



CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

**FOR THE YEAR OF FAITH
ON THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS**

Roma 2012

Habete fidem Dei!
How good it has been for us to live
with this faith in God for more than forty years!
And how pleasing this has been to God!
This already shows that He is thinking about us.
I cannot rejoice or thank the Lord enough for his Providence!
(Peter Semenenko, Letters, vol. XVI, p. 84)

Dearest Brothers!

Having arrived at my second year of service, I direct myself to you once again with a circular letter. This time I would like to invite you to a common reflection on the gift of faith of our Founders Bogdan Jański, Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz. Pope Benedict XVI encourages us to do this with his Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei* and with his proclamation of the Year of Faith, which will last from October 11, 2012 to November 24, 2013, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican Council II. The Holy Father hopes that this will be “a time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith.” (4). It is my hope that the unshakeable faith of our Fathers be for all of us an impetus to rediscover, revitalize and strengthen our faith, to share it with others, to spread it and to witness to it with our consistency in both its personal and communal dimensions.

1. The occasion to renew our faith

We believe that in His love
the Father call us to conversion
(Charism)

Faith is man’s response to the Word of God; and God, in giving him the grace of faith, always takes care of its growth and maturation. We see it in the example of the great personalities of the Bible (patriarchs, prophets, apostles, etc.). And we see it to an even greater extent in the Risen Lord, who with great determination and urgency renews the faith of his disciples, while leaving to future generations the promise – beatitude: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (Jn 20: 29), a hope always present for us.

Our Founders, after having lived their conversion in France, sealed thereafter by the Sacrament of Reconciliation, began – with the help of God’s grace – the process of being transformed into “new men”; a process which *de facto* lasted (for so it must) for their whole lives. The strength of this process was obviously the power of God, but the human support was in their example of life and in the encouragement they received from others, in their reading from the Bible and from religious and

philosophical books, in spiritual direction and in the sacramental service of priests. It is opportune to remember one of the first acts in this process. Through the initiative of Bogdan Jański, in autumn of 1835 Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz “for their own spiritual encouragement and to detach themselves even more from the world”, made a very solid spiritual retreat in the resurgent Benedictine monastery at Solesmes. In a pilgrimage on foot they covered the distance of 260 kilometers between Paris and the monastery. For them the experience of the retreat was so beautiful, that they compared it to a stay in Paradise. At its end they arrived at this conclusion: “Only by a truly Christian life will we be able to compensate, at least in part, for the grace that the Lord has rendered us by opening our eyes” (Jerome Kajsiewicz, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 24).

Our Constitutions, reminding us of our call to conversion, clarify that this consists in a personal resurrection together with Jesus to a new life, permeated with the power of his Spirit (cf. the Charism). This continuous conversion – the first, the second and every successive one—is a force that purifies, renews and deepens our faith. Undertaking this road of conversion, which continues throughout our life, we desire to give an ever more visible witness to the power of God, which in a truly mysterious way transforms human existence and the course of the world’s events.

In this context, the Year of Faith invites us to reawaken within us the desire to see the face of God and to take heed of the need for an authentic and ever new conversion to the Lord. Father Peter Semenenko wrote to one of his confreres: “Oh that you might have clearer eyes of faith and spiritual understanding, that you might see fully how beautiful is this life, how good, full of truth and salvation for all eternity! May this place where God has placed you be for you a condition for every grace and blessing of God” (*Letters*, vol. XIV, p. 62). I would like us to learn again from these words, which I address as my wish for each one of you.

2. The occasion for fidelity to the faith

*This dedication entails an act of faith
whereby we respond to God’s call
to give ourselves completely ... to him*

(Constitutions 13)

God, taking under his special protection the Chosen People, made a covenant with them on Mount Sinai, which he renewed often along the course of history. This act, according to the divine plan, was to guarantee the greatest durability, stability and efficacy of their bond: above all on the part of man, because God is always faithful. This truth is recalled in the prophets as well as in the prayer of the Psalms, the liturgy and the reflections of Wisdom: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33).

Our first priests (Semenenko, Kajsiewicz, Hube and Duński) were aware of their duty to bring to completion, before beginning their apostolic work, the process of the

foundation of the Congregation; and therefore to write a rule, to give a name to the community and to consolidate its religious framework: namely, to choose a superior and to bind themselves by religious vows. To Father Peter Semenenko was entrusted the task of composing the final draft of the Rule, which was approved at midnight on Holy Saturday, March 26, 1842; furthermore, he was elected superior for five years. The first Resurrectionists professed religious vows in the Congregation of the Resurrection for the first time in history at dawn on Easter morning in the Catacombs of St. Sebastian in Rome: first Father Peter, before the community; and then, in his hands, the other members of the community.

Our Constitutions underline that by the reality of our religious vows “we dedicate and consecrate ourselves totally to the Risen Christ,” and “we respond to God’s call to give ourselves completely with all our talents, abilities and powers to him, to the Church and to the Congregation” (13). This awareness of God’s call and of our response draws us to an understanding of religious profession as a covenant of conjugal love. In this covenant God wants us to offer ourselves as a free and total gift, thus belonging exclusively to Him. In this way our living of the religious vows and our fidelity to them, which conform us to the poor, chaste and obedient Christ, become the leaven of the new creation, and thus for many people “will serve as an inspiration, ... encouraging them to live their own Christian vocation more faithfully” (15).

We are living in times where everything vacillates, in which decisions are made apart from responsibility and commitment, in which under the pretense of freedom various choices are pursued in which an antivocational culture is dominant, which denies the value of permanent choices as well as definitive commitments for one’s entire life. For this reason the Year of Faith is a propitious occasion for the rediscovery and the deepening of the meaning of the covenant God has bound with us by means of the mysterious call to follow Christ on the road of the evangelical counsels, i. e. consecration by religious vows. A long time ago Fr. Peter Semenenko tried to comfort one of his confreres with these words: “Dear Father! You are worrying yourself uselessly; you are too anxious about many things and afraid of the future. You need to foresee these things, but not to be frightened; and above all you need to have a strong faith, since we belong to the Lord; we are his work and he attends to us as the apple of his eye. We are not men of little faith! Indeed, faith in the Lord never disappoints, and how often have we had proofs of his special protection?! And he will not disappoint us, even to the end.” (*Letters*, vol. XIV, p. 148)

3. The occasion for deepening our understanding of the contents of the faith

*Doctrinal formation continues through growth
in the personal assimilation of the mysteries of faith*

(Constitutions 162)

St. Paul wrote to the Romans: “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (10:17). The Word of Christ – preserved in the gospels– contains immense riches of content in its diverse forms of teaching. Every generation of Christians has drawn from this treasure, looking in it for inspiration and indications for living by the light of faith. Even at the time of Jesus, we must admit, some of the truths of faith were difficult to accept for his listeners. St. John, recounting the miraculous multiplication of the loaves performed by Jesus and his Eucharistic discourse, notes that indeed many of his own disciples reacted with the statement: “This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? (Jn 6:60). Then he adds that “from that moment many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him” (Jn 6:66). In this dramatic situation, to Jesus’ question, “Will you also go away?” Peter responds: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (Jn 6:67-68).

Our life history is marked from the very beginning by many abandonments: even in the very “nucleus” of the Congregation, from the first five who formed part of the “House of Jański”, only three persevered. In the third volume of John Iwicki’s history of the Congregation we find an index of all the members after first vows, from 1842 to 1990. This reading is very shocking! In this period first vows were professed by 1890 persons, of whom 1000 abandoned the road once undertaken. This does not mean that all of them had problems with faith or that all of them should have been forced to remain with us. It seems, however, that something did not work; perhaps in the discernment of their vocations, or in their hearts, or even in the very structures of the Community. Because “unless the heart, the authentic sacred space within the person, is opened by grace that allows the eyes to see below the surface and to understand that what has been proclaimed is the word of God” (*Porta fidei* 10) – then faith will never be transformed into a definitive decision such as following the Lord and living with him.

Our spirituality of a profound discipleship of Christ is formulated in our Constitutions in terms of a continual dying and rising together with him. With Jesus we die to ourselves when we submit our way of thinking to the service of his plans, when we subjugate our will to his and immerse our heart in his. We rise with Christ when we let ourselves be guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who makes us perceive the stunning beauty of an evangelical option so demanding that it awakens in us the desire to respond positively and completely; and then sustains us in its faithful implementation and forms the hearts of those called, conforming them to Christ and prodding them to make his mission their own (cf. *Vita consecrata* 19). We rise with Christ also when we make ourselves available for service without saving up our energies and are ready to accept our brother such as he is; when we are always ready to forgive; when we experience the interior need to *place everything in common*: material goods and spiritual goods, talents and inspirations, as well as apostolic ideals and charitable service – in a word, when we exercise perfect fraternal charity and we give to the world a witness of being good disciples of Christ (cf. *Constitutions* 1, 7; *Vita consecrata* 42).

That our faith might be professed, as with our Fathers, we must announce the beauty of following the Lord wherever he sends us, to give witness of a Christian and religious life. Father Jerome, speaking of the benefits of faith, explained: “Faith, here on earth, raises the dignity of man and divinizes him, making him a participant in God’s life, which is the beginning and fount of human life. Faith assures us of eternal life, because whoever has faith lives in justice, carrying out good and holy works, which will be the basis for an eternal reward” (*Pisma*, vol. 1, p. 354). May the Year of Faith be a propitious occasion to deepen and to share the great mysteries of our Faith: living it, for example, by means of successful House Meetings, monthly days of recollection or annual retreats.

4. The occasion to fortify our faith in the Risen Lord

*We give glory to God by manifesting
the presence of the Risen Christ to the world*

(Constitutions 5)

The message of the Resurrection of Christ is the nucleus of the Good News and at the same time the key which opens for us the understanding of Revelation. It is the fundamental truth of the Gospel, in which the entire preaching of the Church finds its source, beginning with the first discourse of the Apostle Peter, who on the day of Pentecost “standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “... (this) Jesus of Nazareth, ... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:14. 23-24). The Resurrection of Christ is the fundamental and crowning truth of our faith. “Fides christianorum resurrectio Christi est” – says St. Augustine. Earlier yet, St. Paul, explaining to the Corinthians the truth about the resurrection, declares unequivocally: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14).

Religious communities, in their spiritualities and their various forms of activity, are called, according to the desire of the Church, to accentuate and re-present some specific aspect of the one mystery of Christ (cf. *Vita consecrata* 93). Divine Providence has assigned to us – and in this we should glory – precisely this essential and splendid truth of the Christian faith: the Resurrection of Christ. Considering things from today’s perspective, it might amaze us that neither in the Diary of the Founder nor in his letters do we find any word sounding like the word “resurrection”. Of course, there are some words associated with it, such as: “banner”, “decay”, “new life” and “rebirth”. The awareness, however, that the mystery of the Resurrection was for us *the* Gospel sign, remained in the hearts of the first generation and bloomed anew on the day of their first vows, and in a special way when in 1842 the administration of the Church of St. Claude in Rome was entrusted to us. Father Kajsiewicz made this observation: “It pleased God to give us an exterior proof that He himself is the inspiration for the name we have taken, namely the Resurrectionists”. And he wrote thus in his Memoirs: “We had never seen it (the Church of St. Claude),

because it only used to be open for one mass in the morning. It was a great and pleasant surprise to find above one of the three altars a painting of the Resurrection of the Lord. This was a very curious event, because until then no one had ever heard of the existence of any other altar in all of Rome, dedicated to the Resurrection of the Lord” (*Pisma*, vol. 3, p. 426).

The radical originality of the Resurrection – according to our Constitutions – should mark our whole life: our thoughts, our will, our feelings, our mentality, our actions and our attitudes. The person of Christ Risen, always present among us, is the revelation of God’s love. A particular manifestation of this love was experienced by our Founders and by all of us who have followed them. Moved by this awareness, we feel the need “to witness to this transforming power of God’s love, not only in our own personal lives, but also in community life” and in our apostolic work. Living his love daily in the Eucharist, we extend our hearts, bearing a clear witness of hope to all those to whom we are sent. A carefully prepared Liturgy is one of the most important aspects of this testimony, inasmuch as it expresses the eternal and joyful “Alleluia” of the Church’s paschal season (cf. *Constitutions* 1-3).

In this perspective, the Year of Faith is for us Resurrectionists an invitation to experience anew, in the paschal mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, the fullness of God’s love, which saves us and calls us to conversion and to a change in lifestyle. Together with Father Jerome I would like to touch the heart and the will of each one of us: “Just as the Risen Christ who appeared, gladdened, blessed, consoled and encouraged, so also we, raised up and confirmed in the Spirit, are apostles of the Risen One. Let us raise our gaze to heaven, where at the right hand of the Father our Risen Lord sits and awaits us, preparing a dwelling for us” (K. Wójtowicz [ed.], *Tryptyk wielkanocny*, Kraków 1999, p. 18).

5. The occasion for sharing our faith

*Individual houses must be vital Christian communities,
where the faith, hope and love of each religious
is both expressed and developed.*

(Constitutions 133)

The People of God of both the Old and the New Covenants appears on the pages of the Bible as “the pilgrim faith community”. On God’s part, gathering all men into one people was a process begun the moment in which sin destroyed communion with God as well as communion of people with one another. God, when he called Abram to set out on the road to paths unknown, at the same time promised him that he would become the father of a great nation. Later on, his bestowing upon Israel a particular love as the chosen people was a sign of the future uniting of all peoples into one. In spite of this, the people were not faithful to their vocation; and thus the prophets accused them of having broken the covenant and of having behaved as a prostitute (cf. Jer 2:1-32), on account of which they called the people to return to their original

bond with God. The Lord Jesus, before instituting the Church as “the new chosen people”, had asked his Father in his priestly prayer that his disciples “may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:22-23). Sacred Scripture places a strong emphasis on the communitarian aspect of human existence, because it is in community that man learns to listen to the words of God and to celebrate his mysteries; furthermore, in community people can sense the presence of a God who loves us and can experience the power of the unity of our faith.

Every religious community is by nature a part of the Church and an expression of ecclesial communion. The constitutive and distinctive elements of religious life remain always: a community of life, of prayer and of the apostolate. Indeed, the founder’s charism entails a certain “gift of attraction”, thanks to which the original nucleus of the future religious institute is formed: some persons unite themselves around a common project and provide the impulse for the formation of the community and for its future expansion. This grace worked in such a way that the Servant of God Bogdan Jański, moving among his companions, managed to discern and was able to select the most suitable individuals from among the great wave of the Polish emigration. Kajsiewicz, eyewitness of the creative efforts of our Founder, made this observation on Pentecost Day of 1836: “God, in his mercy, has poured out a particular grace upon our tiny group, upon the four of us who are in a certain sense the cornerstones of a new building. The other two or three who were not to remain with us, or rather not to be united to us forever, did not understand anything about our conversation and, as on the first Day of Pentecost, thought that we were drunk” (*Pisma*, vol. 3, p. 414). The Founder himself, at the end of a long letter addressed to the Brothers located in Rome, underlined that “the same spirit, the same charity, faith and hope, in which the Lord God has gathered us in unity have been present among us and have overcome every trial; they are still present, because of God’s particular grace upon us” (Letter of July 12, 1839): expressing thus the quintessence of the information contained in the letter.

Our Constitutions, speaking of the strength of the Congregation, note that this is potentially present in every individual local community which radiates the theological virtues. The development of faith is sustained by our personal commitment in three areas: the first is the Eucharist, which is fundamental and effective, which strengthens faith and in which we live the Paschal Mystery of Christ and we unite ourselves with him, dying to ourselves and rising to new life. Another area regards prayer, and in a special way a prolonged and attentive Eucharistic Adoration. Indeed, the level of our faith is expressed also in the care given to the quality of community prayer, which has always been considered the foundation of common life. We should not forget that community prayer attains its efficacy only when accompanied by personal prayer. For this reason it is important to take care that the life of our communities flows according to a determined daily rhythm. In this way we will find time for everything: prayer, work and rest. The third area which favors the growth of faith is sharing the Christian values hidden in the Word of God. Monastic

communities from the very beginning have cultivated “lectio divina” or “reading of God”. The apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata* calls to mind the great value of meditation on the Bible *in common*, because it “leads to a joyful sharing of the riches drawn from the Word of God, thanks to which brothers or sisters grow together and help one another to make progress in the spiritual life” (94).

In this Year of Faith it would be very opportune to use this tested and profitable method, both in our local communities and in the various apostolic groups. In this manner our faith in the Risen Lord receives our particular imprint. With reason Father Kajsiewicz observes—and we should always remember—that “no one can give to others what he does not possess himself. In order to awaken faith in others we must have it alive in ourselves; to kindle in the hearts of people love for the Lord, we must be already on fire ourselves; in order to convince, we must ourselves be convinced” (*Pisma*, vol. 3, p. 47).

6. The occasion for spreading the faith

For the Resurrectionist, the apostolate represents a call through Christ to lead an apostolic life imbued with a deep and lasting faith.

(Constitutions 191)

The Bible lets us see that every gift of God carries with it a task; every calling is accompanied by a command; to every vocation a mission is attached. Patriarchs and kings had to attend to the quality of the law and the welfare of the chosen people; priests and prophets had to care for the purity of divine worship and the authenticity of the voice of God; apostles and disciples must go out to the entire world with the Gospel and the Sacraments.

The Apostle of the Gentiles is aware of the magnitude and the importance of this mission: “when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked with Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me; James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised; only they would have us remember the poor, the very thing which I was eager to do” (Gal 2:7-10). This testimony from Paul sums up his entire apostolic activity: the awareness of being chosen, the guarantee of the assistance of God’s grace, the universality of the kerygma, the service of charity and finally perseverance in unity and in communion with the Church.

Looking at our own history we see that the Elder Brother, already recognizing in himself the charism of a founder, to the question: “What do Christ, the Church, the Country, the Emigration want from us?” would respond: “Our country and the Church need workers” (*Diary*, pp. 422, 428). And exactly like a simple “worker” he was consumed in apostolic labors. With fervor and enthusiasm he singled out the

needs of everyone around him and sought to provide for them by unconventional methods: by visits and conversations, books and advice, financial help and searching for a job, by the authenticity of his attitude and proofs of his closeness to the Church. Our first priests, immediately after their ordination, conscious of their new commitments, wrote to their friends with an impassioned heart: “You cannot imagine what a mysterious bond unites the Offering, the confessional and the ambo; I notice an urgency in regard to them and I feel so strong, bold and presumptuous that I often regret the fact of not being able to be transferred in this moment to Paris. Yet I trust that the Lord will not abandon us even later on” (Paweł Smolikowski, *Historia...*, vol. 2, p. 349). It is good to note that our initial “missionary travels” have something in common with the first mission of the Twelve and of the 72, where Jesus “began to send them out two by two” (Mc 6:7; Lk 10:1); and they are similar to the story of the two disciples of Emmaus, who set out in haste and returned to Jerusalem to bring the glad announcement: “The Lord has risen indeed!” (Lc 24:34). Therefore, it is not by coincidence that in 1838 Bogdan Jański sent Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz to Rome; that in 1857 Father Aloisio Oldoini and Brother Saverio Salvati laid the foundations of the pastoral work at Mentorella; that the same year seminarians Eugene Funcken and Edward Głowacki left for Canada; that in 1863 “an old man and a child”, Fr. Charles Kaczanowski and Bro. Marcin Janus, went to Bulgaria for missionary work.

Our Constitutions recommend that our mission be permeated by “a deep and lasting faith”, because the latter is a driving force and “the necessary condition for effective apostolic activity” (191). Faith tells us to leave everything and to follow Christ wherever he might send us; faith dictates that we go to all the world to proclaim the joy of the Resurrection; faith sees to it that in our principal apostolates we strive to build Christian communities alive with the Spirit of the Risen Lord (cf. 201); faith pushes us to carry forward the activities which, humanly speaking, are beyond our personal and economic capabilities; faith, in the end, allows us to confess boldly the beauty of our decision to follow the Lord Jesus.

I wish that, not only in this Year of Faith, we might carry out our apostolic work, such as it has been entrusted to us, with such faith that, as expressed by Father Jerome: “the Resurrection might be felt everywhere”. It is my hope that by our lives we will spread faith in the world and we will render a visible witness of being Resurrectionists: “We are of the Resurrection and we await and desire true resurrection ... we should be for others its banner and its prophecy” (*Tryptyk wielkanocny*, p. 31).

7. The occasion for walking with Mary along the paths of faith

Mary's faith enabled her to accept the gift of God's love and to trust that all the promises made to her would be fulfilled.

(Constitutions 150)

Mary is for all of us the eminent model of authentic faith. It is she who believed at the Annunciation, it is she who by faith gave birth in her virginity to the Son of God; it is she who, trusting in God's word, fled into Egypt; with the same faith she followed her Son all the way to Calvary; "By faith, Mary tasted the fruits of Jesus' resurrection and, treasuring every memory in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19, 51), she passed them on to the Twelve assembled with her in the Upper Room to receive the Holy Spirit" (cf. Acts 1:14; 2:1-4) (*Porta fidei*, 13).

To her, of whom it was said, "blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lc 1:45), I would like to entrust our Congregation and all of the confreres:

*Mother of the Church and of our Congregation!
Aware of the defects in our faith
and conscious that "without this it is impossible to be pleasing to God";
remembering that the Apostles themselves prayed to Jesus, saying these words:
"Lord, increase our faith";
with great trust we turn to you, oh Mary:
Support us,
that we might tirelessly yearn
for a humble and mature faith;
lead us to your Son,
so that He, the conqueror of evil and of death,
might bestow upon us strength in moments of doubt and trial;
obtain for us the grace of a strong, steady and ardent faith;
a faith that is joyful, persevering and effective;
a faith that remains open to new lights;
a faith that is alive, bringing forth works of love;
a faith with eyes that see farther, deeper, higher and everywhere;
a faith that is obedient to the inspirations of the Spirit and to the Word of Truth.*

In Christo Redivivo

Bernard Hylla CR
Superior General
XIX Successor of Elder Brother Bogdan Jański

Roma 11 October 2012, Inauguration of the Year of Faith