



CURIA GENERALIZIA DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESÙ

Jubilee of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

2018/03

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear Friends in the Lord,

This year, at the invitation of Pope Francis, the Church focuses its attention on young people. The October Synod of Bishops in Rome on “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”, and the January 2019 World Youth Day in Panama will be two significant moments in which the Church will concentrate on young people today, to listen to their concerns, dreams and hopes, and to enrich itself with their joys, initiatives and openness to life.

Precisely in the period of preparation for these two meetings, the Society simultaneously celebrates the 450th anniversary of the birth of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga (March 9, 1568, in Castiglione delle Stiviere) and the death of Saint Stanislaus Kostka (August 15, 1568, in Rome). Both young Jesuits gave witness to surprising openness to God leading to counter-cultural options. Feeling called to give their entire selves, both demonstrated an unambiguous willingness to identify themselves with the Lord, responded with determination and enthusiasm to their vocation, and overcame many challenging obstacles that seemed to block their entrance into the Society of Jesus.

For us, to direct our attention to these young Jesuits, proclaimed saints by the Church in 1726, means to return to the radical surrender of one’s life to Jesus Christ and to the cause of the Gospel, and to deepen our integration of life and mission. It also means to grow in inner freedom in such a way that we can make discernment - both personal and in common - our normal way of proceeding in our service to the mission of Christ today.

For its part, the Holy See, mindful of the anniversary of the birth of Aloysius Gonzaga, has announced the celebration of a *Jubilee Year of St. Aloysius*, from March 9, 2018, until the same date in the year 2019. It has identified the Church of St. Ignatius in Rome, where lie the remains of Saint Aloysius, and all churches in the world dedicated to this young Jesuit¹, as privileged places of pilgrimage. I therefore wish to invite the whole Society, its communities and institutions -many of which bear the name of Aloysius Gonzaga- to find the best manner of celebrating, in a culturally contextualized way, this time of grace, which draws our attention to the rich contributions young people bring to society, the Church and the Society of Jesus. This initiative gives us an unparalleled opportunity to make known the life of this young and holy

¹ As in every Jubilee year, the Holy See grants a plenary indulgence to those who celebrate this Jubilee. The conditions for this are explained in the Decree *Beatissime Pater*, Prot. N. 38/18/1.



Jesuit, reflecting on and drawing fruit from it, as St. Ignatius counseled in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Aloysius Gonzaga manifested a vigorous personality from a young age. He was born and grew up in a Christian family setting, in which letters written by Jesuit missionaries from distant places were read; but his family context was also a worldly one, full of sensuality, ambition and violence, that promised him a future of wealth, fame and power. Nevertheless, with a strong faith, an amazing interior freedom, and resisting pressures of all kinds, he sought to be guided by the voice of the Spirit that resonated in his conscience, adopting the following of the Lord as his way of life. Like St. Stanislaus, he overcame resistance from his family and completely surrendered himself to God in the Society of Jesus, founded only a few decades earlier.

Aloysius Gonzaga only had time in his life to devote himself fully to formation; his utter commitment to that formation justifies his being considered a model for young Jesuits. He died as a theology student, at the age of 23, having contracted the disease of those who, in Rome, were excluded and marginalized because of a terrible plague that wiped out half of the city's population. Caring for them voluntarily, he risked himself and gave up his life for them (cf. Jn 15.13). In the face of this witness, Pope Benedict XIII proclaimed him patron of youth in 1729, Pope Pius XI named him patron of students in 1926, and, on the fourth centenary of his death in 1991, Pope John Paul II declared him patron of those suffering from AIDS.

I am convinced that the Spirit of God continues to call out to many young people, from their faith and from the suffering of the poor of the world. Many, in all countries, yearn for a transparent and honest world without corruption, where there is recognition and a place for everyone. Many young people, in a noble, bold and generous way, want to do something for the good of humanity and of their people. They want the suffering of so many to disappear, to achieve reconciliation between persons and peoples. They desire that our planet be protected and that humanity be guided by transcendent values that give meaning to the world and to human history. Often, however, many of them do not know how to do this.

It is time, therefore, for us to listen to them and ask ourselves how we can help young people grow so deeply in their faith and love for Christ that they may, with a courage similar to that of Aloysius Gonzaga, confront the idols of the dominant culture. Bearing in mind that he died serving people who were not only sick of the plague but also abandoned without hope in the streets of the city and regarded with fear, it is time for us to examine how we, as ministers of the reconciliation that Christ offers humanity, can help young people today to overcome all kinds of fear and anger, often stirred up for political reasons against those who are "different" or "other," expressing instead welcome, trust, and compassion. Finally, knowing that Aloysius Gonzaga saw religious life as an inspiring personal way of offering one's own life for others, we must ask how we can present the Society of Jesus and religious life to young people today as a joyful life choice, aimed at serving and giving life to others.

I conclude by asking Mary, Mother of the Society, to help us obtain the grace of knowing how to accompany in faith and in life the young people we deal with and whom we welcome in our institutions. Although she herself was still very young,² she welcomed the call of God in the humble village of Nazareth, allowed herself to be overshadowed by his Spirit, and

² Cf., Message of the Holy Father, on the occasion of the 33rd World Youth Day, which will be celebrated on March 25, 2018.



consented to bear in herself the incarnate Son of the Most High, for the good of her people and of all future generations. God grant that we may serve and help young people today, so that, like Aloysisus Gonzaga, they may, in all things love and serve.

Fraternally yours in the Lord,

A blue ink signature of Arturo Sosa, S.I., Superior General.

Arturo Sosa, S.I.
Superior General

Rome, 6 March 2018

(Original: Spanish)