

“ARTISANS OF PROVIDENCE”

A celebration and a call to holiness



*Letter from Casante F. Massimiliano Parrella
to the Calabrian Family*

Verona, October 8th, 2022

LETTER FROM CASANTE

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On the cover

an art piece by the Syrian artist Nizar Ali Badr

LETTER FROM CASANTE F. MASSIMILIANO PARRELLA
TO THE CALABRIAN FAMILY

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*My dear brothers, sisters, and friends of the
Calabrian family, Shalom!*

INTRODUCTION

1. Last May 30 the XII General Chapters of our Religious Families concluded; and for the first time, it was a General Chapter of the Calabrian Family, an event of the Spirit that led us to be Prophets of a true Communion: sought and built with passion. From this profound experience, was born the final document "START", *this is the way: follow it* (concerning the text of Isaiah 30:21) ... Said document, was presented to the whole Calabrian family around the world on June 29, 2022. Recently we have been working on drafting the action plan for the new six-year term, precisely in light of the conclusions and guidelines approved by the Chapter itself. All of us are asked to be

protagonists, not spectators sitting and contemplating, applauding, or criticizing; and to be personally committed, we have been given precious words: Charism, Spirit of faith and abandonment, Providence, Church, synodality, authentic communion, challenges, the sign of the times, being on the side and with the poorest, fraternity, friendship, relationship, trust, being good, courageous prophets, missionaries.

It is therefore time to *Start* and to do it together, with enthusiasm, with joy, and full of trust in the Lord Jesus, Absolute Master of the Opera; our Founder said it clearly, “*the Opera is of God, He formed it and He will take care of fulfilling the divine plans as long as we all are and live with the pure and genuine spirit that the Lord himself has put in it*”.¹

2. On the liturgical solemnity of Saint John Calabria, the Calabrian Family will have the opportunity to begin the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the birth of our founder and to open an entire year of an intense and particular journey that will culminate on 08 October 2023. It will be an extraordinary opportunity to rediscover the gift given by God to the whole Church and the Calabrian Family, in the person and the spirituality of Fr. Calabria through his choices and his intuitions. It will be a year full of events and

1 Letter[E] CARDINALE MONS. GIROLAMO * 7082
[undated]

celebrations which I wish may help all of us to care for and nourish our faith in God the Provident Father, to know more and more about the figure and the writings of Fr. Calabria, and to discover the face of so many beautiful people: brothers, sisters and lay people who preceded us in the Kingdom of God but who here on earth loved the Opera and gave their lives for it and the Church.

3. The stage of the Chapter ended on May 30, 2022, with a visit to the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis, who, with a very simple but profound speech, called us to be Artisans of Providence; from here I wanted to take the title to my first Letter which, albeit briefly and without presuming to say everything or draw conclusions, I would like to deal with the theme of Providence.

LOYALTY TO THE CHARISM

4. From the beginning of this Letter, I strongly wish to express my conviction: that we can speak of fidelity to the Charism of which we often hear references, only if we feel the spirit of abandonment in Providence vibrating within the mind and heart and with holy jealousy, we try to keep it, to live it and pass it on as we received it from our Founder. Thus, if we feel the need to stop, to take the time to pray, to discuss, to talk to each other, to share... it will be necessary to do so in the very respect of fidelity to the Charism; no one has the presumption

of being the holder of the Charism, and certainly, all those who know it, love it and keep it with care animated by the Spirit, are capable of expressing it. Fr. Calabria himself in 1931 felt the need to stop to pray intensely to the Holy Spirit to be guided if he should continue with the only foundation of faith, trust, and abandonment in Providence or if he had to change something.

5. From the historical time of Fr. Calabria, reality has changed in a truly significant way - in its social dynamics, in lifestyles, in the conception of the values themselves, in the ways of understanding and living faith and spirituality, even in the forms of poverty -: remaining faithful to the foundation of abandonment to Providence, we are asked to be able to live in our time, with adequate modalities, to seek authentic answers to real questions; and this updating is necessary because the Charism is not a dead letter, but it is an evangelical principle of life that enlightens and makes us faithful to what does not pass while pushing us to be creative to respond concretely and loyally to today's needs.

6. We know well that today the world has changed and that it continues to change with a speed that sometimes frightens us. Without an intelligent opening to the new and without having the courage to take risks at times, we could fall into the temptation of repeating ways of the past using languages that people no longer understand. What matters is that we do not deviate from the Charism and that the Opera does not

yield to the temptation of human protections, but remains abandoned only to God: "*Oh yes, this House will go on, it will spread only on this pact: nothing, no support, human protections, the literal practice of the holy Gospel, hidden from all, faith, faith in God and his paternal Providence. Souls, souls, here is our income of millions, billions*".² So let us renew our faith, faith in God to whom nothing is impossible because He is the Lord of History, who with His Providence governs individuals and the entire universe.³

TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE CHARISM...

7. Management for the Calabrian family is a valid tool for implementing the great program of the Opera. This is why discernment is important and we must do it together, in prayer: brothers, sisters, and laity. Therefore, I share with you some points that I believe are necessary for the discernment of being "Artisans of Providence".

8. *First of all, seek the Kingdom of God.* "*Oh, how great this Opera is. However, it is necessary that the genuine spirit may be put into practice, which is this: To seek only the holy Kingdom of God, to live abandoned to the Providence...*"⁴ Abandonment to Divine

2 DIARY * 53, Nov 10, 1914.

3 Acc. Waldemar Longo, *Provvidenza e gestione delle Opere, Final Document of Casante*, Verona, 2005

4 DIARY * 1112, Jan 30, 1938.

Providence is an attitude that must be present, even before starting any work or initiative. It means being available to live this style even in the small choices and events of life. Therefore, listen to and discern God's will to carry out not ours, but his divine plans. *"I repeat, the Opera belongs to the present times, destined to accomplish in its smallness and poverty, although great in the mind of God, new and great designs all proper to the hour we are going through; but for it to truly achieve these divine designs and be light and salt with a pure and genuine spirit, it is necessary that it receive its "Confirmation", as the Most Reverend Father Visitor told me several times in recent times, as a definitive seal of the Lord through the Holy Mother Church. In C. J. Sac. J. Calabria".*⁵

9. The More apostolorum - in the manner of the apostles... *"You will also remember how you went (to Rome); indeed more Apostolorum, without luggage and provisions; humanly speaking it should not have been done like this, but you have gone, entrusting yourselves to divine Providence, you have worked and the Lord has blessed and made fruitful your labors; after S. Filippo other poor and abandoned souls were added, in Borgata Gordiani and Tormarancio; and now the foundations are being laid for a work like that of S. Zeno for poor and abandoned children. How much glory will come to the Lord, how much good to souls! But there are still*

5 REMINDER - NOTES * 4962/A Verona, Dec 17, 1947.

*other designs, which you will accomplish if you persevere in this single thought of seeking the holy Kingdom of God, abandoning yourselves in the loving arms of divine Providence. There will be difficulties, Satan trembles, but do not be afraid. If Jesus is with us, we will be able to withstand every trial, overcome every difficulty".⁶ It has been like this since the beginning of the Opera and we want it to continue. The activities and equipment are useful and necessary to manifest our charism, no one denies it, on the contrary! But they come as the fruit of a life deeply marked by our spirit. *By the grace of God, I was made a priest and collected children in my house. Some said to me: "but leave it there" but I said, "they are souls, poor souls, abandoned souls, God sends them to me, and why won't He also send me the means?". And the means came, indeed it can be said that the Opera was founded without a cent.⁷ If we keep faith in God and place nothing before it, then we will favor Providence. This is an indication that is valid for the whole Calabrian family: human means without the lived Gospel do not guarantee fidelity to the Charism nor the stability of the activities.**

10. We are the Opera. We should never forget that in management, the main resource is ourselves: *"Here at the foot of my Crucifix, at the end of the old year and on the threshold of the new, I think in a very*

6 LETT. COLLECT. * LETTER XXVIII, Feb 6, 1942.

7 REMINDER - NOTES * 8375/D, [undated].

special way of you, and I feel I can address this my poor word to you so that you, in turn, can comment on it to the other brothers and we all treasure it, first for the good and sanctification of our soul and then for the good and sanctification of this great, very great Opera, which, as I have told you so many times and I will not stop repeating to you, it is all and only the Opera of Jesus for the times of now, that is, with purposes which are all proper to the grave, a very grave hour that we are going through and which appears ever more threateningly over poor humanity; time of Satan, but together the time of God. But the Opera, let us remember well, is not the houses, the workshops, the schools, the hospitals; we are the Opera! and if we did not live in it the pure and genuine spirit that Jesus put in from the beginning, it would be nothing but a name empty of meaning and any efficacy. For God's sake this may not happen to any of us; called to be part of this Opera, we have the high privilege of being the helpers of the good Lord, in fulfilling his new and great designs; what honor, but together what responsibility!"⁸ And again, "Dear Fr. Luigi, we have no resources, no stock market funds; the resources, we are the cash fund and do not doubt that if we do well, everything will proceed to the greater glory of God, for the good of our souls, to spread the Opera".⁹ Of course, in managing, we must have our heads on our necks but Fr

8 COLLECTIVE LETT. * LETTER LXXII Dec 28, 1951.

9 PEDROLLO FR. LUIGI, *25 Aug 1,1920.

Calabria also teaches us to ask ourselves: *"When Providence is lacking, we check if we are living the pure and genuine spirit of the Opera"*.¹⁰

11. Our Calabrian vocation. "... May this tell you how much concerns me your interior renewal, in the spirit of your holy vocation, so that you may resume with more ardor and strength and with more profit the work of your apostolate and sacred ministry".¹¹ *And again, "... We live, therefore, our time, dear ones; we work in our Opera, treasuring the holy vocation of Poor Servants. "Non multa sed multum" is a motto for us. Let us not be tempted by the many activities, to the detriment of the interior life: as much as I know and I can, I highly recommend this interior life, of union with God: it is the indispensable basis of every apostolate. "Sine me, says Jesus, nihil potestis facere: without me, you can do nothing". If we do it alone, without the Lord, it will soon vanish. We do willingly even the small things that Providence assigns to us, and we will have collaborated with all others in the divine work for the progress of mankind towards God"*.¹² Our father Fr. Calabria naturally addressed these words to his

10 My beloved Brothers COLLECT LETT. * (UNDATED), Verona 2001, p. 437.

11 COLLECT LETT. * LETTER LXIX Verona, July 1, 1951, (On the 50^o priesthood anniversary of the Father)

12 COLLECT LETT. * LETTER LXXVIII Verona, Nov 18, 1952.

religious in the fifties; I still feel them current, strong, alive, and true for the whole Calabrian Family. Have we ever wondered if as a family we truly correspond to our vocation to Charism? And this question I hand over to everyone, to believers and non-believers alike! Understand what a great responsibility we have! We are asked to go beyond our human logic and to entrust everything to Providence; each one reminds himself that no one in the Opera is master of anything, that the Opera was before us and will be after us; but our contribution, our presence, our action will help the Opera to be better today. Without categories, without labels, without mental structures: each presents himself as he/she is; I, we, today are called to live the Opera and live up to this vocation. This makes us alike, without distinction: the common vocation to the Charism that I am called to welcome, to live, and to announce it with my life, my work, my presence, my style, my relationship, my commitment! Here is the great responsibility: being there is not enough! We must also ask ourselves how we are inside the Opera, with what style, and what depth.

12. Go and be with the poor. *“Divine Providence will put other seeds into the soil of the Opera from hand to hand; our program must not exclude any activity of good and apostolate, nor be limited to this or that region, the whole world belongs to God. However, we must*

always go where humanly nothing is to be promised, therefore to the poorest, to the humble; we must seek souls, abandoned, rejected, despised, old, sick, sinners; these will be the treasures, the gems of the Opera, the key that opens Heaven to us, and thus Divine Providence will be better manifested.

Our present and future works, to be legitimate and genuine, must always bear the mark and seal of "do not anguish".

No good work, no soul should be excluded for the sole reason that the means are lacking, these will come either in one way or another, as long as we receive this soul with faith, and with faith, we commit to this Opera.

God may allow some critical period to prove our faith, then more faith, greater faith because the more the Divine Providence will manifest itself.

If the time of trial persists, then we must humble ourselves and make a serious examination with new and firm intentions to remove from us what could hinder Divine Providence, and to dedicate ourselves more generously to the service of God in the poor who are our true masters".¹³ If we fail what St. John Calabria told us, it is inevitable that we become managers of works that are not according to the spirit, works that will be more and more ours and less of God. To grasp the signs and signals that Providence sends us is fundamental to being artisans... that is today's men

13 [E] CARONTI EMANUELE ABOT * 8730 July 23, 1943.

and women who put themselves to work on behalf of God. Do not be afraid of new challenges, new calls, or novelties. We have said that Charism is not a dead letter... it may not happen to us to extinguish its vitality and its evangelical creativity! Come on friends! Together we learn to read what God asks of us; let us discern, pray, discuss and then act with confidence and courage! Do not be afraid of the novelties that Providence dreams for us, we must pass from the theory of prophecy to the practice of being prophets who seek and embrace old and new paths, not according to where the wind blows but according to where the Spirit leads us! It is urgent to stay on track, it is urgent to be a sign, it is urgent because the Lord asks it of us! Do not be afraid! Courage!

13. The Casante. *“Another condition for this Opera to live and expand is to listen always and in everything with a spirit of faith to the Casante of it, to the present one, as well to whoever succeeds him, the Lord has given and will give light and special graces, to keep intact the very particular features that the Lord has given to this Opera of his. And these graces will be all the more abundant, the more the Casante will be docile, humble instrument, aware of his nothingness and of the free grace of having put him in this Opera”.*¹⁴ It remains difficult for me to deal with this criterion, but I must be able

¹⁴ REMINDER - NOTES * 5473 Verona, April 23, 1934.

to get out of my person and see everything from above, with the eyes of faith, with those same eyes with which Fr. Calabria looked at the Opera and with which he received as a true gift the pure and genuine spirit, but I consider it an important criterion in the light of our reflection on Abandonment to Providence. *“It seems to me that it is Jesus who wants it; you have to adhere to the Casante like ivy to oak, like light to the sun”*.¹⁵ I think that for the whole Calabrian Family this remains an important criterion reaffirmed again in the XII General Chapter of the Poor Servants of Divine Providence; have the utmost confidence in the Casante, both for spiritual growth and the development of the Opera. Therefore, I tell you: do not look at me, I am poor and fragile, and at this moment I feel last among the last ... look at what God can do with me and how he can work me for the good of the whole Opera; I am not and I do not want to be the master but I ask for the grace to be his Servant and Servant of the whole Calabrian Family; look at the Casante like this!

14. Peace craftsmen. To be Artisans of Providence, we are asked to be true artisans of peace. And it is not rhetoric, it is not a concept taken for granted: it is that way. It is not enough for me to see us deployed under the flag of one or

15 John Calabria, *Living Words*, Verona, 1973, pg. 228.

the other state; it is not enough to display symbols of peace or pray for peace: we are asked to have the courage to build peace, and not in an ideological way or by honest reflections, but by implementing a concrete and daily style that warms and makes our daily relationships authentic. So, we overcome the divisions between us, we must stop to nurture feelings of envy, jealousy, and hatred (I use this term with knowledge of the facts), let's stop with power games, with hidden alliances: that's enough! We are credible witnesses of what we announce: we are truly asked to be builders and craftsmen of Peace. I am sure that the Lord will bless this path of peace and personal and community conversion which is the basis of communion. He will reward us beyond all our expectations if we believe that Divine Providence will not fail to inhabit not only our environments, our realities, and the territories in which we are present, but will not fail to exist in our lives and our history. And I am sure he will bless us with new religious and lay vocations.

Here is the last criterion that I share with you for being faithful to Charism; I echo the words of Pope Francis.

15. *“The path to peace does not mean making society blandly uniform, but getting people to work together, side-by-side, in pursuing goals that benefit everyone. A wide variety of practical proposals and diverse experiences can help achieve shared objectives and serve the common*

good. The problems that a society is experiencing the need to be identified so that the existence of different ways of understanding and resolving them can be appreciated. The path to social unity always entails acknowledging the possibility that others have, at least in part, a legitimate point of view, something worthwhile to contribute, even if they were in error or acted badly. “We should never confine others to what they may have said or done, but value them for the promise that they embody”, a promise that always brings with it a spark of new hope”.¹⁶

16. *“Working to overcome our divisions without losing our identity as individuals presumes that a basic sense of belonging is present in everyone. Indeed, “society benefits when each person and the social group feels truly at home. In a family, parents, grandparents, and children all feel at home; no one is excluded. If someone has a problem, even a serious one, even if he brought it upon himself, the rest of the family comes to his assistance; they support him. His problems are theirs... In families, everyone contributes to the common purpose; everyone works for the common good, not denying each person’s individuality but encouraging and supporting it. They may quarrel, but there is something that does not change: the family bond. Family disputes are always resolved afterward. The joys and sorrows of each of its members*

16 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, Vatican City, 2020, n. 228.

*are felt by all. That is what it means to be a family! If only we could view our political opponents or neighbors in the same way that we view our children or our spouse, mother or father! How good would this be! Do we love our society or is it still something remote, something anonymous that does not involve us, something to which we are not committed?"*¹⁷ It is for us... let's love the Opera!

17. To safeguard. We recalled at the beginning what fidelity to Charism means, and then, what the criteria for living it are; furthermore, the ability to realize that we have a treasure chest with a treasure inside, a great treasure (the Charism) that has been given to us. What do we do with this precious gift? Here is the responsibility: we cannot throw it away as if nothing had happened, we are called to guard it!

18. *"Listen: if your mother or father gave you a beautiful closed box, and assured you that there are many beautiful and precious things in it, and only allowed you to open it after their death, you would no doubt keep that box jealously, and you would not doubt what your father or mother told you, even though you don't know what's".*¹⁸ My friends, the box is the Charism; the Father and the Mother are God and the Church. At death, the box will open and we will possess the hidden

17 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, Vatican City, 2020, n. 230.

18 John Calabria, *CATECHESIS* * 3861 Jan 27, 1912.

treasure. In the meantime, let us look after this treasure well!

19. The beautiful realities, the important things, the truly precious ones must be kept. So is the encyclical "Laudato Sii" of Pope Francis; a continuous conscious reminder of values, of fundamental aspects of our life, first of all, creation and ecology. The theme of Providence (transversal in the entire Encyclical of Pope Francis) is for us the precious treasure to be kept. It cannot be trivialized, much less considered an outdated spiritual virtue, typical of the past, old-fashioned; the theme of Providence must be central in our reflections and our daily choices. We make the "box" that St. John Calabria left us even more precious and let it enter our life, our homes, our communities, our activities, our choices, our speeches, our sharing, and evaluations ... let it enter into our prayer (in this regard I recommend: the chaplet to Divine Providence that does not become a practice of piety to be done by simple tradition or routine, but is a way to say to God: "Father, that the Opera is yours and depends on you: guard it, guide it and carry it forward").

20. Conclusion. *"According to your charism, you are called to revive in the world faith in God the Father and filial abandonment to His providence. This is beautiful!"*

19 Pope Francis, inaugural homily.

When we contemplate Jesus in His public life, in His preaching, and even in His conversations with His disciples, we see that in His heart there was this desire in the first place, to make the Father known, to make His goodness felt. This is how Jesus lived, fully immersed in the Father's will, and His entire mission was aimed at bringing us into this filial relationship, whose essential characteristic is trust in Providence: that the Father knows us better than we know ourselves and knows better than we know what we need. Well, you have been 'fascinated' by this essential dimension of the mystery of Christ. Following in the footsteps of Saint John Calabria, you have chosen to make it your own and to bear witness to it, and you want to do so, especially in the company of the poorest, the last, the discarded of the society, who are your 'pearls', as he, your Founder, called them.

Fr. Calabria, like all saints, was a prophet. He has left you a great legacy and you must treasure it. The journey you have taken and are taking is none other than a reinterpretation today of the path that God indicated to him: a man integrated into the Church of his time, who knew how to respond to needs by going to the peripheries, to manifest the paternal and maternal face of God. Reinterpret it with creative fidelity, seeking new paths so that the "dream of God" might be fulfilled in your religious communities. Return to it and reread it.

I would say that cultivating trust in divine providence together with the poor makes you artisans of a "culture of providence". This is very important! We must not lose this dimension, this culture of providence, which I see as

*an antidote to the culture of indifference, unfortunately, widespread in the societies of so-called “wellbeing”. The Christian spirituality of providence is not fatalism, it does not mean waiting for solutions to problems and the goods we need to rain down from heaven. No. On the contrary, it means trying to resemble, in the Holy Spirit, our heavenly Father in taking care of His creatures, especially the frailest, smallest ones; it means sharing with others the little we have so that no one lacks what is necessary. It is the attitude of care, more necessary than ever to counter that of indifference”.*²⁰

21. *At the beginning of this jubilee year, which commemorates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Saint John Calabria we are also beginning the new sexennial, walking together as a Calabrian family, these are the indications that I feel I must give to all of you, those inspirations born in my heart. Let's treasure it, and make it a serious object of reflection, verification, and sharing. Allow me to add: please do not misunderstand my intentions, because none of my confidences entrusted to this writing refers to someone in concrete for some event that occurred; do not give this distorted value to my thought. I wish they were a source of conversion and renewal for all of us. I wish they were the springboard to START this new sexennial. Do not receive them as an order (I told you that I am not the master), but I would like them to be*

20 Part of the speech of the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the General Chapters of the Poor Servants of Divine Providence, Sala Clementina, Monday, 30 May 2022.

simply indications for a path: true, beautiful, possible, counterflow and indicated by God the Father to our Holy Founder, a path that today I feel more relevant and more alive than ever to implement the designs of the Opera with an open vision towards the future. I am sure that if we take this path, the Lord will do great things in the Opera and we will be witnesses of things greater than these.

Let's believe it! Let's believe it!

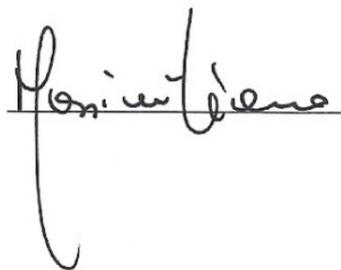
"This is the way, walk in it..."²¹

*Wishing you all, the Calabrian Family,
a Happy Feast of Saint John Calabria
and a Happy Jubilee Year,*

In Christ I bless you!

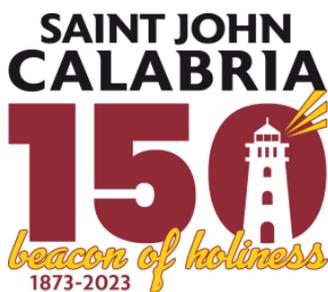
Your brother and father

Massimiliano

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Massimiliano', written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long vertical stroke extending downwards from the end of the line.

Verona, October 8th 2022

²¹ Acc. Is 30:21.



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ccsc@doncalabria.org