



Rome, March 8, 2013
Prot. N. PG038/2013

THE SOLEMNITY OF ST JOHN OF GOD

My Dear Brothers, Co-workers and members of the Hospitaller Family of St John of God

Introduction

On March 8, we are celebrating the Solemnity of St John of God, and I want to extend to you all my very best wishes, trusting that we shall properly prepare to commemorate and joyfully celebrate our Holy Founder, whose spirit continues to live on in the Church and in the world through our beloved Family.

He lived in the 16th century: he was neither a theologian, nor a priest, and neither did he hold any important posts in society, politics or the Church. And yet he was one of the outstanding men who helped to renew the Catholic Church. This was because, more than anyone else, he made visible the love and mercy of God towards the poor, the sick and the needy to the point of *wearing himself out* for them. His life was a perfect reflection of the Good Samaritan's, or and continues to be no less necessary in today's world. His message, his spirit and his witness to us in the contemporary world is the testimony of his own life and of the man himself, and we must not only remember and wonder at him, but above all we have to follow his example.

A witness to hospitality

It is normal that a man like that would have written very little, and was not his own master, and had little time to himself. And yet what little he did write or dictate, in only six letters, is a profound compendium of theology, spirituality, pastoral care, and health and social care. A manual of Hospitality, validated by his own life which was given over entirely to the plan that God had prepared for him, serving the needy people who went out to meet him, to the point of, quite literally, spending the last drop of his blood for them.

"I am also very unhappy when I see so many poor people (who are my brothers and neighbours) suffering and in great need in both body and soul, and I cannot help them" (2GL 8). This gives only a hint of what he felt, experienced and suffered in his heart at the sight of people in need. And this was after giving himself wholly to them. His letters, and the book by Castro, his first biographer, are full of references and details about the kind of Hospitality that St John of God practised: *"John's charitable work kept him busy all day long. At night when the house had settled quietly down and in spite of the fact that he felt worn out; he would not retire until he had gone around to visit each and every patient. he consoled them with his kind words, giving them both spiritual and temporal comfort. He used to ask them where they came from and whether they needed anything" (Castro XIV – translation by Bro. Benedict O'Grady, O.H.).*

Celebrating the memory of our Founder in our own day is above all an appeal to all his sons and daughters to be, like him, witnesses to hospitality. We must bear witness by living according to his lifestyle, based on daily service and self-giving, being Good Samaritans in our own age. He did not work out any particular strategies to make himself known, but merely lived his life and served others for the love of God. The world and the Church expect us, each and every one of us who make up the St John of God Family, to continue as *witnesses to Hospitality*. It is an urgent mission which each and every one of us must perform, in which all of us, however insignificant we may think we are, have a contribution to make. And here, once again, we discover the basis for real and credible Hospitaller vocations promotion and pastoral care.

A witness to Hope

Difficulties are part and parcel of life, and we know very well how many difficulties St John of God had to cope with in his life, particularly in carrying forward his mission. Difficulties abounded, while resources were in very short supply. Yet this never discouraged or frustrated him, and did nothing to hinder his work to bring his project of hospitality to fruition. It was his confidence and hope in Jesus Christ that enabled him to remain single-mindedly dedicated to his mission and to find the ways and means of performing it *as humanly and humanely as possible*.

"I am in great need.... The debts and the poor increase by the day... For with the work that I have begun, I am now beset by great difficulties... I think Jesus Christ who provides all things, because without Him I could not do anything at all " (1DS 14, 2DS 2-22). He drew his strength from Jesus Christ to live in hope when beset by difficulties. It was not a hope based on passive acceptance, but on faith, on service, and on constantly working and seeking resources humbly and creatively. He found many benefactors and men and women of goodwill who helped to support his project, which grew day by day, not forgetting, as he tells us in his letters, that the situation caused him suffering and *distress (2GL 3)* and sometimes *anguish (2DS 2)*.

What he experienced then has occurred time and again throughout the history of our Order, and even today in many parts of the world, particularly at the present time in which the global financial crisis is impinging on many of our Centres and facilities.

John of God's experience must help to enlighten us, and above all it is a call to us to be hopeful when beset by difficulties, fully trusting in the Spirit of the Lord who began and continues to support the Order's project of hospitality. Hope will not rid us of our difficulties. There may be times when we cannot continue to maintain the services and programmes we are running, because of a shortage of resources. Yet hope drives us on to practise hospitality with even greater passion, to put even more effort into our work on behalf of this treasure that has been entrusted to us, to serve the sick and the needy with even greater devotion, to seek the resources we need and the most appropriate means of managing them, and to do so creatively, intelligently and transparently, to heighten communion between all the members of the St John of God Family and to use the qualities and the potential that each and every one of them possesses. By so doing, our hope and trust in Jesus Christ will bear good fruit.

Conclusion

We are now setting out in the new Sexennium, and the complete document containing the *Declarations of the 2012 General Chapter* has already been circulated among the Provinces and published on the Order's website, together with the programme of the most important coming events. We have begun implementing this programme, by setting up a number of commissions and preparing for the Canonical Visitations will begin after the Feast of Our Father, held under the title "*Living hospitality with hope and courage*".

In January, the General Definitory met for a few days in Granada where we presented and committed all the work we shall be performing in this new period, and with the whole Order, to the protection of our Holy Founder.

And so I send you all, Brothers, Co-workers, Volunteers, Benefactors, the Sick and all the Guests in our Centres, my very best wishes for our forthcoming Feast Day. I want you to prepare for, and celebrate it with great joy. May our Father's spirit help us to grow in Hospitality and to place all our hope and trust in our mission of service to the poor, the sick and the needy.

United to you in our Lord and St John of God, I send you my fraternal best wishes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fra Jesús Etayo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name "Jesús".

Bro. Jesús Etayo
Superior General