

**Circular Letter
of the Superior General for
the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
December 8, 2007**

"Dear Marians, rejoicing in the gift of this Beatification, chose once again the road to which the Gospel calls you, and which your Founder showed you"

His Eminence Franc Cardinal Rodé,
Prefect of the Congregation
for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
Góra Kalwaria, September 17, 2007

Beloved Confreres:

Celebrating the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us first recall the great event inscribed by the goodness and mercy of the Lord, as was the Beatification of our Founder, Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński. Our Founder was shown to be a model to follow, and the Church directed its attention to the Charism of our Congregation in a manner never seen before. The Solemnity of the Beatification was an unusual event, not only from an organizational point of view, but more than anything, it was a powerful spiritual experience for all the participants.

The program of spiritual preparation for the Beatification helped us to rediscover in the person of the Founder, our Father, and thus to better know his rich path of faith, and to awaken reflections on the founding Charism of the Congregation. Everything points to this, that the Beatification of Father Stanislaus opens a new era in our life and evangelization.

I thank the members of the General Beatification Committee presided over by Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, for developing the program of preparation for the Beatification and for the Year of Thanksgiving. I extend my appreciation to the Postulator General, Fr. Wojciech Skóra, and to all the confreres who contributed to the fulfillment of the beatification process in all of its stages. Through the hands of Fr. Paweł Naumowicz, Provincial Superior of Divine Providence Province, I give my thanks to the organizers of the beatification celebrations in Poland.

Another event, that deeply touched all of us, was the death of Fr. Mark Garrow, Provincial of the American Province, and our former Superior General. We were uniting in prayer for his intentions, being firmly convinced that his place was among us. However, God's plans proved to be different. Today we can give thanks to God for Fr. Mark's entire life and for his service to the Congregation, which was filled with love. We believe that he rejoices in the fullness of life in Jesus Christ. We trust that in him, we have an advocate before the Lord for the Congregation's needs. I think that it was not accidental, that his suffering and death coincided with the time of the Beatification of our Founder.

The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God a Sign of God's Gratuitous Love

The mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception is the primary characteristic of Bl. Stanislaus's spirituality and it is the particular sign, strength, and joy of a Marian vocation. In this mystery, we may contemplate in a particular way, the beauty of a new life in Christ, to which we were called first through our Baptismal Consecration and then through our Religious Profession. Today's Feast is an opportunity for us to return to the source of our vocation, namely to Christ, who is the First-born of the new creation. Let us allow ourselves to be grasped by the loving gaze of Christ, to immerse ourselves in His grace, to discover anew the beauty of the life to which He calls us. Let us discover with renewed strength how beautiful and attractive holiness is, which we contemplate in Mary Immaculate, and which also shone through in the person of our Blessed Founder.

The Immaculate Conception is the sign of the gratuitous love of God, which is the deepest sense of our life and vocation. On the day of our Patronal Feast, let us open ourselves to the grace of God, so that each one of us may feel deeply and intimately loved by Him in the concrete reality of our own lives and service. This is a gratuitous love, that precedes any and all our possible merits. This is also a forgiving love, which lifts us from our falls and our unfaithfulness, and which allows us to experience over and over again, a new life in Christ. The secret of holiness is to open one's heart to experience this love and to allow oneself to be guided and formed by it.

Within each one of us, there is some sort of inclination to sin, which wants to dominate us. If we establish that our primary goal is to fight evil, then our entire thinking will revolve around sin, which we will want to conquer. This will lead to a haughty type of ascetic "muscles" and a dangerous concentration on moral perfection. The truth of the Immaculate Conception reminds us that Christ saves us. He waits

until we come to Him with all our misery and helplessness. Before every miracle that Jesus intended to do, He expected only faith. He first loved us, before we were conceived in our mother's womb, and He does not withdraw His love, seeing our life marked by sin. He chose us, and destined us to "be holy and without blemish before Him" (Eph 1:4). The experience of God's love allows us to conquer sin. What matters most in the spiritual life is this: do we believe, that we are loved by God without earning it? We need to respond with our trusting faith because of this love, just as Mary did, when she said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Your word."

The Year of Reflection and Thanksgiving for the Gift of the Beatification

From time immemorial, there has always been the temptation to regard God's gifts as something obvious and to forget to be grateful. In the midst of the Psalms, there are many prayers which call us to give continual thanks to God for His grace (Ps 9, 18, 21, 28, 31, etc.) In the New Testament, Jesus teaches us the meaning of gratitude in the parable of the Ten Lepers (Lk 17:11-19). Only the leper who came back to Jesus, glorifying Him as the Lord, and giving Him thanks, was completely healed. We will never be able to sufficiently glorify God. However, the very desire to glorify our Lord is pleasing to Him, and opens us to new gifts. For the first time after the Beatification, we are celebrating our Patronal Feast which in a special way unites the hearts and minds of Marians throughout the world. Therefore, together with Mary, let us joyfully and gratefully sing the *Magnificat*, for truly the merciful God has done great things for us.

We cannot halt for a moment the enthusiasm awakened in us by the Beatification of our Father Founder and return to "business as usual." The extraordinary gift which we have received places a daily accountability upon us before God and the Church. The grace of the Beatification and the action of the Holy Spirit, which we witnessed in this event, has caused, maybe as never before, the Marians all over the world, to feel themselves particularly united, in the desire to give of themselves to the utmost, to respond to God's love by living a more radical Gospel life in the spirit of our Founder. This sense prompts us to take up an intensive collaboration with Divine grace, so that the gift of our Founder's Beatification would produce in us, enduring and copious fruits, foreseen by Divine Providence. For this goal, a time will be used for reflection and thanksgiving for the gift of the Beatification of the Founder, which will last until December 8, 2008.

Shortly, each one of us will receive a book entitled, *And That Your Fruit Would Remain*. It contains a selection of materials to help you to fruitfully live out the Year of Thanksgiving. I draw your special attention to the proposed conferences with excerpts from the Scriptures and our Constitutions to be used communally and individually during the monthly Days of Recollection. The conferences were prepared mainly on the basis of the writings and the path of faith of our Founder. Please observe in your communities the same time and manner of conducting the monthly Day of Recollection, as was practiced during the Year of Preparation for the Beatification. Documents, homilies, and addresses, included in the second part of the book, give a larger theological perspective, and they also update the founding Charism of the Blessed. The material, other than the excerpts from the Scriptures and Constitutions, may be utilized for reading in the refectory or for individual meditation.

An important feature for this Year of Reflection and Thanksgiving for the Beatification will be the special Spiritual Exercises dedicated to better understanding the person and the way of faith of our Founder, so as to connect with him in a personal, spiritual relationship, as well as a reflection on our founding Charism which he left us, so as to later discover it in ourselves and to accept it as our own. During the Spiritual Exercises, there will be discussions on the meaning and timeliness of the Marian charism today. Father Zdzisław Żywica, assisted by Fr. Andrzej Tokarczyk, will conduct the Spiritual Exercises: two rounds in Poland, one in the U.S., and one in Brazil. For a long time, both of these confreres have specialized in their studies on the relationship between the founding Charism of a particular religious community and the personal experience of the way of faith of each of its members. Exact dates for these Spiritual Exercises will be announced shortly.

Some Signs of Gratitude to God for the Gift of the Beatification

How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good he has done for me? (Ps 116:12).

First of all, I invite each one to personally ponder before God, the manner in which he will show his gratitude for this exceptional gift of God's love. The Holy Spirit will tell each one, what God is inviting him to do in the concrete situation of life and his apostolic service in the framework of our Founder's Beatification. We ourselves know best, what in our lives most hampers us on our way to God and what opens us to His grace. Allow me to share with you my personal experience, which is also my proposal for reflection for each one of you. I have this deep urge within me, that during the Year of Thanksgiving for the Beatification, that I will daily undertake a 30-minute adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament joined with a meditation on the Word of God. This is meant to be a sign of my submission to the transforming love of God as well a prayer to the Holy Spirit for myself and our whole Marian community.

Many confreres, who daily adore the Most Blessed Sacrament, share the extraordinary fruits of this practice. Also, many Religious Communities undertake daily adoration as an act of love for Christ and as a protection from secularization and superfluous activities. This kind of prayer appears pleasing to God, because communities that practice daily adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament rejoice in numerous vocations.

The example of Fr. Stanislaus' life proves that the experience of God's love is not only a base for one's personal holiness, but also the source of a fruitful apostolate. For this reason, it is my fervent wish that the grace of our Founder's Beatification will lead us all to the renewal of an Apostolic Spirit, and to a greater awareness of our missionary character of life, both as Christians and as male Religious.

Consultations have been held for a long time on the topic of thanksgiving to be expressed by the entire Congregation for the Founder's Beatification and the approaching 100th Anniversary of its Renewal. Among others, this was my goal in convoking in Rome a Convention of Superiors of Provinces, Vicariates, and Missions (March 8-10, 2007). Seventeen of our confreres participated in this Convention. The majority (15 members) supported the idea of opening a mission in Asia as a work of thanksgiving by our Community for these two historic events and they proposed this, to start work in Philippines and then continue on to India. The opinion of all the participants of this Convention was that the votive offering of thanksgiving ought to be the work of the entire Congregation. Not all of our Provinces are in a position to provide qualified personnel to work in the missions, but almost all of them can participate in the material expenses. Thus, the members of the Convention voted almost unanimously that each Marian community and institution worldwide would designate 1% of its income during a three-year period, starting January 1, 2008, towards our Asian missions.

The General Administration assembled on November 29, 2007, in its first session since the Beatification, officially recognized the opening of a mission in the Philippines as a Marian votive offering for the gift of our Founder's Beatification and the Renewal of the Congregation, whose 100th Anniversary we will soon celebrate. The General Administration fully supported the opinion of the Convention of March 2007, that if the mission work in Asia is to be undertaken, it ought to be financed by the entire Congregation. Taking into consideration that God loves a generous giver, and that the work of thanksgiving would lose its profound meaning if done out of constraint, we withdraw from putting an obligation to pay an additional tribute. We turn with only our fervent and heart-felt request, to all the communities, directors of Marian institutions, custodians of the Marian shrines, and pastors, to designate during the next three-year period at least 1% of their entire income towards the realization of the votive offering of the Marian Community's gratitude and for the further development of our Marian missions.

The Beatification of our Founder confirmed us in the opinion that our Charism is a gift for the Universal Church and that our moral obligation is to transplant it to all nations and cultures (cf. C 8). At this time we want to do this in Asia, the continent, which in the opinion of the Holy Father, demands today the special care of the Church, becoming at the same time its hope.

In January of 2008, I plan a trip to Philippines in the company of Fr. Joseph Roesch, so as to concretely identify the needs of that local Church. We are going there at the invitation of the Director of the Apostolate of The Divine Mercy in Philippines as an arm of the National Conference of Bishops of that country. We sincerely ask you for prayers, that we may discern the Will of God. The first missionary team is projected to travel to the Philippines in the spring or summer of 2008. Presently three confreres from the Divine Providence Province are preparing themselves for this mission in the U.S. Two others have expressed a desire to go to the missions. I thank them whole-heartedly for their sacrificial offer and dedication, while I thank the Provincial Superior, Fr. Paweł Naumowicz for his openness. Also confreres from other Provinces have declared their readiness to go, although it is not always possible in regard to the present personnel needs of their communities. We embrace this newborn cause with our prayer and care. This is the work of all of us, for which we are all communally responsible.

Planning the opening of new missions, we recall with gratitude those of our confreres who have worked for many years with great dedication in the missions *ad gentes* in Rwanda, Cameroon and Kazakhstan. It is our great joy that God blesses our missionary work in those countries and that more and more confreres embrace our missionaries with care and prompt assistance.

However, we cannot forget that missions and apostolates are something much larger than any single work. Each Christian, and especially a Consecrated Person who lives by Christ's grace, shares in His mission. It happens independently of one's works and services. Not everyone is called to leave one's country of birth and to proclaim the Gospel in other countries or continents. Instead, we are all called to proclaim the Good News to our generation and to make present the salvific love of the Father. Let us ask ourselves about the motives, which lead us to undertaking our works and obligations. Even the best, the noblest works can be performed in a selfish manner with the eye on one's own needs. And inversely, the simplest and seemingly most common works performed in the spirit of love and unity with the

community of the Congregation and the Church, become the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the world and have as such a tremendous apostolic power. Also those confreres, who do not directly contribute to the ministry of the Congregation because of their age or health, still participate in the mission of the Congregation and the Church through their prayer and suffering.

Conclusion

This very day we are renewing our vows. For Blessed Stanislaus, the Religious Life was the most precious pearl, for which it is worth giving everything. When we renew our Religious Consecration in the year of our Founder's Beatification, let us with particular love, give God our whole heart, intellect, and will. Let us also embrace with our thought, the wonderful legacy of our Congregation, the riches of our Founder's charism, which by the gift of God radiated for us a new light.

From my heart I blessing each and all and commend myself to your prayers.

Jan Mikolaj Rokosz, MIC
Superior General