

**Called to Holiness**  
**This is the will of God, your sanctification (1 Thess 4.3)**

Cottolengo, writing to a cleric friend on May 13, 1811, informs him of the happy events that were approaching, that is, his priestly ordination, which took place on following 8<sup>th</sup> June. And he requests him to pray for him every day, the "Veni Creator", so that the Lord may transform him into another man (cf. C, I, p. 58).

The deacon Cottolengo in that moment feels the need that the Holy Spirit may change him into another man, that is, a man of God for the exercise of priestly ministry. Probably we too on some occasion felt the same desire to be truly transformed into a man or woman of God, that is holy, so that our consecrated life could be meaningful for ourselves first of all and for the Church.

Well, this desire is not an isolated desire of someone particularly sensitive to the spiritual life, but it is a desire that should be felt by all the faithful, because all the disciples of Christ are called to holiness.

At the time of Cottolengo this universal call to holiness was not a common doctrine in the Church, only a few schools of spirituality supported it, e.g. St. Francis de Sales. In the manuals of theology it was not treated. Only the Second Vatican Council officially proclaimed this doctrine in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (cf. Chap. V), based on clear biblical teaching (cf. e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4.3: "This is the will of God, your sanctification"). It is worth making the comparison between the words of the Cottolengo and Vatican II.

The Saint writes about 140 years before the Council: "... I tell you ... that none of the Christians in any state and condition he may find himself can be exempted, if he wishes to save, from attending ... to holiness in a manner corresponding to his profession as a Christian "(Sermons, t. 6,7,82). Vatican II says: "it is therefore clear to everyone that all the faithful of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (LG, 40, b). It can be seen that there is almost identity of words between the Cottolengo and the Council.

Cottolengo, then, more and more convinced of the call of all to holiness, prescribed in the Little House noted invocation "Virgin Mary Mother of Jesus, make us saints." Besides proclaiming the universal call to holiness, Cottolengo also explains in what it consists.

In fact, he writes that "the perfection to which our Lord commands us to attend", consists "in an unlimited desire to climb always higher in the virtue without being content with some degree, although already remarkable ... reminding us always of the input that the Holy Spirit gives us that the true Christian is the one who constantly walks every moment in good and grows in it, like the sun that just popped up on the horizon restlessly wanders and grew up until high noon, or as the Psalmist speaks [cf. Sal 1] that a true follower of Christ is like a tree planted along the banks of the clear waters, grows, swells to increase its branches as it were up to heaven "(Sermons, t. 7,10,37 ). In other words we should not put limits to meet the demands of charity.

If all are called to holiness, for no one to reach it is impossible. Cottolengo criticizes the theory of the impossibility "God cannot command the impossible ... as recalled the Council of Trent ... Deus impossibilia non iubet" (= God does not command the impossible) "[DS 1536]. The saint, however, acknowledges the difficulty of following the path of holiness; but the grace of God rescues us: "That mighty and strong grace that comforted Paul in thousand troubles ... though will it not be this divine grace still ready to support you and help you in your needs, if you remain faithful to the Lord ?" (Sermons , t. 6,7,87).

There is no reason to be discouraged because of our shortcomings and our faults because the Holy Spirit makes us understand that "nemo repente fit summus" (= no one becomes suddenly excellent) (Sermons, t. 11,24,75). In his message for the 175th anniversary of the original inspiration of the Cottolengo, the Pope St. John Paul II wrote that holiness is "the most significant prophecy that the Little House of Divine Providence can offer to humanity of the third millennium" (Message ... , p. 10).

In these first years of the third millennium we had the beatification of two cottolenghini: Mons. Francesco Paleari on September 17, 2011 and Brother Luigi Bordino on May 2, 2015, as well as the diocesan inquiry concluded on the heroic virtues of Sister Maria Carola Cecchin (7 October 2014) and the allegedly miraculous event attributed to her intercession (22 June 2016). It can be said that the third millennium for the Little House was started very well as indicated by Pope John Paul II. And therefore how can we continue on this path so that the prophecy of holiness will become a humble and constant witness for the good of the Little House, of the Church and of the world?

Pope John Paul II reminds us authoritatively that "it is urgent to proclaim and witness the Gospel of charity and solidarity" because "charity is the precious treasure of the Church, which with its charitable works speaks even to the hardest hearts and to those seemingly insensitive" (Message, p. 8). We have to believe that true charity is our particular form of evangelization. Furthermore, the Pope reminds us that the exercise of charity should be like a single fire with two flames, one directed to the Lord and the other to the poor man and that every service of others must be born of a constant and profound contact with God . In a word, we must strive for holiness. (P. 9)

This is the "high standard" of Christian life we are called with the help of God, of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of our saints and blessed.

Turin, July 22, 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lino Piano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'L' and 'P'.

*P. Lino Piano*