



La Carta

October 2022

Dearest Brothers,

When I think of the month of October, my thoughts bring me to Villa Santa Maria and our own Saint Francis Caracciolo. What amazes me is that he was truly in love with our Lord and he wanted this sense of fervor to be experienced by all members of our religious family. In order to perpetuate this, he, along with Agostino Adorno and Fabrizio Caracciolo, introduced the practice of circular adoration and circular penance to our religious family.

I like the symbol of the circle very much. I was reading that in Christian symbolism, the circle represents eternity. It symbolizes eternity as it has no beginning or end. It also represents holiness, perfection, continuity, divine chosen ones. I cannot help but think that the notion of “circular” was somehow attached to this in the minds of our Founders. Circular represents prayer that was ongoing with a spirit of continuity, even if it was done only during the hours of the day. In the book, *I Chierici Regolari Minori nella Chiesa*, Father Luigi Affoni, quoting from early sources, noted that:

In the Constitutions of 1606 mental prayer is presented in the following way.

“It is fitting that men consecrated to divine service, although placed on earth, should raise their spirit to heaven and meditate assiduously on Christ Jesus and his virtues”. “Lay brothers, during this prayer, are permitted to recite the Rosary or the beads of the Blessed Virgin Mary “submissa voce”. ” The practice of mental prayer is particularly recommended for novices. “In order to grow in this virtue, they should remember the Lord's saying: “One must always pray and never grow weary” (Luke 18:1), which is certainly required by the direction of our Institute”. (Constitutions 1606, P. I c II)

With regard to circular adoration, it was noted that except for the times of community prayer, at every hour of the day, in turn, a religious should be in prayer: “This will be a particular and distinctive use of our Institute, whereby one of the religious will always be in the presence of God, like a lighted torch whose light and splendor will radiate to the outside world”. (Constitutiones 1678, P.I. c. 8,6; Regole 1840, c. VII, VI)

The first intention of the Founders, codified in the first Constitutions, was that circular prayer should be done during the day and at night in all the houses, but alongside this provision there is an annotation, which is traced back to St. Francis Caracciolo himself, which states that the exercise will not be practiced until the brothers have reached a sufficient number.

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The point being emphasized is that “circularity” implies the communion of the religious with his community and with the community of mankind:

“During the circular prayer the religious, with all his mind's affections, will pray to God for the Holy Catholic Church, for all the Christian people, for our Sacred Religion, for our benefactors, especially for the soul of Sixtus V of v.m.”. (Constitutiones Primae, c. II)

In addition to circular prayer, "circular penances" were also practiced.

Father Giuseppe Imperato in 1598 to the Crown prince Philip II, to whom he had turned for the foundation of a house in Spain, in order to make the Order known, explained that in this new Order four "circles" are practiced: 1st. Circular prayer so that always like lighted lamps one is praying before the Blessed Sacrament; 2nd. Fasting to give alms (renouncing food to give it to some poor person, Constitutiones primae, c.3); 3rd. Fasting to give alms (renunciation of food to give it to the poor, Constitutiones primae, c.3); 4th. Cilice, on behalf of all, to submit to the Lord's mercy all offenses.

The circularity of our devotion keeps us together, allows us to be connected in so many ways, and is a way to solidify the integrity of our communities. Let us rediscover this great practice within our own communities, whether they be houses of formation, parishes, retreat houses, missions, or communities with other purposes. I again affirm that the availability of adoration for our local communities, parishes and missions must be established. This undertaking is quite ambitious and also possible if perpetual adoration in our parishes can be done. This can be a long-term project to actively involve our people to share our spirituality.

Circular adoration and penance, when practiced, will certainly bear great fruit for our Order. It will balance our religious life and show that we are one, collaborating and working together for the building up of the body of Christ. It will also drive away all negative attitudes of disunity and competition. Meditating on Christ in our life leads to prayer in action and new vibrancy for our Order. Let us again begin more fervidly this practice by following the footsteps of our Founders.

Please know that you are in my thoughts and prayers.

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