

**LETTER OF THE GENERAL SUPERIOR
ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION IN 2015**

Prot. n. 169/2015

Dear Confreres:

The celebration of our titular solemnity of the Immaculate Conception coincides with two important events in the Church: the conclusion of the Year of Consecrated Life and the beginning of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy opened precisely on this day by the Holy Father Francis. In this perspective, we contemplate the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of our Lord, which we recognize as the heart of our charism. Today we also turn to our Mother and Patroness, Mary, with a special request for the canonization of her faithful servant and our Founder, Blessed Stanislaus, having a reasonable hope for his canonization as early as next year.

1. The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord as the wonderful fruit of the Divine Mercy

"Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy" — with these words Pope Francis begins his Bull *Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)*, heralding the Jubilee Year. Shortly after, he adds: "The Holy Year will open on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This liturgical feast day recalls God's action from the very beginning of the history of mankind. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. And so he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (cf. *Eph 1:4*), choosing her to be the Mother of man's Redeemer. When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive."

The papal placement of the mercy of God in the context of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary becomes our inspiration, as well as a guide, for today's reflection. In our Marian theological thought, we see that there are internal links between these two mysteries of faith. The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord is fully understood in the perspective of Redemption: It is the Divine Mercy for mankind. If the merciful love of God-Redeemer to men was most fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Son of God and Christ's Paschal events, then the Mother of the Lord appears from the very moment of her holy conception as redeemed in a particularly sublime manner — *sublimiore modo redenta*, in the words of Blessed John Duns Scotus. Therefore, she is the most uplifting and wonderful fruit of the Divine Mercy. All humans were subjected to the law of original sin and then redeemed; only the Mother of the Lord was preserved from the stain of sin on account of the future merits of her Son and forever "was full of grace, full of the Holy Spirit" (Blessed Stanislaus, *Inspectio Cordis*). This way she has become a sign of the mercy of God, which is antecedent in regard to any human actions and is granted without any merit on the part of man. Mary's merit was her humble acceptance in faith of God's gift of mercy, her compliance with His action, her submission to God's plan for her life, and recognition of her own littleness.

Therefore, we should read afresh the Blessed Stanislaus' call for spreading devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God in the Vineyard of the Lord. This means that we must proclaim the primacy of God's merciful love in regard to human activity and help men to shape the attitude of an active response to the gratuitously granted grace. It means that, in our attitude and ministry, we must show God's wisdom and providence that precede our action and help us as we wander along the winding roads of our mistakes and weaknesses. We fully realize that the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception is a particular sign of the primacy of God's merciful love, gratuitously given to man not only at the moment of his creation, but also in the act of his redemption, when God saw mankind's misery and raised us to the dignity of adopted children. We find this kind of Immaculate Conception spirituality in the outlook of our Father Founder. In this context, his declaration of intent to found our Congregation is extremely expressive: "Divine goodness and wisdom begins and brings to an end what it wants, in spite of countless difficulties standing in the way, and the very unfitness, according to human judgment, of the means. For nothing is impossible for the Almighty. This shone forth most clearly in me the most wretched, most despicable sinner, most inadequate, most unfit instrument for founding the lowest and the smallest Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without sin. In me the spirit was unequal to [the task], no virtue, little prudence, all were by far too small, for dreaming of rather than for undertaking a matter of such great difficulty. But God himself, God (to whom be everlasting and endless glory, and thanksgiving), as he inspired me for this work of his admirably, that is lovingly, mercifully, wisely, wonderfully, so he himself accomplished it and is accomplishing it for ever and ever" (FDR 1). Such is also our way of faith: to recognize in the experience of God's merciful love

our own powerlessness, weakness, and unfaithfulness so that the grace of redemption may shine for us fully.

2. The year of Blessed Stanislaus, our Founder

We look forward with a reasonable hope to the canonization of our Founder, Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, next year. Positive opinions from the two groups of experts, both medical and theological, led to the conclusive recognition of the case of healing, presented before the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, as scientifically inexplicable and granted through the intercession of Blessed Stanislaus. Basically, all that remains is to decide about the need for the canonization of our Blessed Father Founder, which decision belongs to the ecclesiastical authority. Therefore, we commend to God this last step in the canonization process, trusting that we shall receive the long-awaited grace. Lest we wait for it in idleness, we must make efforts in preparation for the canonization. In contrast to the preparations for the beatification, I will not formally establish any committee this time. The body of the Provincial and Vicariate Superiors, annually meeting in Rome, took upon itself the task of preparing and, in a certain sense, the role of this committee. The last meeting was held in March of the current year. The next one will be held on Feb. 23-26, 2016, also in Rome. I also know that some Provincial Superiors have already appointed provincial committees. Wherever relevant teams are still absent, I ask the Major Superiors to appoint them. As part of our preparation for the canonization and subsequent thanksgiving for it, I encourage everyone to turn once again to two books prepared for the beatification of Father Founder (for the period of preparation: *Lest you remain without work in the vineyard of the Lord* [Rome, 2006]; for the period of thanksgiving: *And that your fruit would remain* [Rome 2008]).

In view of the above, I declare the year 2016 the Year of our Father Founder, Blessed Stanislaus.

I hope that the canonization, as well as the preparation and thanksgiving for it, will revive the charism of our religious community and stimulate in us a more faithful and generous response to the grace of vocation. I also believe that, through the gift of canonization, the [spiritual] paternity of Blessed Founder will shine forth with the full splendor of holiness, and that his example of total dedication to Christ and the Church after the example of the Immaculate Mother of our Lord will become so great that it will draw us to a holy life, also.

Dear Confreres:

To close, I send you all my heart-felt festive greetings and embrace you all with my prayers, especially the elderly, the suffering, these feeling lonely and going through a vocation crisis. Today we not only belong, but also feel ourselves to be a part of a fraternal community, united by the bonds of Christ's love through the Holy Spirit and endowed with the same charism. We renew our religious vows and entrust ourselves once again to God, who is to be beloved above all, in the service of Christ and the Church under the maternal protection of Mary Immaculate.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!

Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, MIC
Superior General

Rome, December 8, 2015