

# HOW TO BE WITNESSES AND PROPHETS FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF ST VINCENT PALLOTTI

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## Introduction

Having considered what the Magisterium of the Catholic Church teaches on the subject of being witnesses and prophets for today's world, we now see how we can live this dynamic by following the example of St. Vincent Pallotti. At the school of Jesus, Pallotti learned how to become a prophet not only for his own time, but also for the times of today. In this presentation, I would like to underline some points that have marked this Pallottine process of becoming witnesses and prophets.

### 1. Everything stems from the experience of a personal encounter with God

The process of being witnesses of Jesus Christ and prophets for the world today always begins with the experience of a personal encounter with God. Pallotti often asked himself: “Oh my God, who are you and who am I?” In this experience, the person discovers who God really is and discovers himself. For Pallotti, God is infinite love and infinite mercy and man cannot understand himself outside of this horizon of God: “Man is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, man according to the essence of his creation is an image and likeness of Charity by essence. He who is in charity (that is, who exercises himself in works of charity) is in God, and God is in him. Therefore, if man wants to be in God, longs for God to be in him, he must be in charity (that is, he must live in the exercise of charity. Charity looks at God and his neighbor”.

From the experience of God's love comes the call of every Christian to proclaim God's love to all, participating in the apostolate each according to his possibilities and conditions of life, but following the example of Jesus Christ. In this line, we can see the *eco pallottino* in the words of Pope Francis: “By virtue of the Baptism received, every member of the People of God has become a missionary disciple ...Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus”.

### 2. Pallotti witness to the infinite love and infinite mercy of God

After having experienced the infinite love of God in his life, Pallotti lived two movements linked together. The first movement: a person who has had the experience of the love of God cannot do anything else but love, since, for Pallotti, to live means to love for all eternity: “My Jesus, who does not love cannot live.

Second movement: from the experience of the love of God, Pallotti feels within himself a strong desire to make himself close to the man who suffers, following the logic of an oblation love for the good of his neighbor: here we speak of the famous “I would like”. Here he speaks of the famous “I wish”: I wish that all parts of my body and my soul itself would breathe compassion and mercy, I wish to become food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, riches for the poor, light for the blind, speech for the dumb, hearing for the deaf, health for the sick, life for the dead....

### 3. Pallotti, prophet of the spirituality of communion

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St. Vincent Pallotti was considered a prophet of the spirituality of communion, as the book edited by one of his sons, Fr. Francesco Todisco SAC indicates. In fact, the work founded by St Vincent Pallotti shows that this saint was truly a prophet of communion, insofar as in order to respond to the pastoral challenges of his time, Pallotti always sought not only to bring all men to union/communion with God revealed in Jesus Christ, but also to promote communion among all the protagonists of the apostolate.

This element is expressed in a clear way in the preamble common to the constitutions of the founding communities: “Faced with the worsening of the problems relative to the faith which the Church, in his time, had to face and faced with the multiplication of its tasks for the diffusion of the Gospel in mission lands, he felt the urgency of reviving faith and rekindling charity among Catholics with the intention of bringing all men to the unity of faith in Christ. To this end, he considered it indispensable to ensure the cooperation of all the members of the Church, both clergy and laity, and to unite their efforts to promote more effectively her apostolic mission” (Preamble b).

#### **4. For Pallotti, being a witness and prophet requires imitating Jesus Christ**

For St. Vincent Pallotti, to be a prophet means to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the prophet par excellence; and this requires a profound faith that allows the person to live a process of total transformation: “A soul that believes in Jesus Christ and who with humility and trust strives to imitate Jesus Christ, obtains that Jesus Christ destroys in her all deformities and shortcomings, Jesus Christ enters that soul and Jesus Christ works in it and Jesus Christ continues his life in that soul; He lives in her and applies to her the merit of his most holy works” .

The process of transformation allows us to imitate him in everything. Therefore, Pallotti recommends to everyone to “have his spirit, that is, that all the internal operations of our soul be similar to those of our Lord Jesus Christ. himself, so that we may sincerely imitate him also in the external works which must be the true expressions of the internal.... The principal internal operations which we must distinctly consider in our Lord Jesus Christ in order to imitate him are the spirit of sacrifice, the infinite love of God, and the infinite love of God. in order to imitate him are the spirit of sacrifice, infinite love of suffering, mental pains, the continuous exercise of always doing the most holy and purest will of the heavenly Father, the humility and meekness of his heart, not seeking his own glory, but infinite love of the glory of the heavenly Father and the health of the souls, and the spirit of continuous prayer and union with God”.

#### **5. For Pallotti, a credible witness manifests itself with joy**

As Pope Francis writes, joy is born from the personal encounter with Jesus Christ: “The joy of the Gospel fills the heart and the whole life of those who encounter Jesus...With Jesus Christ joy is always born and reborn.”. A witness of Jesus Christ without joy cannot be a true prophet; a prophet without joy is a missionary who has lost his way.

For Pallotti, “Holy hilarity and spiritual joy are precious fruits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, therefore one of the distinctive characters of the true servants of the Lord.... If they lack such a character, few souls will lead to God, since few will fall in love with following Christ; on the contrary, if they show themselves to be cheerful, and in holy joy, they will make it clear that serving God and following the Holy One forms the life of true joy”.

#### **7. The primacy of prayer to obtain the gifts of the Holy Spirit**

For Pallotti, the process of becoming witnesses and prophets requires moments of prayer, since prayer is necessary “in order to obtain the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit”, as in the Cenacle of the Gospel. as in the Upper Room in Jerusalem where the Apostles were gathered in

prayer together with Mary: after the coming of the Holy Spirit, these frightened men became courageous witnesses of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:14-36).

In order to be filled with the gifts of the Spirit, Pallotti recommends assiduous prayer. For this reason he puts into the mouth of Mary, Queen of the Apostles the very significant words: “I, O son, want to see you rich, and very rich in the treasures of the Divinity, I would like to see you completely transformed in God to make yourself a minister of the Gospel more useful to souls, and to procure more effectively the interests of the glory of the heavenly Father: love therefore the prayer, let it be your food, your drink, your rest”.

### **Conclusion: How to Discern True Prophets from False Prophets**

I would like to conclude this presentation with two criteria that can help us discern the true and false witnesses and prophets for our time. The first criterion is given by Jesus Christ: “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will recognize them...a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor a bad tree produce good fruit” (Mt 7, 15-20).

The second criterion is Pallotti's when he wrote to his confreres who were on mission in London: “Woe to us if we preach Jesus Christ Crucified while we live among delights, if we glorify his poverty while we live among riches, if we magnify his humility while we live among honors”. These words are very significant not only for the confreres in London, but also for all of us in our dynamic of being witnesses of God's love and prophets for the world today, following St. Vincent Pallotti.