

**CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEATIFICATION OF
BL. GEORGE MATULAITIS-MATULEWICZ
June 28, 2007**

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Dear Confreres:

I am writing this letter, so that in the midst of the fervent preparations for the Beatification of our Founder, we won't overlook another important milestone. June 28, 2007, marks the 20th anniversary of the Beatification of Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, who not only saved Fr. Papczyński's Institute from annihilation, but reformed it and brought about its new growth. I invite each one of you to commemorate this Anniversary in your Communities and, for as many as possible, to participate in the main Solemnity that will take place on July 15, 2007, in Marijampole, Lithuania – the place of repose of Blessed George's earthly remains.

The quickly approaching day of elevation to the altars of the Founder of our Congregation, demands that we look with new eyes on the past Beatification of our Renovator.

The Holy Father, John Paul II was very enthusiastic about Archbishop George's Beatification. He wished to make it a gift to the Church on the 600th Anniversary of the Christening of Lithuania, celebrated in Rome. Several years before the fall of Communism, the Polish-born Pope fully realized, that the celebration of this and of similar anniversaries, could bring back from oblivion such communities, which were called at that time, the "Silent Church." It would serve to remind the entire world, that the Church in Lithuania, although persecuted and often brought to the brink of extinction, continues to live and to bear fruit. At the same time, the Pope directed the world's attention to the person of the Marian Renovator, (who was also the Founder of the Congregations of the Sisters of the Poor of the Immaculate Conception and the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist), and to his unusual timeliness.

A few years after the Beatification of Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, in a private conversation with Fr. Adam Boniecki, the then Superior General of the Marians, John Paul II asked if the Beatification was producing fruit. Today, 20 years after that Beatification and on the eve of the Beatification of our Founder, we must propose the same question. Let's ask ourselves: Have we been ready and able to benefit from the gift of Fr. Renovator's Beatification bestowed on us by the Church? Have we been able to show to our contemporaries in an attractive manner which would invite imitation, the love that Fr. Renovator had for the Church and his neighbor, as well as his evangelical wisdom, which helped him to overcome national, racial, and political differences? Have we done enough to propagate his rejection of all biases, of which he himself often suffered, and his living by the motto of his episcopacy, "Overcome evil with good" in accordance with St. Paul's spirit, while always striving to be "everything for everyone?" Let us ask ourselves if we have tried to deepen his vision of our Congregation. Have we understand from reading of his works, that he hadn't considered the development of our community as a goal in itself, but had placed above all, the goal of an ever more perfect ministry of service for the salvation of souls, which is inscribed in the salvific mission of the universal Church?

The pondering of those questions brings to mind our important achievements of these past 20 years. Various publications of the Renovator's writings and works dedicated to his person and activity have appeared in many languages. We held special worship celebrations, symposia, and conferences, the aim of which was to bring the person and thoughts of Bl. George closer to the general public. He became the patron of new parishes. We undertook numerous pilgrimages to his tomb in Marijampole, in order to draw inspiration and strength to the bringing to life, of the instructions that Blessed George left for us.

Was it possible to do more? Shouldn't we draw more benefits from the gift of Archbishop George's Beatification? I leave it to each one of you to find the answer to this.

Today, 20 years later, we ought to take fresh heed, of the words spoken to us by the Pope and by other members of Church, who shared with us the joy of the Beatification, and revealed with great discernment, the spiritual riches of the Blessed.

In his homily during the Holy Mass of Beatification, John Paul II thus spoke about the Blessed: "For 56 years, he strove to be worthy of Christ. Thus, he took up his cross – and there were various crosses, which he had to take up and bear in those decisive times – therefore he took up these crosses and followed Christ. And he was ready - in many ways - to 'give up his life for Christ'. His words, his actions and his entire pastoral ministry, give witness to this. He was not seeking himself, he did not wish to 'preserve his own life,' rather, he was ready to 'lose his life' on many occasions. Precisely through this,

he found himself in the fullness of life, as much as a man is able to find life in Christ. Following Him, he also led others along the way of the Gospel – along the way which is the fruit and the consequence of Baptism 'in Christ.'

A parallel, which the Pope made in his description of Bl. George, to the mystery of Baptism, was undoubtedly related to the celebration of the 600th Anniversary of the Christening of Lithuania, which included, according to the pontiff's wish, the Beatification of Archbishop Matulaitis-Matulewicz. Thus, it is only natural, that on the 20th Anniversary of his Beatification, our thoughts and heartfelt fraternal feelings go to our Lithuanian Confreres. We believe that Bl. George will give support to the Marian Community of his beloved fellow countrymen, so that it may regain its former splendor after many years of trial and suffering.

Blessed George is rightfully regarded as a patron of unity between nations. I take the liberty of recalling here the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of his Beatification. Polish and Lithuanian Bishops were concelebrating the Holy Mass in our Church at Warsaw-Stegny. In his homily, His Eminence, Henryk Cardinal Gulbinowicz, emphasized the idea that the building of the renewed Congregation on "three stems" – Lithuanian, Polish, and Belarussian – proved to be the right direction to take. "I mean to say that this was a way which provides us with a model for today's work, when we strive for unity in Europe, where each person, regardless of language, nationality, culture, tradition, or customs, would have a right to be himself," said the Cardinal. He further reminded the assembled that, "towards the end of his life, Bl. George wrote: 'Today I can truly say that the Catholic Church is my only Homeland and that I am only its patriot.'" Ten years later, this reminder still remains timely. We notice with sadness that nationalistic biases and manifestations of xenophobia, frequently accompany the process of the coming together of nations. As Bl. George's spiritual sons, we ought to strive to be always and everywhere the builders of unity, the roots of which we see in Christ's Church."

Dear Confreres, I was only able to speak here of a few topics. I trust that the 20th Anniversary of the Beatification will become for each one of us, an impulse for a new and more profound appreciation of our Renovator's thoughts. Divine Providence dictated that he was the first Marian to be elevated to the honors of the altar, not our Father Founder. This fact has a profound meaning. Through it, an *accomodata renovatio* has been achieved, of the work started almost 250 years ago in the heart and thought of Fr. Papczyński. Through it, something that characterizes the history of the entire Church has been accomplished. Forms and structures specific to bygone epochs may pass away and be replaced by new ones, but the essence of the Church, everything that is of the Holy Spirit, remains unchanged and shines through with a new splendor. Maybe it was the reason our Founder waited to perform a miracle, giving priority to the younger, the Renovator, and thus confirming the identity of our Congregation that has survived until our times, in its renewed form.

Marians, elevated to the honors of the altar, are a great gift of God and of the Church. In this gift, we perceive a new affirmation for the road assigned to us by the Founder, the Renovator, and our Constitutions. The best way to show our gratitude, would be to draw from this gift and to increase it. Marians, elevated to the honors of the altar, remind us that we are all called to holiness, just like they were, and that our way of life, is a call to "lose our life" for Christ. We should not seek ourselves or to desire to "preserve our own lives." Instead, we ought to be ready to "lose our life" many times over, in order to ultimately find it in its fullness, by finding life in Christ.

I give you my heartfelt blessing as you seek to follow this path, and I commend myself to your prayers.

Jan Mikolaj Rokosz, MIC
Superior General