

**Superior General's Circular Letter
on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
Closing the Jubilee of the 100th Anniversary of the Renewal and Reform
of the Congregation of Marian Fathers
December 8, 2009**

Prot. No. 213/2009

Dear Confreres:

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, more than on any other day, we rejoice in our communion with Mary at Christ's side. On this day, I send my greetings to everyone, but especially to our ill confreres, and I ask all of you to reflect in a special way on God's love for each one of you individually and for our entire Congregation.

The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God is a never ending song in honor of The Divine Mercy. This mystery is particularly close to us today, when we are closing the Jubilee celebrations of the 100th Anniversary of the saving of our community from extinction, thus giving a new impulse to its growth. Our recalling this 100-year old event has provided us with an opportunity to give thanks for the mercy shown to us and to pray that God will keep on performing great deeds in us today as well.

Through the four stages of the Jubilee Year (*Gloria in excelsis Deo, Miserere, Magnificat, Duc in altum*), as well as through the jubilee celebrations, we have striven to create a climate for God's actions in us and for our conversion; for a deepening of our knowledge about the circumstances of the renewal and to explore Blessed George's contribution to our charism. Once again, I would like to recall the following events: the opening of the Jubilee in Rome presided over by the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Stanisław Cardinal Ryłko (December 8th), the historical and theological symposium in Licheń on the circumstances of the renewal and the founding charisms (May 24-31, 2008); the main celebrations of the thanksgiving and supplication at the tomb of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz in Mariampole, Lithuania (July 19th) and at the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw (August 29th) where Blessed George made his first religious vows, thus initiating the renewal of our Congregation.

Today, at the General House in Rome, led by Franc Cardinal Rodé, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, we praise the Lord once again for saving and renewing our community and we entrust to Him our future as we heed His Word.

Message for the Conclusion of the Jubilee

The liturgy on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception invites us to meditate on the fall of our first parents (Gen 3:9-15.20), and on the mystery of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38).

The sin of our first parents was not in their partaking of the forbidden fruit, but in their turning their hearts away from God. Succumbing to the words of the Tempter, that they "will be like gods" (cf. Gen 3:5), man dethrones God in his heart. He no longer regards God as his Master. Instead, he places *himself* at the center of life. The most garish fruits of this sin which we see all too often in the world around us are violence, murder, adultery and the various forms of exploitation of man by his fellow man. However, we cannot conclude that the consequences of the sin of our first parents are revealed only in grave misdeeds. The essence of the first fall was in showing disregard to the Lord as our God. It is possible to lead an orderly life on the outside, avoiding scandals and dramatic failures; in a sense, this life may even be pious, but in fact, it is far from God. In our individual and communal lives, we can preserve its outward correctness and we can even take on good apostolic works, but instead of centering on God, we'd be centering on ourselves and on seeking our personal glory. This kind of idolatry – possibly, the most dangerous of all – can also appear in the life of consecrated persons.

Gazing intently on Mary, Immaculately Conceived and totally dedicated to God, we ask ourselves: whom indeed do we serve? For whom do we live? Can we really say that God and His glory are the center and goal of our lives and actions? Or do we, under the appearance of a lifestyle dedicated to God, really seek our own glory and comfort, rebelling every time we experience a trial, a humiliation or a lack of appreciation?

In the scene of the Annunciation, we see the exact opposite of an attitude of seeking one's own glory and placing oneself in the limelight. Mary, full of grace, is not concerned with herself, but instead, is fully centered on God and on fulfilling His will: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Mary does not parade her actions about. She does not say, "I will do

everything that the Lord said," unlike the Jews at Mount Sinai (see Ex 19:8) who then went on to make a golden calf (Ex 32:1). The Immaculate Virgin unconditionally agrees to God's working in her and through her.

A year ago, I invited all of you to let the Holy Spirit reform each one of us. A true reform means primarily a profound inner *metanoia*, a change of heart and minds through the power of the Holy Spirit: "... that we might live no longer for ourselves but for Christ who died for us and rose from the dead," as we read in the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer.

It is easy to see Blessed George as a man of action, an activist. In reality, he was a man of prayer and contemplation. Everything that he did resulted from his deep union with God. Similarly, we, as the Congregation renovated by Blessed George, must be above all men of faith who fulfill God's work and not some sort of an "action group" within the Church. Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz did not leave any doubt about it. Here is one of his instructions: "We should try to get into the habit of a constant spirit of prayer: while walking, during working hours (...) or whenever we have a free moment, while passing from one job to another or even while conversing with people – in a word, everywhere and at all times. (...) In our active life, it is absolutely necessary that we acquire this habit of prayer. (...) Let us learn to remain and to walk in the presence of God, always prepared to do whatever is most pleasing to Him, and our soul will be immersed in prayer" (Journal, November 24, 1910).

This is the direction and sense of all reforms. Prayer is not alienation; it is not fleeing away from work. On the contrary: it is a necessary condition for our life to be fruitful. Without prayer, our works and actions lose the reason for being and they may unexpectedly become a goal in themselves and a very subtle form of idolatry. Without prayer, our interpersonal relations also become shallow and superficial.

As we close the Jubilee of the Renewal of our Community, I invite you all to be always faithful to prayer. It is possibly the greatest need in our Congregation today. No one acquires the aptitude for praying once and for all. No one among us has a natural aptitude for praying. Prayer is a gift from God. This gift has to grow in us during our entire lifetime. At every moment of life, there is the risk of abandoning prayer. Let's not fall prey to this temptation. Unfortunately, often times, praying is the first occupation that we abandon. It must be otherwise. We may resign from many other, less important matters, provided that we remain faithful to our individual and communal prayers. For without prayer, there is no communal life.

Proceedings of the General Convention

A year ago, a General Convention took place in Rome (December 4-7, 2008), whose guiding idea was to reflect on Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński as *the Father and Guide on the Marian Path*. In a way, the Convention summed up the beatification of our Founder and introduced us into the Jubilee of the Renewal. Many confreres asked me to more fully present the main topics of the meetings and their conclusions.

During the Convention, we noted that the beatification of our Father Founder was a special sign of Divine grace towards our community. The beatification brought the person of Blessed Stanislaus closer to our community's members as a father and as an illustrious personality in the seventeenth-century Church. Many of our confreres stressed the point that after the renewal of our Congregation, our Founder seemed to be pushed to the background and thus, we began to pay less attention to the principle elements of our mission for which our Congregation had been founded. The beatification caused Father Papczyński to be returned to his rightful place in our community. The foundation of each religious institute is the charism left behind by its Founder. Reading the founding charism anew in the light of modern-day challenges is one of the basic criteria for remaining faithful to the institute's vocation; it is the condition for the institute's vitality and growth. The founding charism ought to be re-read, re-interpreted, but never changed or impoverished.

Many of our confreres were able to deepen their *identitas* in regards to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. It has been noted that the cause, which was supposed to be the main goal of our Congregation – fostering the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. – was regarded as a marginal aspect. It does not come as a surprise seeing that point # 2 of our Constitutions, which speaks about the Congregation's particular mission, does not mention fostering the honor of the Mother of God's Immaculate Conception. During the Convention, many confreres gave witness that their studying and contemplating this mystery had become a source of life for them. We all noticed an ever growing desire for the *suffragium defunctorum* among the confreres. In other words, to pray and to intercede for the deceased not only as one of the pious practices, but as an essential element of our charism, which was the second particular goal of the Marians.

We must also continue the initiated reflection on the mystery of The Divine Mercy in our charism. The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God is a wonderful fruit of this mystery. Thus, praying for the

deceased is a manifestation of mercy for those who can no longer do anything for themselves and it also immerses them in the Mercy of God.

Keynote speakers that previously had received the task of studying the main elements of our charism, delivered a number of proposals aimed at its more fuller definition in our Constitutions. However, the opinion prevailed that it was important to change our awareness of our charism as well as the way that we live it out on daily basis. Thus, various forms and causes were discussed: those already in existence and awaiting revival, and those to be initiated.

In this spirit, the Convention empowered the Superior General to petition the Congregation of the Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments to grant the Marians the special privilege to recite the Office of the Dead from the Liturgy of the Hours and to celebrate the Holy Mass according to the formula for the deceased in their monasteries and parishes or other pastoral centers on a designated weekday (Monday or Tuesday) regardless of the obligatory memorials occurring on that day. This would be a sort of connection with a long-standing tradition, existing for over 200 years, according to which the Marians recited the Office of the Dead daily. There is a chance that the privilege will be granted because we are the only male order in the Church founded to assist the deceased.

There was also a wide spread conviction during the Convention that the opposition of the persons of Blessed Stanislaus and Blessed George (which had existed at some points in our history despite its being totally unjustified) was completely overcome in the light of our Founder's beatification and the 100th Anniversary of the Renewal. Father Matulewicz never considered himself a founder of a new congregation. On the contrary, he thought saving the existing Marian Order the main task of his life. The exceptional character of Blessed George's role consisted in rescuing Fr. Papczyński's work in the Church and his prophetic interpretation of the mission of our Congregation. The more attentively we study the persons and legacy of our Founder and Renovator, the better we see the charismatic continuity, union and the same spirit that causes the charism of Blessed Stanislaus to radiate more strongly when it is read through the prism of Blessed George's work and thought. Both our Blessed Fathers are witnesses to the great deeds that God accomplished in them and through them. Both our Blesseds continue to attract and inspire.

Preparations for the General Chapter

In a certain sense, Chapters measure the day-to-day history of a religious institute. In the next year Provincial Chapters will take place. The General Chapter is planned for the first quarter of 2011. The Chapter is a time of God's special works; it will bring fruits only if the entire community will allow the Holy Spirit to guide it while its members will commit themselves to various works with glad hearts and minds.

The upcoming Provincial and General Chapters bear a special responsibility for interpreting the signs of the times in the context of our Founder's beatification and the 100th Anniversary of our Renewal. Everything seems to indicate that God wishes to tell us a great deal through those two events.

The Chapters require preparations. Thus, I convoked a pre-Chapter Committee and defined its goals. One of them is to give an opinion on the *Instrumentum laboris* entitled *The Charism of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers and its Timeliness in the Modern World*, prepared by the Committee for the Charism. Also, the Committee will work on conclusions made by the General Convention such as the analysis of the Constitutions and Directory in the light of the new reading of our charism accomplished after the beatification of our Founder and the celebrations of the 100th Anniversary of our Renewal and Reform. It will also prepare its proposals for the Chapter and define our community's priorities for the next six years.

In the opinion of certain confreres, it is time to bring back our white habit. I am aware of the extreme sensitivity and importance of this matter. It is not possible to simply ignore the desire of certain confreres to wear the white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother, which was our Founder's requirement. They are convinced that it is the will of God for the Marians to bring back the white habit. To them this outward sign is an opportunity and an aid to their giving themselves entirely to God and to live by our Congregation's charism. Many are also adversaries of the white habit's comeback. According to them, along with the return of the religious garment, there is a risk of introducing an unnecessary division within the Congregation, as well as narrowing our religious life down to only an outward manifestation.

The matter of the habit and other important, although not equally emotional questions, will certainly be discussed during the Chapters, because certain confreres have already presented their written proposals or are about to do so. In order for the Chapter to have the necessary information at its disposal, I instructed the pre-Chapter Committee to prepare an appropriate questionnaire and to distribute it among all community members. This would give each Marian an opportunity to express his views on important

questions regarding our Congregation. May our communal wish be to discover God's will for us.

I ask you, Dear Confreres, to pray for the intention of the Provincial Chapters and the General one so that we allow God to fulfill His plan for our community.

Conclusion

May the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception be our source of strength and continuous renewal. May the Holy Spirit that filled Mary at the inception of her life continue to enliven and to renew our communities and each one of us. I commend all of you, our entire Congregation and myself to the grace of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Mary.

Jan M. Rokosz, MIC
Superior General