His Christ.

3 Be careful not to do the opposite when one of these cases occurs, that is to murmur, speak ill, become angry, be impatient, say: "I am not a saint; they are not things one can bear; these are not men of self-control", or similar things; and then to pass your responsibility to others by saying: "It would be better that that fellow would talk to him, or write to him or warn him, because he would do it better than I; he will not believe me; I am not able to do this, etc.". We must think that God alone is good and that Christ works in those instruments who let themselves be guided by the Holy Spirit.

4 And since I have read your letter and seen with great pleasure the zeal you have for the "work", it seemed fitting to me to send you this letter, poorly written as usual. Anyway, being your letter addressed to Father Agostino, I rely on him to give you proper advice.

5 As to the pharmacy, it has been unwisely decided to pay month by month and to reduce the old debt by something every month. It would have been better to have found the way to get the money to pay it all. 6 However, we have to accept what the Lord sends and make good use of everything. Also we have always to pray to the Lord so that He may teach us to bring everything to a successful conclusion. We must firmly believe that all that happens is for the best. We need to pray much so that we may see and, seeing, we may do what is necessary at the moment. Shouldn't you in a month have the means to pay either the new expense or the old debt, 7 shouldn't the Lord inspire anything else, you could then call again on the friends of the "work" and remind them that it was decided by them to pay every month the pharmacy bill, etc., that at the present there is no way to do it, and that everybody should remember of the way to do it. 8 And if you could not find another way, remind sir Marcantonio and sir Giovanni that it has been said other times that all the works must be united

and the begging be done unitedly. However, first we must feed the poor, then pay the debts incurred for food, then the other. Implement this and forget any other thing. Organize begging for this purpose with the best means you know, and let us pay this debt.

9 As far as the second item, we think that with three begging we will annoy the people, divide the "work", and compete against each other, and, what is worse, we will cause complaining and clash between a "work" with another. 10 About the idea that the Bishop could take upon himself the support of one "work," I do not believe that his Lordship said that, or he must have been misunderstood, because I know that his Lordship loves all the "work" and it is his desire to help all. But it is not possible to do more than is being done. I know that his Lordship will do what he can: or half, or one, or two, or three, or all, or part, according to the strengths the Lord will give him. 11 As far as looking for chosen men, much we pray to and praise the Father that he may send workers.

12 About the third item, we know nothing of that Venetian woman. Therefore, we cannot give you any answer. 13 I am very sorry about sir priest Zanon: I will appreciate it if he could be warned and begged for God's love to withstand this temptation. Blessed he will be if every kind of evil would be said about him falsely. He should bear this with great joy, awaiting a great reward in heaven. 14 Of that good person we know nothing yet; and no good news we have in our hands.

15 4th. I warn you not only not to intrude upon these things, but also, if someone spoke of them, to interrupt the conversation. Not because working is not good, (in fact, it is written: "He who does not work, must not eat,") but because every time a good thing is proposed, but it cannot be done, it must be considered for sure to be a Lucifer-like temptation and not from God, because God does nothing in vain. This temptation is not a new temptation, but an old one. 16 About working, we are not foreigners to this desire, but we have continuously taken great effort to put it into practice. As it is publicly known, we have worked in Venice for three years

publicly with the abandoned ones; for two years, (and this is the third) we have worked in the fields in the Milanese and Bergamo territories, publicly: and everyone knows that. And Lady Lodovica knows how much we have toiled in order to take home the textile art, even to the point of working for free. And now here in Brescia we have started to sew caps. I tell you this because while others grumble and have this desire in words, we have manifested it in deeds. Therefore, do not spur on the running horse. 17 I say: do not do it. Not because it has not to be done or we have not to work. But, whom do you have qualified to work at home? And whom do you have who wants to teach them for the love of God? And what experience do you have in this regard? 18 I maintain that work is good and continually I am looking for it and praying to God that He may grant it to us. Yet, I do not see any way out, except one, and I think that it will certainly succeed everywhere it is set up: that is, making straw plaits for hats. Regarding this, recently we have found new methods for preparing the straw. Therefore, I ask you, with all the influence you have, to make sure that this work be started. 19 What you could do for now is to ask friends to set aside some hundreds of stalks of wheat and spelt before they are beaten. Then, at your request, we will send you adequate instructors.

20 5th. We had much comfort from the news about Basilio. Take care of him, treat him kindly, stay near him when he sees patients; praise him for the commendable things and be patient with him for other things. See to it that he be helped, so that, when he comes, everything will be ready: nurses, ointments, bandages, threads, cotton, needle, thread, etc. Do not promise him anything, so that he may gain merit for what he does, but if you want to surprise him with some gifts, the Lord will inspire you. Tell him that if I find any good medicine where I am, I will send it to him, even if I should get it from a hospital. And so, you will see the honour of God, of the hospital and Basilio increasing.

21 6th. Organize the begging in the best way you can. I hope that, where we are lacking, the Lord will make up for abundantly.

22 7th. As to the cloth, I like it a lot. Is it enough for so many people? However, let us thank the Lord for everything.

23 8th. As to the priest, you have done well in reminding me about him. Despite the fact that everybody looks for and needs them, you cannot find them. However, we will not stop searching.

24 9th. I do not know what to say about Romiero and Martino but that the disciples are according to the master. Therefore, pray to God that He may grant me the grace of setting for them a better example than I did so far, and that God may give a better master to them and to me better cooperators.

25 10th. As far as Ambone, keep him at this condition, agreed by him and by you; otherwise, send him to me. Tell him in this agreement: he must always sit at the end of the table, and every time he does something evil, he must not have wine; and if he does evil of greater importance, he must be disciplined. His task is to empty the night pots with someone you will assign, to sweep the entire house, get water, wood, etc., and never handle food. He must not leave the house or speak to anyone but you, to our supervisor, who is called deputy, and to the guardian. If he observes this rule for a short while, have him sit higher at the table with the others. More he improves, more this yoke of penance for his mistakes will be lifted. See to it not to spare giving him punishment every time he speaks as before, and if he knows it and does not confess it, give him the same punishment. 26 It would be better if you could have him observe this rule with kind words, without telling him that I wrote to you. Be careful and warn the porter that he may run away and take with him some of the children, because this is one of his habits, and he has said he would take Giovanni... Should he mention he would like to leave, make him happy right away and do not give him extra time.

27 11th. For now, and not as ordinary rule, but only for one time when it occurs, or more, as you may deem it, I give you

permission to feed the beggars. I do not have the authority to give you a larger permission. The thing must be dealt in the chapter or our meeting; what will be agreed upon, will be communicated to you, if you would request it.

28 12th. As to the reading, do not trust the children: be vigilant, question, examine, and listen to often if they read or recite. And do not trust Bernardino either. As far as grammar, I do not know whom you have who can teach grammar; when you have somebody, notify sir priest Alessandro about who it is, his aptitude and condition, and he will answer you.

29 As to sir Giovanni, you must not speak to him with dead letters, as my letters, but you must pray for him and directly speak to him the words of life.

Written by Barili

30 Jerome, the Servant of the Poor, wrote the above.

31 Since it seems to me that sir Jerome has answered sufficiently what you have written, I will not enlarge upon it, except that we are returning your letter so that you may compare it with this one, and with another one addressed to sir Amadeo, brother of sir Giovanni Cattaneo. See to it that he has it soon because it is important. 32 It remains for me to say that you made a great mistake in not sending a letter to that priest in Somma Campagna, although I had advised you to do so. You could have given it to sir Leone. 33 Nothing else. Be well in the Lord and pray for us all.

34 From Brescia, at the hospital of Mercy, June 14.

Priest Agostino, Servant of the Poor.

4

St. Martin Valley, the day of the Blessed Virgin

To Giovanni Battista Scaini in Bedizzole

The part of the letter that describes the recipe for curing an illness of the eyes is omitted, and only the last sentences are reported.

1 ...Nothing else. Please, entrust us to the prayers of our brothers, especially to those of sir Bartolomeo and sir Stefano.
2 The result of the convert shows you that you are not asking the Lord the grace to act, and faith without works is dead. Do not think of being before God what you think you are.
3 Written in the St. Martin Valley, on the day of the Blessed Virgin.

5

Somasca, December 30, 1536

To Giovanni Battista Scaini in Salò'

1 Dear beloved brother in Christ. The peace of the Lord be with you. 2 Through sir Francesco I have received your letter and seen what you write. 3 You need not worry because you collected little in the begging, for the Lord, who says that first we must seek the kingdom of God, will provide opportunely. 4 The collectors of alms were sent there only for giving you an opportunity for merit. Therefore, having you done what you could, the Lord will be satisfied with you because for Him, who is the most benign, good will compensates for the lack of success. 5 As far as sending again for begging next year, only God knows what will happen then. I think I could be well anointed with the last anointment by that time. Therefore, I would not need to ask for oil to anoint throats. 6 Regarding that which was collected, I leave it to you and, once you have sent it to Brescia, we will see how to use it. 7 We will not forget to remember you in our prayers. You too pray to God that He may answer them and grant you the grace to understand His will in your tribulations and to follow it. Probably, His Majesty wants something from you, but you do

not want to listen. 8 Keep well and pray to God for me and remember me to sir Stefano.

9 From Somasca, December 30, 1536.

6

Somasca, January 11, 1537

To Lodovico Viscardi in Bergamo

1 Sir Lodovico, beloved brother in Christ. 2 Since sir priest Agostino, our father, is not here, with his permission I read the letters you have addressed to him. Since you notified him about those disorders in order to take some provisions, I tell you that on his return, in a few days, I will show him your letter and I pray to God that He may show him the remedy and the provision.

3 In the meantime I ask you to call the supervisor, the man in charge of the donkey, Giovanni the nurse, Job the steward, and Martino, bearer of this letter, and warn them that I tell them on behalf of Christ that God will punish them, as several times I told Bernardino primo that God will punish him if he does not mend his ways. I have been a bad prophet although I have prophesied the truth. Beware of God: God will punish them if they do not mend their ways. 4 Do they not know that they have offered themselves to Christ and they are in his house and eat of his bread and allow themselves to be called servants of Christ's poor? How, therefore, do they want to do the above without love, without humility of heart, without bearing with the neighbour, without looking for the salvation of the sinner and praying for him, without mortification, without shunning money and the women's face, without obedience, and without the observance of our rules? 5 Because they are away from me, do they think that they are away from God? Let them clearly see what the Lord, though I am far away, makes me say. They know that it is the Lord that makes me say it; if I do not speak the truth, I become a slave of the

father of lies and become a member of this father of lies. They know I speak the truth. How come they do not accept it as from God? And if God shows them through this means that He sees them, why do they not fear God? Will they live as hypocrite and obstinate? If they do not emend their ways and if the fear of God does not work, even the fear of men will make no difference. 6 Therefore, for now I do not know what else to say but to beg them for Christ's wounds to be mortified in all their external action and, within, filled with humility, love, fervor; to bear one another; to observe obedience, respect the supervisor and the old holy Christian norms; to be meek and kind with everybody, especially with those who live in the house; and above all, not to grumble about our Bishop, but always - as I have written in all my letters - to obey him; to be assiduous in praying before the Crucified by asking that He may open the eyes of their blindness and by seeking mercy, that is that they be made worthy to do penance in this world as a guaranty of eternal mercy.

7 In other letters we have asked to send to these poor a pair of scissors and ointment for the scabby; I repeat it, they have a great need of it.

8 And, take care of your health. I do not have time to write more because almost all the people of this house are seriously ill, and they are more than sixteen. Peace be with you.

9 Since the donkey is coming, we are sending you Giovan Francesco whose leg is festering.

10 Somasca, January 11, 1537.

Jerome Miani, by proxy

"OUR PRAYER"

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Father. Hail Mary. Creed. Hail, Holy Queen.

Our dear Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, because of your infinite goodness we ask you to restore the Christian people to that sanctity of life that was characteristic of the time of the Apostles.

Hear us, o Lord, because you are kind and merciful. In your compassion look upon us. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God have mercy on us (*repeat 3 times*).

May the power of God the Father, the wisdom of His Son and the strength of the Holy Spirit and the glorious Virgin Mary guide and protect me on the journey toward peace, love and prosperity. Also, may the angel Raphael, who assisted Tobias, be always with me everywhere I am and go. My dear Jesus, my dear Jesus, my dear Jesus, my love and my God, I trust in you so that I'll never be disappointed.

It follows the invitation to pray for a true trust in the Lord. Let us put our trust in our good Lord and let us have true hope in Him alone because those who hope in Him will never be disappointed, and will be firmly established upon solid rock. In order to obtain such a holy grace, we will invoke the Mother of Graces by saying: *Hail Mary*.

Let us again thank our Lord, God and heavenly Father, for all the gifts and graces He has bestowed and continues to bestow on us. Let us pray that in the future He may help us in all our spiritual and material needs: *Our Father*.

Let us again invoke the Blessed Virgin that She may pray to Her delightful Son for all of us, so that He may grant us to be humble and meek of heart, to love His divine Majesty above all things and our neighbor as ourselves, and that He may uproot our vices, increase our virtues and give us His holy peace: *Hail Mary*. May God grant you peace (*people may exchange a sign of peace*).

Let us also pray to God for His most perfect Church in

heaven, that is, for the Blessed, so that their worship may grow; for the perfect Church on earth, that is, for those who are in His grace, so that He may increase their virtues and grace, and preserve them in the observance of His commandments; for the imperfect Church, that is, the sinners, so that He may grant them the conversion of life and the remission of sins; for the atoning Church, so that He may free them from torments and grant them eternal glory; for those who will become His Church, that is, those who are infidel now and in the future, so that He may grant them the light of faith. *After saying an "Our father" and a "Hail Mary," in our hearts let us ask the Lord the above things.*

Then a "Hail Mary" for Monsignor Cardinal of Chieti and for Fr. Cajetan and his Congregation, for the Capuchins Fathers, for Fr. Paul and his companions, for Mother Andrea and Mother Archangela and Sister Bonaventura, for Madonna Elisabeth Capello and Madonna Cecilia. Then a "Hail Mary" for all our Fathers Priests both the present and the absent and those who are about to join us in this holy works; for all the stewards and all the brothers who are entrusted to their service, so that the Lord may grant them perfect charity, deep humility and patience because of the love for His Majesty. Then for all the benefactors of all our works, for the procurators, the bursars, the spenders, and for those who provide these works with help, advice and favors: *Hail Mary.*

Then for...

Then for those who rely on our prayers, for those who pray to God for us and those whom we owe praying, for our friends and enemies and for the deceased faithful, especially our parents, brothers and sisters, and even for our Father Jerome and all the other brothers of the Company and all the deceased of these pious works: *Hail Mary.*

Then, let us raise our mind to God and pray that because of His mercy He may hear our prayers, make up for our mistakes since He is the beginning, means, end and fulfillment of every good. *Pray in this way or in others as the Lord may inspire you.*

Then, we may continue to mentally pray for the space of a "Miserere." Then, we may continue: Let all of us humble before our heavenly Father as prodigal sons who have squandered every spiritual and material good by living badly. Therefore, let us ask for His mercy by saying: Mercy, grant us your mercy, Son of the living God. O God, help me, a sinner. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then the priest says a prayer as the Lord may inspire. At the end, we shall say three "Our Father" and three "Hail Mary", very softly, with arms crossed, by praying in memory of the three nails by which He wanted to be crucified, so that He may grant us the grace of despising this world and ourselves.

And let us pray for the Church so that She may return to the early status of Holy Church, and so that peace and harmony may return among the Christian leaders, and united in holy peace, they may march against the infidels and heretics in order to convert them and lead them under the yoke of the holy Catholic Church.

Then, we shall say an "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary" in secret for the glory of all Saints, all the angels, archangels, especially those who guard us, so that they may protect us from any temptations of the world, flesh and evil; so that they may present our lukewarm prayers to our Lord God and pray Him to bear us and spare us from every backbiting and rash judgment, and lead us in truth on His holy way.

LIFE OF ST. JEROME MIANI (By Anonymous)

God's Benefits to Mankind, Gift of Writing, Purpose of the Author in Writing the Story of His Friend Jerome

God has bestowed innumerable gifts upon mankind. Only those who have eyes purified by faith know how much those gifts are necessary and give grace because of their number and greatness. Those contemplating the depth of divine goodness see that the immense God not only has been the omnipotent creator and giver of gifts, but also the most gentle and loving father, a father who so loved man that, almost forgetful of his highness and out of overwhelming love, he clearly showed that he had planned everything for man, his noblest creature, or better yet, his most beloved son.

Let us not talk about his unheard mercy, which fills everyone not only with wonder, but also with awe and gratitude, if we think about it. I refer to one of the smallest gifts from his divine majesty, one without which mankind's history and the discoveries of things would be lost, and exchanges among mortals would be interrupted. I am talking of the invention of writing by which things always live on, the far ones become closer, the ones hidden in the innermost parts of the soul become open and clear. Writing preserves the things of the past, teaches those of the present and prepares us for the things of the future. Although it is useful to us in every circumstance and various situations, it is more useful when, by narrating the history of the people of the past, it straightens and makes prudent and wise our deeds.

This marvelous and immortal gift of writing was given to us as it had been to Moses and to the other prophets by God for the benefit and greatness of man. Unfortunately, because of the miserable blindness of the

human intellects, of their own folly, or better yet, of their corrupt malice, today it is greatly perverted and directed to the pitiful detriment of the world. Instead of being a powerful means of life, it has become a most harmful instrument of death. Hence, writing, that were of the best, gave us stories of dishonest and despicable loves. One author, through foolish and fictitious tales, deceived people. Another, of beastly rather than human mind, taught the rules of fighting, depicting as good a most cruel act, while yet another wrote convincingly that under certain conditions it is legitimate and blameless that a man kills another. Furthermore, some writers, already beguiled by the devil, endeavored to also beguile others by spreading the cult of false gods, very demons themselves, and fill the world with ideas not only contrary to divinity, but also to nature itself. Therefore, nowadays, human blood is being shed in a most cruel war, sincerity is besmirched by decadent extravagance, mutual love is destroyed by greed, and, whereas the world should be a shelter for humanity, temperance and decency, it has become a horrible den of cruel and merciless wild beast.

However, being a Christian born of Christian parents by the grace of God, having the gift of writing with Christian freedom, and wanting to give to intelligent people the opportunity and the interest to follow this noble undertaking, I would like to start in this way.

In these days our Lord God has called to heaven our sir Jerome Miani. I lived with him a long time and he loved me very much in this life, unworthy though I was. In telling the story of his holy life and death, I would like first to honor our Lord God, and second, to give an example for others to follow. I think it would be fitting that in this sweet and human living will not be lacking his work as a gift from a Christian to a Christian, from a friend to a friend, from a Venetian to a Venetian. In this way, our young or old Venetians who feel that baptism alone make a man a perfect Christian, by the living example of one of their noble countrymen, may learn to what purpose they should direct

their efforts and, in this brief and miserable life, know what should be their actions and desires.

I now pray that that blessed and friendly soul who loved me so much when in his mortal body, now, I believe, ascended to heaven, may help me by his prayers. May he obtain that what I write for the glory of his beloved Lord be cause of repentance for the wicked and of greater perfection for the good. In this way, our free republic, which has known no other Lord than Christ, may know by what thoughts and actions she calls herself Christian, name that she so ardently desires and rightly attributes to herself.

Fatherland, Family, Character, Army, Care of Nephews and Nieces

Jerome Miani was a native of our city of Venice, which is situated in the lagoons of the Adriatic Sea. Because of the beauty of its palaces, its antiquity and liberal government, people from all over the world come to live here. By worldly standards, its fame is such that there is little need of praise from others.

Jerome descended from a noble family that in the vernacular is called the House of Miani. But, as many claim, it should be called the House of Emiliani. Like many families of our city, because of wars with the Goths and other barbarians, they left Rome with their belongings and came to live in Venice. Instead of Emiliani, the family was called Miani by the populace, always a silly interpreter of things. Many prelates and saintly senators, who were issued from this family, give witness of its nobility. Many of them reached high government posts in our Republic and brought to it illustrious fame with their wise counseling.

Jerome was nurtured and brought up by his parents in the bosom of the Republic. His father's name was Angelo, and his mother's Dionora, or rather Leonora Morosini. There was like an omen that, by means of an angel and the action of God, a saint with a sacred name

would be born. Jerome had older brothers, Charles, Luke, and Mark.

He did not lack friends, either because he was gracious in keeping them, or because by nature he was affectionate and benevolent in making them. He was naturally joyful, kind, and strong-minded; as far as being talented, he could hold conversations with his equal, but his love was superior to his intelligence. He was short of stature, of rather dark complexion, robust and vigorous. Sometimes, he was quick-tempered.

During his youth, he lived in different ways and always adapted himself to the different changes of the times. In the war our Republic waged against the League of Cambrai, he told me that for a time he was a member of the cavalry. And, as St. Paul says, "our injustice praises God's justice," he did not know how to guard himself from those errors into which soldiers fall. This is not because they are in the army, but because of the ruined souls which join the army, corrupted as they are by the bad example of vicious leaders, who with their iniquitous scoundrelism corrupt and spoil the army. Instead of being guardians of Christian customs and defenders of honesty, because of them the army has become an impure and wicked thievery, or still worse, a cesspool of every wickedness, as if to be a soldier means to be lustful, insolent, cruel, and greedy, instead of being chaste, modest, strong, and liberal.

When the war quieted down and his brother Luke was called to his eternal rest by the grace of God, leaving some young children and a widow who, because of their age and the sudden departure of their father, needed assistance, the pious man undertook the care of the poor widow and his orphaned nephews. Since they had a wool clothing business, for several years, until the children grew old enough, he administered both the family affairs and the wool trade, without taking any profit for himself, but solely out of sheer sincere charity.

Conversion, Christian Life

God, even before the creation of the world, because of his infinite mercy, from eternity loves and predestines his children. Therefore, when it pleased the good God to perfectly move his heart and by holy inspiration to draw him to Himself from the occupations of the world, Jerome, by going often to listen to the word of God, started to recall his ingratitude and remember his offenses against his Lord. He, therefore, wept often and at the feet of the Crucified he prayed to Him that He would be his savior and not his judge. He would hate himself and his past life. He would attend churches, preaching and Masses. He would seek the company of those who could help him with their counsel, example, and prayer. Among the many the Lord sent to him for his salvation, was an illustrious Father, a Venetian Regular Canon, a man of outstanding doctrine and kindness. Since he is still living, I shall not mention his name. For many years he took care of his soul and directed him in the way of eternal life.

Pondering on these holy thoughts, the servant of God often heard repeat the Gospel's words, "he who wishes to come after me, must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Inspired by the grace from above, he applied himself to imitate, as much as possible, his beloved master Christ. Therefore, he began, by moderate fasting, to conquer gluttony, the beginning of every vice. He would keep watch at night, never going to bed if he were not sleepy. He would read, pray, get tired, humble himself as much as he could in dress, speech, conversation, and much more in his heart. He would consider himself nothing, knowing that whatever good was in him was by the grace of the Lord. He would endeavor to speak rarely, only when it was necessary, knowing that speech has been given to praise God, to edify the neighbor, and ask for the things necessary. He would keep diligent vigil over his eyes that they might not see what he would have to repent, knowing

that it is written, "turn my eyes away so that they may not see vanity."

He would help the poor with whatever alms he could, with counsel, with visit, and defend them; what was delightful to note, was that he was always joyous, except when he remembered his sins. Wanting to uproot them from his soul, he proceeded in this way: first, he would choose one sin, then, every day he would try to overcome it by practicing the opposite virtue. Conquered one, he would go to the next. In this way, with the help of God, who granted him every day greater fervor, every plant of vice soon was uprooted from his soul and he became ready to receive the seed of the divine grace. Often he would remind me of this system: "Brother, if you want to cleanse your soul from sins in order to make it the dwelling place for the Lord, start by pulling one by the hair so that you may punish it in your own way, then go to the others and soon you will be sound".

He set his heart on suffering every misfortune for the love of his Lord. One day, as the nobleman Paul Giustiniani who was present told me, when a scoundrel viciously insulted him for no reason at all and threatened to pull out his beard (that was very long) one hair at a time, he said nothing else but these words: If God wills it so, here I am. Do it! Those who heard said that had Jerome Miani been his former self, not only would he have not tolerated the offender, but he would have torn him to pieces with his teeth.

He stopped attending the Council, put the care he had for the Republic into the care of his soul and yearning for the heavenly fatherland. He would talk with few people, guard himself from being idle as much as he could, and grieve over nothing except when an hour passed without doing something good.

Famine of 1528, Works of Mercy, Illness of Jerome, St. Rocco's School, Hospital of Incurables

While the Servant of God was in this holy vigilance

and was trying to amend his body and his habits, the heavenly kindness provided sweet opportunities to his new soldier to imitate his captain, Jesus Christ, and so to gain heaven.

In his justice, or better in his love and mercy, God wanted to awaken the Italians from the deep sleep of abominable vices. Therefore, as everyone knows about and remembers with sorrow, in 1528 a famine so big occurred in Italy and Europe that in towns, cities and villages thousands of people died of starvation. There was such a shortage of grain that little of it was to be found, and that, at intolerably high prices. The poor people were compelled by hunger to eat dogs and donkeys, then grass, but not from their gardens or cultivated fields. On the account of the bad times, there were no gardens, therefore, they ate wild grasses, and these without oil and salt, because they did not have any. But, what do I say, grass? In many places stale hay and straw from the thatched roofs were finely chopped and attempted to eat.

Hearing that in our city there was more opportunities than in any other Italian cities, with their wives and children, people left their homes, that were more like tombs for the living, and in bands invaded Venice.

You could see the poor people in the squares and the streets unable even to cry, but weeping silently at their approaching death. Seeing such a spectacle and moved by ardent charity, our Miani decided to help them with whatever he could. So, in a few days, he spent the money he had in this work, sold the clothes, tapestry and the household goods, and used up everything in this pious and holy enterprise. He would feed some, cloth others because it was winter, shelter some in his own home, comfort and exhort others to patience and to dying for the love of God, reminding them that eternal life was intended for just such a faith and patience.

In these activities he would spend the entire day and, many times, the day was not enough. So, during the

night he would go through the city helping the sick and those alive as he could. The dead, whom he found at times in the streets, unseen and unknown, he would put on his shoulders as they were balsam and gold, and would carry to cemeteries and sacred places.

Time would not be enough if I told the details of all his Christian works. Having spent all that he had in these works, it pleased God to test him in his own life, as he had done with the very patient Job.

The horrible famine was suddenly followed by a fatal epidemic disease, which caused purple and red spots to cover human bodies. Avoiding neither the sick nor the dead, the valiant soldier of Christ contracted the same disease. Once he realized that, he made his confession, received the holy Sacrament of the altar, and committed himself to the Lord, who was his unique hope and refuge. Then, he spoke and cared no more of himself, as if the illness were not his, but patiently he awaited God's will.

Doctors had already despaired and were waiting for his death, when, in a few days, he recovered unexpectedly, and immediately resumed his previous work, though not yet entirely healed. He worked with greater fervor as he was more sure, after this personal experience, that the Lord does not abandon those who work at his service, rather, he accomplishes in his servant new and wonderful things.

Living in this way more and more each day, he decided to leave to his nephew, already grown up, the wool trade. Therefore, having given an excellent account of everything, he left the business and at the same time the civilian dress, which is a long robe with closed sleeves and is called an elbow-sleeve robe. He wore a thick cloth, heavy shoes, and a short cloak. Having gathered some children who would beg in the street, he took a shop near St. Rocco, where he opened a school, which even Socrates, in all his wisdom, would have not been worthy to see. Here, neither Plato nor Aristotle taught their vain sciences, but it was taught how man, because of faith in Christ and of imitation

of his holy life, becomes the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, the son and heir of God.

He had brought in some craftsmen who would teach the art of making iron pitchers, and he and his children would exercise that art. While working, they would sing psalms; they would pray night and day and everything was in common. Among them there was a special awareness of poverty and everyone was eager to be the poorest.

Their beds were bare straw, their blankets of the shabbiest. Their food was coarse bread and water, eaten with fruits and vegetables.

God's Saint taught these children to fear God, to consider nothing their own, to live in common, to live not from begging but from their own labor. Begging, he used to say, was less than a Christian practice, except for the sick, who cannot live from their own labor; as to the others, everyone should support himself by the sweat of his own brow, according to the saying: "He who does not work, should not eat."

No one more than he loved and served the servants of God, whatever might be their condition. To bishops and priests he paid great honor. Not only to the above-mentioned children did he extend his care, but as a universal father of the poor, he used to give the alms he could to Mazonbo, Torcello, Burano, Chioggia and other similar places called districts, either he himself or through others.

He was so sincere that whatever was not in himself he did not suspect in others; moreover, he thought well of everybody.

He lived a long time in this good and saintly way. Later, he was called by the directors of the Hospital of the Incurables to unite both schools for children in one under his responsibility. Since he did not want to confine his soul, made to the likeness of God, to any particular work, but wishing to act according to the will of his Lord, willingly went there. Of how much he worked there, of how much of his life

he gave are witness those good spirits who are in charge of that place today.

How many times did I visit him either here or at St. Rocco before! During the pious conversations he had with me - the Lord knows well the pure and Christian love he had for me - he would show me the work of his hands, the groups of children and their talents. He pointed out, among others, four who, I believe, were not older than eight. And he would say: these pray with me, are pious and have great grace from the Lord; those read well and write; those others work; that one is very obedient, and this other one observes silence well; these are their supervisors, that one is the Father who hears their confessions. He would show me his small bed, which was more a tomb than a bed because it was so narrow. He would ask me to live with him, even though I was not worthy of the companionship of such a man.

He often in my presence he would weep with the desire of the heavenly fatherland. Surely, had I not been more than cold, his words could have been for me flames of divine love and desire for heaven.

Departure from Venice, Activities in the Regions of Bergamo, Milan and St. Martin Valley, Congregation of the Poor

Here, we should defend him against those who, through ignorance, accused him of inconstancy for leaving the care of the hospital and Venice, to go elsewhere. Do they not know the hidden designs of God and that Christ himself to those who wanted to keep him said: "I must evangelize also the other towns?" What is this wonder if he left his fatherland? Don't we know that the precious stones found in one place are brought in another? That incense, cinnamon, cassia and other valuable goods often see a new sky? That the sun does not remain where it rises, but

always going around ends his daily course? And so, this precious stone, this rich merchandise of the Lord, this sun so bright, because of his exemplary life, did not remain always in one place. Aware that the Christian people were like a flock without a shepherd, he left Venice and went to Bergamo. Here, bishops, prelates, and other pious persons who knew him are witness to the fire of divine love he had, to his love for his neighbor, and to his eagerness to save souls.

He hated heresies and their supporters. He used to say that the Lord allows Christians to be in need of material things so that they would see God in those who are able to give them living alms.

In the region of Bergamo, with the help of the bishop and other good people, he set things in order in the hospitals, which were many in those places. He kept with him some children who were trained in the Christian life. With them he would go through the villages of the territory exhorting the peasants to the blessed life of the holy Gospel.

Not only here did he show his charity, but he also went through the region of Cremona and Crema where he performed the same deeds.

Crossed the Adda river, he entered the territory of Milan where an outstanding act of his cannot be overlooked. After having arrived in the above-mentioned territory of Milan with many of his poor, he fell sick with many of his companions. Having found by chance an old abandoned and unroofed hospital where there was but straw, he laid down on that. He had neither bread nor wine, nor money, because the ardent Christian would bring with him for his needs nothing but a living faith in Christ. While waiting for His grace, a friend of his and ours, divinely inspired, entered where the holy man laid down feverish, recognized him and said: "Sir Jerome, if you like, I'll have you transport to a nearby place of mine, you alone, where you will be well cared for." With a generous soul, he answered to him:

“Brother, I thank you very much for your kindness and I would be happy to go there only if you also accept these brothers of mine with whom I wish to live and die”. Deeming this answer a serious one, our friend left and went to Milan where he related it to the Duke Francesco Sforza, whose soul may the Lord God guard with kindness. Having understood the character of the servant of God, the Duke sent him the necessary means and had him taken to a hospital in Milan, a place where he would prefer to stay with his companions more than anywhere else.

Nor did his charity end there. Indeed, having given a good and Christian shape to that place, moved by the Holy Spirit, he went on to Crema, where in a short time he assembled many good persons, some of whom were priests and some laymen. In St. Martin’s Valley and in Bergamo, these people gathered in communities homeless poor, who were healed, clothed, taught Christian customs, and who earned their living from their own just labor.

How nice it was to see in times so corrupted by vice, a Venetian nobleman garbed as a peasant, accompanied by many mendicants, or better, by reformed Christians and noblemen according to the holy Gospel, go through the countryside hoeing, cutting grain and doing similar works, always singing psalms and hymns to the Lord. They would teach the poor peasants the principles of Christian life, eat sorghum bread and other such food of the countryside. I think we must pity the great men who, idle and fat, give themselves up to games and feasts in their haughty palaces and gilded rooms, and never think of the happy, future, immortal life full of every delight. Suddenly, they leave their pomp and wealth, and, poor and alone, stripped of everything, they are borne to the grave.

The holy man had gathered in these communities in the territory of Bergamo, Crema and Como more than three hundred souls. They would lead a holy and Christian life, having poverty as a friend, and under the guidance of good priests and laymen, whose names I do not want to mention

so that the glory will be the Lord's; they are known to the Holy Spirit and their names are written in the book of life.

Return to Venice, His Main Friends, Epidemic in the Bergamo Territory, Death of Jerome.

Having being a long time in this state of perfection, he came to Venice for some pious works and stayed a little less than a year. He was clothed, as usual, as a peasant. For holy eyes it was worthy of admiration to see such a man of poor and humble clothes, but of so sublime soul, of so chaste, modest, cautious and prudent customs, that for the purified ears it was a concert of virtues. And to me it looked like a divine thing the fact that he would have great compassion of the evil doers and that he would never think ill of anybody. He would visit his friends. We were often together and he filled me of so many holy memories and Christian hope that they still resound in my mind. Then, he left, never to see us again in this life, but, as I hope through the mercy of God, to see each other forever in the next. His closest personal friends were priests: the Most Reverend Archbishop of Chieti, now Cardinal; the two Lipomanos, one Prior of the Trinity, the other Bishop of Bergamo; the Bishop of Verona and others less important. But, above all, he loved his dear poor who best represented Christ for him.

He had reached, I believe, his fifty-sixth year of his life, of which twelve had been spent in austere Christian life, when our most benign God, who for small trials gives us eternal goods, was pleased to call him to his celestial fatherland.

It was by divine will that a contagious disease should break out in the territory of Bergamo, a disease not understood by the doctors, which in fourteen days or so would kill the sick. At that time, the holy man was in the St. Martin's Valley with many of his own. From them, occasionally, he would withdraw alone to a grotto for contemplation. It happened at that time that one of his own

was taken ill and, in a few days, was at death's door. Since he was in his last transit, he was watched, as it is done in such a case, by many, and among them Sir Jerome. Now, this one had been a long time without speaking nor giving any sign of life, when, suddenly, as rousing from a deep sleep, he got up as best he could, saying: "Oh, what a thing I have seen!" Asked what he had seen, he answered: "I have seen a most beautiful throne surrounded by a great light, on which sat a child holding in his hands a banner that read: This is Jerome Miani's throne." Everyone was amazed to hear this, most of all, Jerome.

Then, he wanted to go to various places, and, being forbidden by his own to do so, he said: "Let me go, because in a little while, neither you nor anyone else will see me." Even though this caused apprehension in those who heard it, no one could believe that the Lord wanted to deprive them of their father and shepherd.

But the most benign God, in order to reward his labors and so that no one would trust in any man regardless of how saintly he might be, on the day the world calls Carnival Sunday, but that the Church calls Quinquagesima, made him fall sick with the plague. Struck very hard, in four days he returned his soul to his Maker with so great a faith (as those who were present said) that he never showed signs of fear. On the contrary, he said that he had made his covenant with Christ.

He would exhort everyone to follow the way of the Crucified, to hold the world in contempt, to love each other, to take care of the poor, saying that whosoever did those deeds would never be forsaken by God.

Saying this and other similar things, he left this mortal life and went to enjoy the eternal one, which, we hope, the Lord in his goodness will grant to us. Amen.

So ends the life of the most distinguished Jerome Miani, written in Venice, in 1536, under the happy governance of the most learned and valiant Andrea Gritti, most serene Prince of Venice.

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1555

The Constitutions, which are observed by the Somascan Congregation dedicated to the ministry of the orphans in the cities of Lombardy.

Origin of the Congregation and Life of Its Founder

1. In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and of the glorious Virgin Mary.
2. It is sung that the holy Church has her foundations

on the holy mountains, that is, the apostles and prophets. Since we have to deal with this Congregation, a particular Church; we need to show its foundations, which have been resplendent with sanctity and perfection of life.

3. This Congregation, dedicated to the ministry of orphans, began in Bergamo in the year of the Lord 1531 by the work of Sir Jerome Emiliani, a Venetian nobleman. As a young man, he gave himself to the world and its pleasures. Later on, he turned to God. By having the Most Reverend Bishop of Chieti as his spiritual director, he became so inflamed with the love of God that, left he the world, put himself at the service of the wretched poor and dressed very poorly. For a long time, he performed this humble exercise in Venice, his hometown.

4. His spiritual fervor increasing, he left the city out of obedience to his spiritual director. Impelled by the Spirit of the Lord and eager to do things agreeable to Him, he went to Bergamo where he gathered numerous abandoned and miserable orphans, some covered with ringworm, scabies, and affected by other diseases. They gave him a place in the hospital of the Maddalena where with great love he cleaned and cured them both from their corporal misery and, with saintly teaching, from their spiritual misery. Similar to a lamp on a chandelier, he radiated so much light of good example that he invited many to run after the fragrance of his virtues and to follow him. Among these there were the reverend and worthy priests Sir Agostino Barili from Bergamo and Sir Priest Alessandro from Besozzo, and also some good and devout lay-people.

5. Since the number of the orphans increased, this holy man, not content to perform this pious deed only in Bergamo, started to expand his activity by going to Somasca, then to Como, and later on to Milan with a good number of his followers. There, after much and much suffering, either because of illness and material needs, or because of mockery, harassment, and persecution, at last he was given, as a shelter for those creatures, a property of the Major

hospital, called San Martino. When the institution was established and running, he accepted in his Company Monsignor Federico Panigarola, Apostolic Protonotary, and Angelo Marco, count of Gambarana, who became a priest later.

6. Having established a good administration in this institution, the Servant of God, invited by Sir Bartolomeo Borello, returned with some to the village of Somasca, on the border between the territory of Venice and Milan. There being no other means to live, he would go to work in the fields with his beloved poor. He would lead a very austere and tiring life. To draw everyone along the right way, he became the most humble and the lowest of all. Even though he was a noble and old man, he would follow the rules of the lowest orphan, imitating the benign Jesus. Such deep humility and love, fervor and fragrance of virtue, would attract distinguished souls from different places. Besides those above mentioned, two other young men from Pavia [joined]: the first, Sir Marco, a man of great doctrine, who lived as a priest with great fervor of spirit and holiness of life; the second, Sir Vincenzo, a Count of Gambarana, who was not lesser in doctrine and holiness than the above mentioned lover of poverty. Then, Sir Leone Carpani, from the parish of Incino, converted and dedicated himself to God's service by following this holy man in the works of piety. Many other priests and fervent laypeople joined this holy Company, and some of them still live in it with edification for the world.

7. To these servants of the Lord gathered in Somasca the holy man sir Jerome revealed his intention. It was to bear fruit in the world not only by establishing these communities of orphans, caring for them, and rescuing them from corporal and spiritual miseries, but also by assembling for the same goals groups of citizen and noblemen. They were supposed to take care of the temporal aspects of the institutions and their temporal administration, while the priests of the Company were supposed to handle the spiritual aspects. All together, they were expected to obtain the grace and glory of God.

8. After this holy man had assembled these companies and established institutions for orphans in Bergamo, Somasca, Como, Milan, Brescia, and Pavia, he lived in great austerity and poverty with so living a faith that he performed miracles because of it.

9. Called to Rome by the Cardinal of Chieti to do the work of the Lord, he assembled those brothers who were in Somasca at that time. After the customary prayer, he told them he had been called to Rome and to heaven, and he said: "Brothers, I think I will go to Christ." And suddenly he fell ill with an epidemic fever. In a very few days, he came to the end of his life, giving great example of holiness. As his children and brothers wept, he said: "Do not cry because I will be more helpful to you from there than from here." Having received the holy Sacraments, he went over to the Lord on February 8, 1537.

10. About the same time, the Reverend Friar Tommaso of the Order of the Preachers passed happily to the other life. He had been with the above-mentioned sir Jerome and preached very successfully to the neighboring people, fostering peace and harmony among them, in cooperation with the Servant of the Lord. And after many years, also an excellent physician from Piemonte died: he had been in the company of the above mentioned. And all were buried in the church of St. Bartholomew in Somasca. And we believe that their souls, because of their good deeds and the mercy of God, are seated in heaven, where they pray for the success of this Congregation and the spiritual success of these holy institutions, that the Lord may deign to increase in number and merit, for the glory of God.

Authority in the Congregation

11. The death of this Servant of the Lord, who had been the leader and foundation of this Congregation, left all the brothers, priests and laymen, like sheep without a shepherd, fearful sailors without a pilot, not knowing what to

do, should they go ahead and steer the boat or each one return to his former state of life. In this quandary, the favor of the Lord did not abandon them because they gave themselves up to fervent prayer and remembered that their deceased father had said not to doubt at all, but to continue the enterprise with courage. Therefore, confident in divine help and in the prayers of the pious Servant of God, since the Company had grown with priests and laymen (among whom there were two reverend and worthy priests, sir Mario de Lanzi from Bergamo, man of great zeal and holy life, and sir Francesco della Mora, nobleman from Piemonte), they all together took courage and appointed as their leader sir priest Agostino and devoted themselves to the service of the orphans. Many of the priests remained in Somasca living in common as poor religious, in prayer and spiritual fervor, practicing virtue in peace and tranquility.

12. However, those who went to the cities found it difficult to work. They considered it necessary the apostolic authority in order to strengthen and stabilize the Congregation. Therefore, they chose sir priest Angelo Marco from Pavia to go to Rome. There he remained a long time and requested a brief from Pope Paul III of happy memory: to be able to elect a superior pro tempore who, once elected, would be the superior of the entire Congregation with the authority to command and to transfer the brothers from place to place; furthermore, it gave the priests the authority to administer the sacraments and absolve their subjects even from Episcopal cases; it submitted them directly to the Apostolic See; finally, it gave authority to the Congregation to draw up Constitutions in its Chapters and to amend them, as it is customary and necessary in Congregations.

13. Being the Congregation strengthened and stabilized by this authority, the present Constitutions are drawn up and established for the observance by all, priests and laymen who want to stay and persevere in this Congregation. They were approved in the Chapters by the majority of votes. These Constitutions have n other intention

but making us live devoutly for God, temperately in regard to ourselves, and work justly and without scandal in favor of our neighbor.

Therefore, may the grace of the Holy Spirit possess our hearts, so that we may always accomplish things pleasant to the divine Majesty, forever and ever.

GUILLERMI'S LETTER

I know that you have heard of the death of our Sir Jerome Miani, valiant captain of Christ's army, as well as of the two deaths of this government. I do not write about his illness and his death, otherwise I would break your heart. He looked as if he had paradise in his hands because of his confidence. He would exhort his own with such a joyous and smiling face that made those who were looking at him fall in love with Christ and get inebriated with the love of Christ. It looked as if he knew he was dying, as I know I am writing this letter. He would say that he had settled his affairs and had made his covenant with Christ. He was never heard

mentioning either Venice or relatives. He would not talk about anything but following Christ. He departed from here before Christmas, but before [leaving] he came to pay me a visit at the Bishop's palace. He knelt before me, recommending me to take care of Christ's faith, and asked my forgiveness. He took leave as if we would never see each other again, and I saw him no longer. He died in Somasca, where there are many upright men from Pavia, Como, and Bergamo.

Today we have celebrated his memory in some churches and Wednesday we will do it in the others, as if it were the Pope who had died, or our Shepherd. While alive, he had reduced himself to such an abstinence and humility that lower he could not go. Well, so it pleased God! I do not know if the death of another person could make me sadder.

The Lord has deprived this fold of one of his most important governors. I believe He will not abandon it: I am waiting for one of the works that He alone can do with His wisdom and infinite power. If I am long, forgive me. It is Monday of Carnival and I am having a good time with you. I have told you all this in reference to Sir Mario, to whom the Lord might be favorable, since he died the seven of this month.

MOLFETTA'S LETTER

Brother Jerome Molfetta, Preacher - of the Order of the Minor Friars, called Capuchins - to the dear in Christ Fathers and Brothers, servants of the poor, and to their children - orphans in the institutions of Lombardy.

Very dear in Christ Jesus, Fathers and Brothers, the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always, and with all those who believe in Him and accompany their faith and their Christian names with similar works.

Many days ago, it came into my hands a booklet entitled "On Divine Love", written by the Reverend Father and of sacred memory Friar Bartholomeo della Citta' di Castello, of our Order of the Minor Friars. He is a man of no lesser

holiness, life and customs, and of no lesser ardent love than the Divine Love, that his burning and sweet writings show. I thought that charity did not want that such a beautiful and useful work should remain buried, either for God's honor or for the usefulness, that seems to be successful, to those who will read it in silence and with attention (after prayer, though). In it, the author unveils to us and gives proof of the beautiful and wonderful ways of the Divine union with many effective reasons and irrefutable witnesses of the sacred Scripture. Therefore, I have decided to publish it myself.

Looking for someone to whom I would make a so holy and beautiful gift, it came to my mind (not without particular God's Providence, I believe) that I could not do better than to inscribe it to your charities. You, as burning lamps, show outside rays of works inflamed by Divine Love, and inspired by the example and the teaching of that blessed soul of Sir Jerome Miani, Venetian nobleman. He had a burning desire to draw and join to God people of any status, class and condition. Of this desire he showed so clear signs: burning of Divine Love, for the sake of the Gospel and for the building of the kingdom of God, he left behind his riches, his noble relatives and his illustrious fatherland. Having thrown himself into the arms of his beloved, naked and crucified Jesus Christ, after a brief wandering, he began to fulfill his desire starting from you poor fellows, by rescuing you from the filth, in Bergamo first and then in other cities where you lived. You were distressed with hunger, cold and nakedness, and some of you were found even dead. And those of you who could escape such miserable a fate, in your troubles, would give out a sound no less sad than the one of the tormented souls of the purgatory, as everyone knows.

He gathered you with so great a sweetness and goodness curing your souls by his holy examples and teachings. With his hands he cured your physical illnesses, such as scabies and many other diseases. He looked for you walking through the neighborhoods, and he got food for you by knocking at the doors. In so doing he has given with his

virtues fragrant perfume to the Lord and to all Lombardy the living light of loving God with everything but ceremonies. Proof of this are the hospitals, which were established by him in the most honorable towns. There, your very voices used to cry: "I'm dying of starvation, I'm dying of cold", and now they sing praise to the Lord day and night.

After having gathered you poor things, he led some of you fathers priests and some of you laymen to leave your real estates and patrimonies, to enter the holy works and to join God with him. What else can I say about the many and many acts of charity performed by him in different places and by which he showed his love for God? Was not that a great testimony of his love when, in Milan, he became sick in the church of the Santo Sepolcro with almost all of you poor things sick too, and he was lying on a bed of straw, and, though sick, he kept helping his sick sheep. Then, invited by some gentlemen of that City to go, only by himself, to their houses to get cured, as a good shepherd, he never wanted to depart from you. The Lord, having tried his constancy, provided a place for everybody and gave them back also their health.

In Pavia, when the administrators of the hospital of Mercy evicted some people who were living in the hospital in order to give him that place, he preferred to go to live with those who were with him then, at the Sala Grande, which is in the Citadel of that city, rather than to give troubles to anybody. And the Lord gave him the place that now is St. Gervasio. And I do not want to be silent about the other many episodes of which those who knew him can testify, such as to patiently bear with and forgive the miseries, infirmities, shortcomings, not only of those with whom he would live, but of any other person. Therefore, I dedicate it to you, beloved in Christ, given the eagerness that that blessed spirit had to unite you to God, so that this book may produce the desired effect.

I pray to the Lord that the great fire of his Divine Love may increase in your hearts, as much I truly desire for his glory and for the growth of his kingdom. In this way, you too

will dedicate yourselves with greater fervor to the works of mercy and divine love. Many others, because of your example, as you did because of the example of Sir Jerome - whom, though dead, I greatly revere - will move to do the same and to win over the universal reformation of the Church, of which he was greatly thirsty and for which he composed a particular prayer. Still today this prayer is said during Masses and in our community prayers. It says: Our dear Father Lord Jesus Christ, we pray to you that, for your infinite goodness, you may reform all Christendom to that status of sanctity which was of the times of the Apostles; and I wish that the Lord Jesus Christ could grant it to us out of his infinite mercy.

And pray to him some times also for me, poor sinner, so that he may lead us all together to the blessed vision in heaven. Amen!

In Vinegia for Piero da Nicolini da Sabio MDLVIII

SUGGESTIONS FOR AN INTERIOR LIFE AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

(From *Constitutiones Clericorum Regularium Congregationis Somaschae*, 1626, 1.II. c.1, nn. 353-380)

Reasons of the Proposed Suggestions

353. All of us who have joined the militia of the Somascan Congregation, from the very beginning have set for ourselves this goal: to uproot the shortcomings which disfigure and deface one's soul; to avoid the occasions of sin which in the world present themselves numerous times at every step; and to ascend together to the apex of perfection by going along the way of virtues. We must keep this aim before our

spirit in such a way that we will never take away our interior eyes from it. In this way, full of solicitude to obtain it, with joy we will welcome what is offered as a valid aid to our Constitutions. Therefore, here are the main suggestions for the development of an interior life. Those who are eager for spiritual progress will welcome them as commands of the Lord and will observe them diligently.

Returning Love with Love

354. We are to think that the Lord has called us from the land of Egypt, that is the world, to a land that exudes milk and honey, that is the Congregation, to be a holy nation, a chosen and favored people, among which He is delighted to dwell. Therefore, without delay we are to let us do away with what may displease His eyes. We are to return love and, by loving God, we are to consider all the rest as nothing.

The Glory of God, Our Salvation and Our Brothers

355. In everything we think, say or do, either in private or in public, even in the smallest things, we are always to have before us the glory of God and the spiritual usefulness for both ourselves and our neighbour.

Life in the Presence of God

356. As there is no moment in which we do not enjoy the goodness and mercy of God, there should be no moment in which with our interior sight we do not see Him present as a witness and a judge of our deeds, words and thoughts. Nothing is, in fact, more effective than this commendable memory of the divine presence if we want to avoid evil and reach perfection.

Joyful Acceptance of Trials in Communion with Christ's Suffering

357. Trials of every nature, degree and origin, even the obstacles which seem to slow down our spiritual progress, except sin, are to be welcomed with serenity as from the hand

of God, Father of great goodness. To Him we are to offer all of them in unity with the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, to His glory and praise.

Tepidity

358. Tepidity must be immediately and totally uprooted from the soul, otherwise, as tuberculosis, it will debilitate every strength and energy of the spirit.

Trust in God, Father of Infinite Love

359. When we face serious difficulties which may lead us away from service to God and from search for perfection, when the fear for the sins committed and the severity of the just judge compel us to mistrust, we are to confidently take refuge in God and think of Him as Father of great love. May the certainty that those who hope in the Lord never are disappointed support us. On the contrary, as St. Bernard maintains as our consolation, nothing makes the power of the Word brighter than the fact that He makes powerful those who hope in Him. In this way, they are able to obtain everything they wish and ask in prayer.

Avoid Evil and Do Good

360. We are to avoid what we blame in others or what we heard others blame. On the contrary, we are to imitate and attain what is worthy of praise.

Love for the Congregation, as for Our Mother

361. We are to consider our Congregation as a mother. We are to love her and, as far as it is in our power, we are to do our best so that everybody may appreciate her. We are, however, to eliminate any exclusive feelings.

The Fervor of Our First Conversion

362. The habits we have brought from the world into religious life must be completely uprooted with zeal, with the help of our superiors and spiritual directors. We are, then, to

do our best so that, with time, our initial fervor may not grow weak. In the beginning of our conversion, it used to inflame us to serve God in sanctity and justice.

Monthly Exercise of One Virtue

363. At the beginning of every month, everyone is to choose a virtue in which he will train himself for all the month. In the same time, he is to wage a particular war against the vice opposed to that same virtue. Everyone is to choose by lot one of the Saints celebrated in the month as his patron, to recite every day an "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary" in his/her honor, and to ask that by his/her intercession he may obtain from God the help necessary to conquer that virtue and uproot that vice.

Attention to Even the Small Shortcomings

364. Nobody is to overlook the seemingly small evils of the soul or petty shortcomings, since a small spark often can cause a big fire.

Freedom from Disorderly Loves and Fellowship of the Crucified Lord

365. If for the love of parents, relatives, friends, goods and similar things we have given up to following naked the naked Crucified, and it takes up all our soul and owns it, then we will be judged unworthy of the vision of Christ and, therefore, of the Kingdom of Heavens.

Love for Every Person and Place

366. For the servant of Christ every land is his homeland, or better, the whole world is exile and his homeland is only the heavenly Jerusalem for which he longs. Therefore, for us there should not be difference of places and peoples. Since we have one Father, who is God, one mother, who is the Congregation, one homeland, that is paradise, we are to embrace with equal benevolence and love every person and place, and we are to prefer to live in those places and

with those people where we find more frequent and greater opportunities to give up our will.

Trials as Opportunity to Imitate Christ Carrying the Cross

367. During temptations, by which the consecrated to the service of the Lord must be tested in some ways and severely sometimes, we need to avoid and carefully anticipate the soul's weakness and frailty, the excessive fear, sadness without reason, the scruples of conscience which slow down our interior freedom and spiritual growth. On the contrary, we must recall the great reward promised to those who fight the good fight, and imitate Him who endured the weight of the cross in order to reach the promised joy. It will be very useful to completely open up to one's superior or spiritual director with confidence, and live according to their advice.

Spiritual Reading as Nourishment of the Soul

368. Every day our religious are to imprint in their mind a passage of a spiritual book until they would read it entirely, and they are to do their best to learn from it for their interior progress.

Trust Only in God, Source of Our Peace

369. Our interior peace must not depend on the words and judgments of men, but on the witness of our conscience and the trust we have to put in God, either in adversity or in prosperity.

Custody of Tongue to Preserve Peace

370. If out of our weakness and fragility we feel provoked by one of our brothers to impatience and indignation, and if we want not to disturb peace, we are to guard our tongue diligently, so that we may let not escape words dictated by an upset and embittered state, which we will regret once we settle down. We are to remember that we are blessed when we endure offenses and insults for the love

of Jesus Christ.

Imitation of Jesus Christ's Humility and Meekness

371. Nobody on this earth is happier than a truly humble religious. By considering himself and the earthly goods as nothing, he rejoices when ridiculed, he is joyful when put down, he takes responsibility when reprehended, he forgives right away when offended. Therefore, everyone is to make an effort to imitate Jesus Christ's humility and meekness, and to prefer to be the last in the house of the Lord, busy in the humblest duties, to obey rather than to give orders, to be taught rather than to teach, considered insignificant rather than humble. In this way, he will enjoy a tranquil life in this world and full joy in the future one.

Pleasing God Only

372. Happy only because of the love and kindness of God, we are not to look for being loved by men, except the good ones, because God does not like those who long to please men.

Abstaining from Judgment

373. We will be easily upset, suspicious, prone to anger, and forgetful of ourselves if we want to pry around others' words and business. Therefore, if we are not urged by our ministry or charity, when it is a matter of others' shortcomings, we are to be silent or prudently stop talking, and to redirect our conversation to more useful topics.

Sorrow for the Sins of Others rather than Ill Thinking

374. We are to carefully avoid passing rash judgments, not to easily consent with the suspicion that worms into our souls, and we are not right away to think that there are no virtuous people where we see many live wrongly. We are to feel sorrow for the sins of others. With insistent prayers we are to ask God their conversion and never despair of the true conversion and penance of any sinner.

Being Good to All

375. All of us, especially our Superiors, are to show on their faces modesty and religious serenity rather than austere seriousness. We are to be good to all, not to refuse anyone the marks of charity, not to envy anyone, to do good, especially to those who have offended us, and to use a greater meekness and benevolence especially with them.

Incomparable Worthiness of the Human Person

376. In order to love our neighbour in deeds and truth, as it is our duty, and in order to help him/her to progress in the service of God according to our vocation, we must not consider in man the exterior poverty but the incomparable nobility and beauty of soul, that the Son of God loved so much that He became flesh for it, till death on a cross. In this way, we will feel pain if we see it disfigured by sins and shortcomings, we will rejoice if it progresses in the way of salvation, and we will take advantage of any opportunity to be helpful.

Only in God Our Joy

377. We are not to look for consolation and comfort in the exterior things, but only in God and divine things.

Endeavor in Meditation

378. We surely will reach perfection of virtue with great joy and happiness if, besides the morning and evening meditations in common, we add another half-hour privately.

Avoiding Excessive Effort in Spiritual Endeavor

379. We are to avoid that the spirit and mind be overexerted in the exercises of the interior life, so that we may persevere in God's service sound in mind and body, as well as intact in spirit.

Service to the Neighbor in Order to Please God

380. God immensely enjoys not only the interior commitment but also the exterior activities undertaken with faith because of love. Therefore, the laymen and those committed to serving others, if they carry out their ministry with zeal, will be pleasing to God and will be guided by Him to the heavenly rest through the labors of the present life.

CHAPTER OF BRESCIA

Chapter of the Servants of the Poor

It is to be prepared an ordinance to be read to all those who join us, regarding all the things they need to know:

- especially about working, taking away goods;
- that whatever one brings in will be put in common and that anything will be no longer his;
- that, should one leave, he will not ask nor keep anything as his own;
- about obedience, poverty, and patience;
- about discomfort in eating, sleeping, and clothing;
- about devotion, confession, fasting, illnesses;
- about abstinence during illnesses, about mortification, talking in a low voice, with few words;
- and especially about not taking oaths, blaspheming, as well as, lying;
- about never making excuses for wrongdoing;
- about asking permission for everything;

- and, until one is a novice, he must not do anything without permission, and all the other things which pertain to a novice. These ordinances for novices are to be exposed on a bulletin board hanging on a wall. Should they leave, they are to be treated with love, and they are not to let leave in anger, if it is possible. Passed.

On June 4, 1536, the Company of the Poor Derelict met in Brescia.

CHAPTERS, ORDINANCES AND DECREES From 1547 to 1568

In the XVIII century, the Somascan Father Giambattista Riva wrote "Gli Atti della Congregazione Somasca" (The Acts of the Somascan Congregation), a summary of the minutes of the Chapters held by the Congregation in the early years of her development. They are three handwritten volumes which give information about houses and profiles of illustrious religious, but essentially they provide lists of deliberations made in the chapters. The information is taken from original sources, the Minutes or Acts of the Chapters, which unfortunately went lost.

In 1547 the Somascans joined the Theatines. Therefore, some Chapters were held under the supervision of the Theatines' Father General and some decrees are meant to regulate such a collaboration.

Only a selection of deliberations is given here.

1547

On October first of this year, our Fathers, the Servants of the Poor, went to St. Nicola in Venice to meet, in force of the mentioned union, with the Theatines Fathers about the needs of our Company and the institutions administered by us. At first, because of the mentioned union, each one of ours expressed obedience to that Father General, who welcomed and accepted them as children, since Sir Cardinal Sabinense reminded that that was the will of the Holy Father.

.....

It was decreed that every year, in September, while someone would be in charge of the houses, priests and lay will gather to elect the Vicar and the Councillors. That the Vicar, in cases of extraordinary needs, will summon lay and priests of the two or three closest institutions.

It was again decreed that all the institutions will be visited twice per year and that the visitors will invite and persuade the children of good disposition and intelligence to learn grammar. That the children and adolescents who work, will be made to read in the morning for an hour, and the same in the evening. That in the institutions the new office will be said.

That, at meals, the older children, especially when they work, will have more portions of food, both in quality and in quantity. That children above thirteen will not be accepted, unless it is visible that they come to serve God and not for other reasons. That the older children who are in our institutions will be well trained and eat their bread [earned] with sweat. That everybody will be solicitous in cleansing ringworm and other impurities of the body, but above all those of the soul. That money could be kept for some sudden need, especially in the institutions where there is coming and going of outsiders; but the Priest and the "Commesso" must know about it.

About the adults who come into our institutions, especially priests: when there is a hint and hope that they want to serve God, they will be welcomed as guests, until Father General and the Vicar are notified.

The adolescents will not say the lesson at meals unless ordered by the Superiors, making sure, though, that everybody will say something.

When the priests are absent from the institution, the children will not be allowed to be confessed by other priests, but they have to wait for their return, unless the other [priests] have the authorization.

The permission to give communion to the children will be asked from the Pastors and Mons. Episcopal Vicar.

The Visitors will have their orders executed in each institution; and they themselves will obey the Priest and the "Comnesso".

The wayfarers will consult the Priest and the "Comnesso" about where to lodge; they will travel in simplicity and especially for the benefit of the institution to which God will lead them.

Customs will be read and observed; and everyone will sleep alone, and at least with linen pants in the summer.

In the hospitals, even though they are friendly, you will lodge the least you can.

It is recommended to the Company to often visit the children who have left our institutions, and to exhort them to go to confession, and to register them in a book designated for that purpose.

Anyone who has been dismissed or has escaped will not be taken back, if there is no need.

That the officials of the house will meet and each will report on something related to his office.

That all, especially the priests, will use the same rite for Masses, office, and other practices.

That the Priest in each institution will consult the "Comnesso" and the other adults in the things that regard the children.

The “Comnesso” will obey the Priest, and will ask his advice in the matters that require it.

The others of the family, then, will be obedient to the above mentioned “Comnesso”, but more to the Priest or Superior.

Impertinent matters or things harmful to the institution and Company will be avoided.

At the beginning and end of every operation, a prayer will be said.

Priest and “Comnesso” will consult each other when they want to go out, to see if they need companions.

The offices of the house will be entrusted to devout and intelligent people.

The Priest will watch that no one in the house waste his time, and that those who are capable and in debt to the Lord God, practice mental prayer morning and evening.

Welcome no one who goes from one institution to another, if he does not carry a letter or a message from the Priest or the “Comnesso” of the place where he comes from.

The Priest and the “Comnesso” will meet every week with those of experience and understanding to read the ordinances, which regard them; in the same way they will meet every month with the others of the community.

Children will not be sent around without serious need; other people should be used to send letters and other things.

The institutions will be cleansed of those who are not orphans and of those who take advantage; in the future, better judgment should be used in looking for these orphans.

The preceding ordinances and decrees, as I gather from an old booklet found in the Pavia archives, were not all determined in this only chapter, but also in others which followed.

In this year’s chapter it was deliberated the governance of the Company as follows:

The Superior of the Company of the Poor will be appointed Vicar and be elected by the Company itself and confirmed by the Father General of the Theatines. He may last in office for

one year and be confirmed until the third year.

This election will take place in this way: the Brother Elector will appoint the Vicar in the hands of the Father Superior present; this with the Councillors will make known those who are candidates to the office; then, they will vote; the one who receives more votes will be elected.

The same procedure will be followed in electing the new Councillors; if one is confirmed in office for the second year, it will be enough if he receives more than half of the votes.

It was ordered that everyone will confess his fault to Father Vicar and that the latter will give a salutary penance to each one.

If by accident one were greatly at fault, the Father Vicar and Councillors will have the authority to notify the Company, to submit him to the vote of the brothers, whose majority will determine his dismissal from the Company and the cleansing of the institution.

Then, those who participate in the chapter are to be elected; they will be less than a third and more than a fourth of the brothers present at the chapter or congregation, without counting either Father Vicar or the Councillors. Those elected to participate in the chapter, together with the officials, will deal with things concerning the public.

When something is proposed in the chapter, anyone will be able to object, and certainly at least one of the Councilors. The opinion of everyone will be heard and any deliberation will be always taken by the majority of opinion.

The Father Vicar and Councillors elect the "Commessi" they should elect for this office the most pious, meek and humble persons, those who walk the straight way and are fit for this task; they should counsel them with good advice to be the first in the Company as far as rank before men, but much more as far as virtues before God. These, with humility, will notify the Father Vicar of all the irregularities and defects they might to observe; and they will always dress poorly. Fr. Vicar will have

special care of them.

As far as spiritual life, it was enjoined that every day vocal prayer will be performed, morning and evening; before that, the elders will spend at least a quarter of an hour in mental prayer, will go to confession and communion once per week; while the young, every fifteen days.

There will be fasting every sixth weekday in memory of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saturday before the first Sunday of the month, and the Saturdays during the chapter. During Advent, there will be abstinence from dairy products.

Those youngsters who want to join the institutions, must be healthy and at least eighteen-year old, must be determined to obey and serve in the institutions, must have been for one year among us and divested of the world. Youngsters having such qualities will be welcomed by the Chapter and, if priests, they will wear the round biretta and a beard; if lay, they will wear a mantle according to the custom. These will be able to be officials in the institutions, participate in the meetings, and sleep in the children's dormitories.

The novices will be welcomed by the Father Vicar, or at least by one of the Councillors; they will wear their own clothes as long as they are suitable, and will stay for one year as guests, living on their own, if they can afford it.

Having to accept any institution, we will pray and fast for three days. We will consider if there is the honor of God, the salvation of any souls, the consent of the public, that is of the Ecclesiastic or secular authority of the town where we are invited. Then, the Father Vicar and Councillors, must be in full agreement with the majority of the chapter's members in the desire to accept it. The intention must be pure and simple and only for God's glory and zeal for the salvation of the souls. The conditions which will have to be proposed are the following: that we will be free to administer the Sacraments to the orphans, teach them Christian life, instill in them habits, orders and practices we deem necessary, with no opposition whatsoever. If this independence were to be hindered, and if the Protectors or Ecclesiastic and temporal authorities, after

being notified by us, were not to provide, we will be free to depart with our workers and to leave the institutions and the orphans in their hands. In the same way, if they observed that we stray from the right way and, after the evangelical correction, they found us unrepentant, they will be entitled to dismiss us. However, it will be good if before that, they could notify the chapter of the defect of the person, so that it may make provision to either correct him or change him.

1548

The 19th of September, the Congregation of the Poor met in Verona and the following ordinances were issued.

That the priests will have the cassocks made of poor cloth or linen, humble texture. And those which are brought in from home, will be of the same type of cloth, that is twill. Likewise, the “Commessi” will use poor and humble clothes.

Mules or ass will be kept for the benefit of the house.

Institutions will be visited often and diligently. The Visitor must not depart if he does not see the institution in order.

The care and governance of the house primarily will rest on the Priest; the “Commessi” will be like lieutenants, to whom the Priest must express the reason of his opinion when it is contrary; all must strive to preserve unity.

In order to help the brothers and instill in them spirit and mortification, first one and then the other will be taken to Somasca for at least a month.

The Priest, with the knowledge of the “Commessi”, will be allowed to keep a ducat in those institutions where frequently the brothers come, to be spent for extraordinary needs.

The priests will invite the children to go to confession once or twice per year with the Visitors or others sent by our Vicar, or head of the Congregation.

The Meeting of the Institutions will be held in the house every week; in it the faults will be said, the officials who are changing will be elected, everyone’s progress will be discussed, and how to improve the institutions will be dealt

wiyh.

The novices accepted in the Company will have no voice in the Chapter until they are expressively authorized by the Father and Councillors with the participation of those who will belong to the Company.

It will not be necessary to write to Venice, that is to the Father General of the Theatines, unless we would like to accept institutions or other enterprises, or welcome somebody in the body of the Company outside the time of the chapter; in fact, besides the statement of the Father General, our Father Vicar can do the other things with the only participation of the brothers or closest Councillors.

1549

On May 5, the annual meeting of the Congregation of the Company of the Poor was held:

.....

It was decreed that Christian doctrine will be taught to our children with seriousness both for their good and for making them able to send them out to teach others, after testing them well at home; only sure people will be sent out

When Fr. Vicar and Councillors are concluding some important affair, they will send some brothers to pray.

1550

On May 1, the brothers of the Company convened with the Father General of the Theatines and our Father Vicar in Brescia. It seemed to them that it was better to elect then the Father Vicar, even though before he used to be elected in September. Then the decree was established. Moreover it was established that, next fall, our Father Vicar will gather those Priests and Lay whom he would deem capable of examining those things which were to be done. It remained in

force, however, the above mentioned decree that the main Meeting, in which the Vicar and Councillors were supposed to be elected, and the representatives of priests were to be present, it was always supposed to take place at the beginning of May or toward the end of April of every year.

.....

1552

The Company, gathered in Brescia on May 13, confirmed...

In church or oratory, no other prayers will be said in public but the usual ones, especially allowing that anyone could say them in freedom. However, it will be up to the "Commessi" to have the children say Hail Mary, while they travel, and five Our Fathers for the Holy Wounds of the Lord, and a Hail Mary when they go to bed.

The fourteen-year old children and under, as well as those who have breakfast or snack, will stand at the table, unless they are tired, according to the Superiors will.

That the mother of the girls will be elected by the Father Superior or Visitors, without needing any votes from the girls themselves.

1556

On April 20, the priests and the brothers gathered in Milan...

Decree that, if some extraordinary donation should come, the Father Superior will be notified so that he may provide for that institution which he knows is more in need.

1557

On April 27, in Milan, the Company of the Servants of the Poor....

It was decreed that women will not converse where the children are.

The Sir Protectors, without our authorization, will not admit children in our institutions lest they may let enter those who are either too young or sick.

They will not dismiss from our institutions anyone older than sixteen without Father Vicar's knowledge, unless he/she is entrusted to care of some persons.

No construction of a certain importance will be made without the Company's knowledge.

.....

1559

On April 10 the Brothers gathered in Brescia...

Discussing about spending and handling money, it was considered to be a necessary thing that in those places where manufacturing has been introduced, like in Venice and Pavia, especially when the secular people do not want to take upon themselves such a trouble, it was also determined to free ourselves from such a task as much as possible. Where it is indispensable to undertake it, the Father and the "Comnesso" must agree, and everything must be registered in a book.

....

During Lent, on Fridays in March, processions will be organized; in Milan, our orphans will participate in the general processions of the town. They will do it also in the summer, when the weather is good, and during Lent only for this year.

In the institutions, the old customs already introduced will be observed, while these ones transcribed will be read in the meetings of the adults.

That in every institution the book of the Christian Life will be provided for.

1560

On April 28, the Company of the Servants of the Poor gathered in Milan, and the following decrees were established:

All the brothers, according to the old custom, will be voted every three years; in the other years in between, everyone's faults will be manifested openly. If someone were guilty of grave things, according to the Superior's will, he will be voted even before the time.

....

The following provisions were decreed:

In Somasca only the adults who are called to Ecclesiastic life will be kept; these must wear the clerical garb when they have received the sacred orders.

In all our institutions, the children with talent will be instructed in reading during meals, and in the Donato's grammar, in writing, during the feasts.

They will not sent from town to town to buy things, such as knives, booklets or other.

When the meeting or chapter has ended, everyone will ask for information from experts about the road to take in order to go about his assignment.

They will avoid as much as possible going out to eat with friends.

They will not provide the houses with pots without the Company's permission.

The night before the feasts of obligation, they will suspend work and will go to bed early in order to get up before dawn.

The Father Vicar will give the priests of the institutions the authorization of electing their own confessor at will.

The children will be taught the small blessing from the booklet so that they may say it when they go out as apprentices.

1561

On April 21, the Company gathered...

The following ordinances were issued:

The priests will be more faithful in regard to the dress code,

adjusting to the poverty and customs of the places where they live.

The churches will be visited twice per year: once by Father Vicar, and then by one of the Company, if it is possible.

The office will be said as a group, as the "Comnesso" will deem it appropriate, according to the times and places. The priests can recite it as a group, but according to the customs of the town or place.

No one will visit his relatives or will do them any favor without the permission of the Company, or at least Father Vicar's or his Councillors'.

.....

1562

Since the Brothers of the Company gathered in St. Martino in Milan...

That the children will not be taught outside the house, except those cases in which it is indispensable.

No one will be allowed to take the Sacred Orders unless he is effectively registered in the Company.

As far as the reform, everyone will take notice of what he does not like and what needs to be added, in order to report it to the next chapter, in which two deputies will be elected.

.....

1563

Having the chapter gathered in Milan on April 26....

It was ordered the Visitor to notify the Father and the "Comnesso" of their defects finds during his visit, without mentioning them in the chapter.

1564

In Milan, the chapter gathered on April 17...

Decrees:

That the latest fashion in dressing will be dropped.

That the new Superior will not change what the previous Superior did.

...

Decrees:

That the children of the school, in order that they be more steadfast in their service in the institutions, will make a promise to the chapter to persevere in obedience.

That, if by chance one of them either wanted to leave or were dismissed, Father Vicar or Superior will be able to absolve him from the obligation of any promises, and this because of our privileges and of common agreement of the Company.

1565

On May 8, the Company gathered in Triulzio and issued the following decrees:

The Superior will be allowed to transfer the brothers from one place to another, during the year, and to send people to help in any town, always though, with the consent of one of the Councillors or other brothers of the Company, and in a case of need.

When the Superior, as well as the Councillors, end their office or charge, they will give them up in the hands of the Company and will ask forgiveness for their mistakes in governing.

...

BOOK OF THE PROPOSALS

“MANUSCRIPT 30”

The Book of the Proposals, commonly known as the Manuscript 30, contains the decisions of two chapters of the Company of the Servants of the Poor. The first one was held in Brescia on June 4, 1536, while the second was probably held at Sabioncello on August 24, 1538. Some pages of the Manuscript are handwritten by Jerome Miani himself.

The Our Prayer, though contained in this Manuscript, is reported elsewhere.

On June 4, 1536, the Company of the Poor Derelict met in Brescia. They are: Sir Priest Alessandro from Milan, Sir Priest Agostino from Bergamo, Sir Jerome Miani, first Father of these poor, Marco from Milan, Giovanni the third from Como, Cristoforo, Giovanni Antonio Vergesi, Romerio, Giovanni Francesco senior, Giovanni Antonio from Milan, Agostino, Giovanni senior, Pietro from Valdimagna, Iob is absent because he is sick and is in Bergamo, Francesco the first, Bernardino the first, Martino, Bartolomeo, Giacomo, Bernardino the second.

It is reminded that also those who do not belong to the Company can ask forgiveness when they do something evil they are not aware of. It is stated in # 129.

It is reminded that the governors, when they find

some poor in need, are to notify the person in charge, and are to help them. When someone knocks at the door, no one but the doorman is to go to open. It is also reminded to read during meals, when it is possible to find someone who could read in the hospitals.

Moreover, these orders are to be observed here, especially those about the knocking at the door, talking during meals, as well as reading during meals.

Sir Priest Agostino raises his voice: too little mortification, too little care of the souls, too little vigilance.

It is to be prepared an ordinance to be read to all those who join us, regarding all the things they need to know:

- especially about working, taking away goods;
- that whatever one brings in will be put in common and that anything will be no longer his;
- that, should one leave, he will not ask nor keep anything as his own;
- about obedience, poverty, and patience;
- about discomfort in eating, sleeping, and clothing;
- about devotion, confession, fasting, illnesses;
- about abstinence during illnesses, about mortification, talking in a low voice, with few words;
- and especially about not taking oaths, blaspheming, as well as, lying;
- about never making excuses for wrongdoing;
- about asking permission for everything;
- and, until one is a novice, he must not do anything without permission, and all the other things which pertain to a novice.

These ordinances for novices are to be exposed on a bulletin board hanging on a wall.

Should they leave, they are to be treated with love, and they are not to let leave in anger, if it is possible.

Passed.

Procedures to follow before the every-4-month chapter. Since all the things done with wisdom are always

closer to the truth and such things please God and his servants, we decide that the chapter of the Servants of the Poor and of the three representatives from each place, be held every four months.

Since all the things planned have a better result than the those improvised, we decide to establish in writing the following procedures for the chapter of the Servants of the Poor and of the three representatives from the places, which is held every four months.

Eight days before the Company meets, the three Servants of the Poor are to meet in order to prepare what is going to be proposed to the Company and to the three representatives from the places.

The date for the meeting of the three Servants is to be notified to all the "Commessi" of the places. A month earlier, the date and the place of the chapter is to be communicated so that everybody may be notified, make himself free and prepare himself for the chapter. Eight days after the chapter of the Company, the three representative of the places will meet, prepared for the community. When the "Commessi" come to the chapter, they are to bring five written lists regarding the children:

- one of the children who are going to be given away as apprentices;
- one of the officials;
- one of the children according to the old order;
- one of those who deserve to be moved down according to the new order;
- one of the orders and dis-orders which are going to be proposed. To this list is to be added a report on all the children of the place entrusted to each "Comnesso".

Besides the ones who will present the three representatives of the places, that is, a procurator and one of

the three, the "Commessi" are to propose the two mentioned above, each in his own place.

Since the previous procedure is quite unclear, we will try to clarify it as follow: all the "Commessi" of the places, after prayer, are to diligently consider who could be presented to replace that procurator who is to be substituted, when the four months expire. They are also to consider changing one of the three representatives from each town, even though this pertains to the three representatives from each town. We need to do this in order to easily know the sure way and to choose the most adequate men for this spiritual exercise and most prepared ones for the chapter.

Moreover, all participants, either belonging to the Company or being representatives of each place, are to bring proposals to the chapter.

Passed.

The chapter will be held during these three times: on Pentecost, All Saints and St. Matthias' day or the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, if it does not fall during the Holy Week.

The chapter will be held one time in one place, and other times in others, according to the necessity. [We have to see whether it pertains] to the chapter to decide if it is better to go begging according to the times rather than according to the needs. To the Company it seems it does not. However, begging according to the needs means that the beggars are out continuously. To the chapter we are to ask how to give water to those who go underneath.

We remind the chapter to send the Visitors with the new orders; [to send them] before the chapter to invite the chapter, to prepare and to question the children about how the "Commessi" behaved himself.

(Prayer: Sweet Father of Ours)

We propose, each time there are the "Forty Hours", to display the Blessed Sacrament immediately, to have a small procession, at least around the church; once He is put back on the altar, to sing the praise of the "Sweet Jesus". This procession is to be done with the mysteries of the Passion, if they are there; otherwise, without. At the end of the Hours, after the "Hail, Holy Queen", it is to be said "Deus qui nobis sub Sacramento mirabili". Likewise during Mass.

To send the children begging, especially to send them to the doors of the churches with boxes, is cause for the souls to get lost and for the spiritual things to be ignored. Therefore, we propose to never send the children to the doors of churches for the purpose of collecting money or other alms with boxes. On the contrary, we are to find the way to work much, so that we may live by our sweat. Only when in dire need, we are to look for alms.

Passed: it must be done with permission of the Ordinaries.

Passed: as we work and the work increases, we must decrease the frequency of sending out boxes to the doors.

It is proposed that: on Sundays, besides the Office of the Blessed Virgin, after the Evening Prayer of the Blessed Virgin, it will also be said the Evening Prayer of the Deceased, especially for benefactors; on Mondays, after the Office of the Readings of the Blessed Virgin, it will be said the Night Prayer and the Morning Prayer of the Deceased; on Wednesdays, it will be said the Seven Penitential Psalms, staying sit; on Thursdays, the Office of the Holy Spirit; on Fridays, the Office of the Cross or Passion; on Sundays, after the Office of the Readings of the Blessed Virgin, it will be said, kneeling, the Seven Penitential Psalms, the Litanies and the prayers.

It is proposed that all members of the Company, on Fridays, will do the discipline early in the morning and in private, in remembrance of the Passion of our Lord.

It has passed that on Sundays, after the Office of the

Blessed Virgin, the Seven Penitential Psalms will be said. On the weekdays, only the Office of the Blessed Virgin is to be said. If any feasts fall on the same day, also the Office of the Deceased is to be said. On Wednesdays also the Seven Gradual Psalms are to be said; on Thursdays the Office of the Holy Spirit and on Fridays the one of the Cross, always if any feasts fall in those days.

It is proposed to give a helper to the “Commessi” who work in the hospitals; this helper, belonging or not to the Company, during the chapter is to replace the “Commessio”. When the “Commessio” participates in the chapter, the helper is to summon all the children of that institution and, after much praying, is to question them in secret, one by one, about the “Commessio’s” mistakes. And he is to take with him two presidents who are to investigate the same thing. Everything is to be put in writing and sent to the chapter, but not through the “Commessio”.

We know by experience that in almost all the hospitals much disobedience and many disorders occur, and many people are scandalized and ill impressed. This is caused by the “Commessi” who are indiscreet, who have no zeal for the souls or care for themselves. Moreover, those who cause these disorders are not faithful and constant in the works. Therefore, we propose that the “Commessi” must correct first themselves and then those who are entrusted to their custody; that an investigation on the management of the house has to be done diligently; and that for those who are found to be the cause of disturbance and who are unable to settle down, another way will be found, that is, either to send them to live with others or to give them a better way of salvation.

My opinion.

We poor ask that our priests: may live on alms, in a community; may celebrate in the Roman rite, privately, for us

poor, even during those prohibitions not caused by us; may hear confessions in all our institutions also of those who are related to us; may recite the Office together; may preach publicly in our institutions; may read and explain the Sacred Scriptures in our institutions; may receive the Sacred Orders even without having any income, if they are candidate to priesthood; may choose among themselves a leader to whom they could give obedience; may renounce everything according to the requirements of community life. Moreover, [we ask] that all those who will be in these institutions or related to them, may receive plenary indulgence at their death, and “the statione” in their life. For any other things, [we ask] to stay under the jurisdiction of the Ordinary.

We propose to hold the chapter only twice per year and, in order not to disrupt devotions, to see to it that it will not be held during Lent. Instead of the chapter, [we propose] to send visitors more often; they should be at least two, who will divide the towns, since one alone cannot visit all the places easily.

We propose to hear the opinion of all the brothers before admitting somebody into the Company.

It passed that the chapter will be held only twice per year, every six months, but between chapters, the custom of visiting twice is to be maintained.

It passed that:

- no one who is in the institutions will keep silk bookmarks in their books;
- in the refectories of our institutions no tablecloths will be used, but a small tablecloth for each one; table cloths will be cut for other needs; had any institutions abundance of them, they are to share them with others; should a noble person come to have a meal among the poor, the same custom must be used, but with cleaner linen;
- meat will not be bought, except in cases of true necessity, for the sick or the elders; the “Com messo” will have authority,

when no alms are given, to buy something cheap for the Sundays and other solemn feasts;

- shouldn't there be enough food to eat with bread for everybody in the house, it will be given only to the elders and small children; in delivering it, it will be assured that everybody is given his/her own portion;

- in the houses of the poor, no roast of any kind will be prepared either during chapters or other circumstances, except for the sick;

- in our institutions the "Commessi" will continually remind to observe poverty, especially in seasoning the soup and burning wood;

- the brothers of the Company will be reminded to observe the rules drawn up and established by the happy and blessed soul of our Father Jerome regarding poverty, either interior or exterior, rules which are contained in the Rules for the Due Circumstances; the observance of these rules is manifested in the way we dress;

- if somebody, inspired by the Spirit of the Lord to confirm himself more to the will of the happy soul of our Father sir Jerome about poverty (that he loved so much and he demonstrated in his deeds), does not want to wear linen shirts, will be given woolen shirts, but not serge shirts; and this will not be for the reason of being different, but for spurring on the other brothers to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, naked on the cross;

- in our institutions some hoods or small mantles will be made for those who go around begging so that they may cover themselves during begging and traveling.

It must be done.

In all our institutions they are to do what they can.

Those who have been elected as first father and Councillors are: sir priest Federico, sir priest Angelo Marco and sir priest Marco. They will have authority over the whole Company but they cannot admit into or dismiss anybody from the Company,

or add and take away any practice. This chapter was held at St. Mary in Sabioncello, on August 24, 1538, feast of St. Bartholomew.

In Pavia, younger children can be put with some older ones, so that the latter may help them out, but they are to have no maliciousness.

We are not to take the place of Sabioncello unless it is completely empty.

To sir Fr. Marco is given the task to transcribe all the practices in order in one book, and as many copies are to be made as many are the communities, so that every place may be given a copy.

I, Don Luca Antonio Fasolo, cleric regular of Somasca, under oath state that I have heard the testimony from Tognò and Togni, eighty-year old men, who were questioned by me whether they knew Father Jerome Miani. They told me this detailed story: Two brothers, hostile to each other, met while one was coming down from Somasca and the other was going up from Vercurago. Facing each other on the path, they started cursing the Blessed Virgin and our Lord. Father Jerome, arrived while they were quarreling, spoke these words: "Brothers, what kind of evil did our Lord and the Blessed Virgin do, that you blaspheme so atrociously? I will do penance for you". He knelt in the mud and started to take mud with his mouth, while asking our Lord for mercy and forgiveness. Seeing that, the two brothers made peace by hugging and kissing each other.

This is what I heard from the two above mentioned. And from the same two, I heard, when I was sixteen or seventeen, that our Father Miani has performed the miracle of the multiplication of the bread.

PASTORAL LETTER OF MONS. LUIGI LIPPOMANO, Bishop of Bergamo - 1533

“Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful” (Matthew 5; Luke 6).

He who reflects well and uses the warm reason of intellect, clearly will understand that the first and foremost foundation of the Christian religion is mercy, clemency, and compassion because every our human and divine perfection consist of them. By them, we conform to the likeness of God. Therefore, he who examines well the evangelical text and the precepts exposed by our compassionate redeemer and contained in the Christian law, in truth finds that the above mentioned law of mercy and perfection does not claim anything but perfect love, and mutual delight, and support among mortals, though such a delight is extended to God first.

This mercy and its sharing among Christians has to be as such and much that every our possession of spiritual as well as material goods should be shared among all faithful, as we read in the Acts and deeds of the Apostles in chapter 2, where we find that “all those who believed lived together and had everything in common; they sold their possessions and goods and shared out all the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed”. And in the chapter 4: “none of their members was ever in want”. In fact, the holy Apostle Barnabas sold his own possessions and brought the proceed to the feet of the Apostles to be distributed among the needy. Therefore, from God he obtained such a gift of grace that he was called to the status of Apostle. Then, such a rite was observed by the other apostles, who, invited by Christ to follow Him, after having left behind and distributed in works of mercy their earthly possessions, began their spiritual life that led them to incorruptible and eternal life. Therefore, we conclude that the principle and foundation and perfection of our

Christian religion is but a bond of perfect brotherly mercy and love. He who is endowed with it, can truly call himself Christian because, as St. Ambrose maintains, “all the knowledge of the Christian religion consists in mercy and compassion”.

To such a mercy, when it is explained with enthusiasm and spread around in abundance, we have to attribute numerous sound fruits, mainly three, which are bestowed by God.

.....

Illumined by such a consideration, enkindled by divine grace, and inflamed by perfect love, the magnificent and generous Sir Jerome Miani, Venetian nobleman, wanted to institute a rule and a way of living and doing good not as much for his own salvation, but as a common documentation and example for everyone in this mortal pilgrim life. This rule was instituted first for himself and then for those who wanted to imitate him. No doubt, in persevering in it, with divine grace, one can be sure of his final salvation. The reason is, as we have said at the beginning of our speech, that the principle and foundation of the Christian religion consists in renouncing and giving up the earthly, fragile and fleeting riches and powers, and convert them to the common use for the poor beggars and needy, according to Jesus Christ's teaching, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell everything you have and give to the poor, then come and follow me”. Wishing to obey and follow this sound advice, he got rid of every fear of future poverty and need, with a joyful heart and prompt will he distributed not a small quantity of earthly goods and riches for the common support of the needy, as he knew well their necessities and needs.

He also considered it to be a little thing to have shared such riches, which are not really ours. In fact, they are not given to us, but they are only lent to us by God under the power of the unstable fortune. Believing that he did not distribute his own things, but that he was only God's deliverer, after such a

donation he dedicated all of himself, with all his corporal strengths and the power of his soul, to the honor, aid, instruction, teaching, custody, defense and material and spiritual support of any miserable, sick, afflicted, abominable and calamitous person, either man or woman, above all if they were widows and orphans. Great admiration is raised in the faithful who look at so profuse and immense a charity, so much mercy and compassion: to wash disgusting wounds with his own hands, to wipe the plagues, to cure with sound remedies and bandages, to bear with stinking odors and other dirt which cause nausea and abomination in both nurses and supervisors, while not only not abhorring them, but touching them with his own hands as if they were fragrant of sweet odor.

What unheard-of tolerance! What immense compassion! What virtues in our days a man so generous and nourished in delights expresses for our benefit! Truly happy are and will be those who, despising the fleeting worldly delights, follow his footsteps and examples. We can truly believe that God, who sees (with the eye of his divine and eternal Providence) and governs every human creature in this happy age of ours, has illustrated him so much that today's mortals, led astray from the sanctity of Christian religion, much enraged and alienated from any form of meekness and compassion, through him may be recalled to the right, honest, compassionate, catholic and Christian rite. In fact, we can already see the clear example of some once public prostitutes, who, left behind their dishonest, infamous, and lusting life, are led to sound penance. And many others of both sexes, once nourished in carnal delights and passions, after many attempts, much care, mercy, and exhortations, he has bent to be more generous and charitable, and to give up dishonest and vicious conversations.

In order to have this good beginning grow and bear fruits, the above praised Sir Jerome, eager to provide universal health to his followers and growth and perseverance to his children and

disciples, but above all in order to have the means to feed the above-mentioned miserable people, orphans and widows, for the sake of charity begs the Christian faithful to let themselves be moved by piety and compassion for so many poor sick and troubled, who are already so numerous under his care, while others are going to join in, and to help them mercifully with large alms, according to their quality and abundant possibilities.

Moreover, he makes each person aware that the alms donated by faithful and devotees will not be wasted or swayed to any other cause, but will be only used for the support of the above mentioned troubled people. In order that Sir Jerome may more easily help such miserable people, it has been ordered that three men tailored for this task be appointed in every neighborhood of our town to raise the above mentioned alms and to deliver them according to the needs.

As almost a religious act, all those appointed to such a task and charity will meet at least once a week to discuss the things useful or necessary for the support of these children, orphans, widows and other miserable people who are under the care and education of Sir Jerome. He does not want any other care of those troubled people but procuring physical health, if they are sick, with his own hands, and serving, educating, and bringing them to the fear of God, as well as to a just, honest religious living and conversing. By leaving to the appointed men the task of collecting alms, he will raise this company as a devout religion, so that God be praised and our town and fatherland be edified, while the givers of alms will receive merit and immortal reward. In order to acquire the latter, the Bishop will also grant, besides what has been said above, forty days of indulgence to those who will give alms to the mentioned poor, for every alms, for any work, advice or favor to their benefit.

Moreover, some noble gentlewomen of good reputation,

honesty, prudence and good morals, are appointed to handle the government and management of those who have left their dishonest lives and have turned to true penance. Such gentlewomen have to teach a just, honest and moral living. They will receive the care and management of all the other sick, orphans and miserable girls who entered or will enter in such a Congregation. In order that this benefit be useful to everybody, not only to the people of our town, but to all our fatherland, it is ordered that in all the lands of our Diocese will be appointed some devout persons who are going to provide the alms to feed such miserable poor. To them it is also enjoined that they should be solicitous to find out if in their lands or towns or villages where they are appointed, there were such poor people: sick, worn out, children, widows and others who do not have the means for living because of great want and poverty, or do not have support; they should notify them to the Congregation. In turn, it must welcome them, feed them and assist them together with the other poor. It has also been ordered that the alms given by devout people will not be accumulated for buying properties or real estates, but that, day by day, they will be delivered for the benefit of the poor. In this way, they are going to live in poverty and that, in the current day, they will not know what kind of food they will have the following day, so that it will be fulfilled the saying of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said to his disciples: "Do not worry about what you are going to eat and drink; in fact, your Father in heaven knows what you need".

In God we have to put all our hope and trust because He even feeds the bird of the sky. Therefore, those who desire to reach the heavenly fatherland, where every good is owned, every reasonable hunger is satisfied and satiated, with every effort and vigilant concern are to approach to and resolve for such works of mercy. They are also to be sure, without any doubt, that over them will descend superabundant gifts of heavenly graces, through which they will arrive to the longed harbor of salvation.

**PERMISSION LETTER
OF MONS. PETER LIPPOMANO
Bergamo, August 1, 1538**

We, Sir Peter Lippomano, by the grace of God and the Apostolic See, Bishop of Bergamo and Conte, etc., to the beloved children in Christ, the priests Alessandro from Varese, Federico Panigarola, Agostino Barili, Angelomarco and Vincenzo Gambarana, Giovanni Belloni, Marco Strata, Pietro Piemontese, to the laymen Mario di Lanza, Antonio da Monferrato, Giovanni Maria di Casale, Giovanni Maria degli Oldrati, Giovan Pietro Borelli, Giovanni Francesco and Daniele and Girolamo brothers from Bergamo, Giovanni da Milano, Giovan Pietro da Gorgonzola, to the citizens and laymen of the towns of Bergamo, Brescia, Milan, Pavia, Como and Genua, greetings and friendship in the Lord.

Not long ago, we have received a petition from you. Desiring to save your souls and serve God in sincerity of life, you have abandoned your fatherly professions, and your worldly commitments. Now, in common agreement, you are asking us to live in common, in order to apply yourselves to continuous prayer, to live on alms, as some people at the times of the apostles used to do.

Without adopting the habit of any particular approved religion but persevering each one of you in his specific vocation, you ask of us the authorization to elect a perpetual or temporary superior, who will be the responsible of your society or congregation and have the power to govern and order what each of you must do.

You have asked that, taking into consideration the abilities of each, some of you could announce the Word of God, others take care of the abandoned boys and girls, of the sinner women, of the converted ones, and to serve in hospitals especially the poor incurables or struck by other illnesses, and some others, with the consent of their superior,

could be sent to towns and villages as a consolation of the faithful and as a comfort of the Churches, as the apostles Paul, Barnabas and Sila did.

In the above mentioned petition, you have also asked to be able to do any other thing that may give glory and honor to God and be useful to your souls' and your neighbour's salvation.

You have explicitly declared that you want to exercise these activities with the authorization of the Ordinaries in whose dioceses you will attain the permission to stay, under their obedience.

In order to exercise the above-mentioned activities with a clear conscience, you have humbly petitioned, as a special favor, our consent and authorization.

Enkindled by the zeal of your devotion, We, as far as possible, want to cooperate with the Lord and would like to meet your requests. We know well the works you have so far accomplished in our city and diocese of Bergamo and in Somasca. We are sure that, with the Lord's help, both you and all those who will join in your society, will be able to do even greater works.

For the above reasons, you are welcomed to come to our diocese of Bergamo any time you want; you may accept, temporarily or for ever, all those institutions that with devout charity are going to be offered to you; you may have the faculty of keeping or relinquishing those you have already received, as you deem more appropriate. You may gather together and establish congregations and societies; you may live in common, pray publicly or privately, daily or nightly, alone or in common; you may elect a superior who will be presented to us in order to be ratified. Your every activity shall be submitted to his authority and discernment. You may issue all those statutes and ordinances that you deem right and advisable. The priests may celebrate and, if they are deemed suitable by the superior and authorized by us, may preach the word of God; anyway, you must present to us all the statutes and ordinances you will make for their approval.

We give you also the faculty that some of you, deemed by you capable, may take care of the orphaned and abandoned girls and boys, of the sinner women, of those converted, and especially of the incurable sick and of Christ's poor; some others may go around as a consolation for the faithful, devout people and churches.

It is given to you the faculty of choosing a confessor; be he diocesan or religious from whatever, who will hear your confessions and absolve you from all your sins, even from those whose absolution is reserved to us, and of course give you a sound penance. You may have a chapel with a movable altar in all those places which, as it has been said, will be given to you, and there you or other priests may celebrate when you want. And last, you may realize and accomplish everything you may deem useful for the glory of God, for the salvation of your souls' and your neighbour's.

We exhort you to be always submitted to us, to Sir the Vicar and to our successors. Live under our and his obedience.

To all the pastors of the churches and their substitutes in the city and diocese of Bergamo, we order -- in case of infringement they will incur immediate excommunication, however, after the triple admonition -- not to bother you, not to hinder you in any way and under any pretext, either directly or indirectly, either in public or in private, either directly or through others, and not to dissuade you from your commitment of undertaking and managing these pious activities; not to prevent you from reaching, enjoining and using what we have granted you; on the contrary, we order that in these things they must encourage, defend, and assist you on your demand.

However, you must endeavor in the Lord so that your ideals, your lives, your works of mercy for Christ's poor may shine before men. May the Christians glorify God the Almighty Father for the witness you give and, spurred by your example, they may be converted to a better lifestyle.

To all the faithful who will offer you help, advice or

favors in the above mentioned things, and to all those who will offer help to you who have decided to live in the sincere poverty of Christ, by the ordinary authority we enjoy, we grant forty days of indulgence in the Church's usual form. To you, however, We enjoin to continue to pray for the happiness of our Lord, Pope Paul III, of the Most Serene Prince of Venice and also for us.

Bergamo, August 1, 1538

From the Bishop Palace

In faith:

Alexander Algerius, Chancellor

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