

**Circular Letter
of the General Superior
for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary
December 8, 2010**

Prot. n. 261/2010

Dear Confreres:

We are invited once again, as we are every year, to penetrate with the eyes of faith the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God and her exceptional mission in the history of salvation. Let us praise God for the miracles that He has performed in Mary and which have been given as a gift and a task to us, the Marians, to become the particular sign, strength, and joy of our vocation (cf. C 6).

Today we embrace each one of you with prayer, gratitude, and fraternal love. Our special affection goes to our sick and elderly brethren. We joyfully greet our youngest who will live out this festivity along with us for the first time. In the mystery of the Communion of Saints, we remember and pray today for all those who are no longer with us.

This year, we focus our attention on the preparations for the General Chapter, which is regarded by our religious tradition as the experience of highest importance for the growth of each religious institute. Although celebrated by a single religious institute, each Chapter becomes an event of the whole Church. This is particularly important now, since the Holy Father is tackling significant problems regarding the Church's mission in the world.

"The faithful are leaving us, yet we remain silent"

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which promotes the Church's activities in the missionary countries, has been a dicastery of the Roman Curia for nearly four centuries. On October 12, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI established a new Vatican dicastery: the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization which will embrace with its activities the so-called Christian nations which are succumbing to de-Christianization. This is an endeavor which defines the new evangelization strategy of the Church at the highest level. In his *Motu Proprio, Ubicumque et semper*, ("Always and Everywhere"), establishing the new Pontifical Council, the Holy Father draws our attention to the fact that, "in our own time, [the Church's mission] has been particularly challenged by an abandonment of the faith — a phenomenon progressively more manifest in societies and cultures which for centuries seemed to be permeated by the Gospel." And these are the words of Archbishop Salvatore "Rino" Fisichella, the first Council Chair: "Pope Gregory the Great once said: 'The faithful are leaving us, yet we remain silent.' I believe that the establishment of this dicastery is a warning sign for the Church, that we cannot remain silent in the face of the faithful leaving the Church. If we've said nothing before regarding people's abandoning the faith and passively submitting to secularization, now the time has come to speak up clearly and courageously, for we are the preachers of the Gospel." The fact that shortly after establishing the Council, Pope Benedict XVI announced the convocation of the Synod of Bishops in 2012 which will be dedicated to the New Evangelization in the Modern World, also shows us that the Holy Father keeps the matter of the New Evangelization close to his heart.

We read in *Vita consecrata*: "If the great challenges which modern history poses to the new evangelization are to be faced successfully, what is needed above all is a consecrated life which is continually open to challenge by the revealed Word and the signs of the times" (VC, 81). Indeed, for centuries, consecrated persons have been offering their priceless contribution to the work of evangelization by imitating Christ and making a fervent apostolic commitment. Unfortunately, persons that ought to be, because of their very nature, the prime witnesses and advocates of God's love in the world, do not always demonstrate to the world the authentic and live-giving face of Christ. At a meeting with General Superiors, the Holy Father once said: "In fact, the secularized culture has penetrated the mind and heart of not a few consecrated persons, who understand it as a way to enter modernity and a modality of approach to the contemporary world. As a result, in addition to an undoubted thrust of generosity capable of witness and of total giving, consecrated life today knows the temptation of mediocrity, of middle-class ways and of a consumeristic mentality" (*Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Superiors General of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*, Vatican, Paul VI Hall, May 26, 2006). Father Eutimio Sastre Santos, CMF, a spiritual father and a theologian of the consecrated life, speaks in the very same spirit: "Never before has there been so much talk about consecration; but also never before have its manifestations been so cast off, starting with persons who should be exacting about consecration. Never before have the lips been so full of words about opting for the poor, but also never before has the way of life given the lie to them as much as it does today. Never before has the appeal to follow Christ been brought forth so much, and also never before has the way of the cross been so scarcely undertaken. The mission has never been proclaimed so much before as the guide for the institutes; however, never before, have the institutes seemed to be so very lost. Never before has the "discovering" of the founder been so greatly promoted, but simultaneously never has he been so utterly neglected by the revised constitutions, which are supposed to be the sign of life and the

basis for re-founding his work" (*La vita religiosa nella storia della Chiesa e della società*, Milano 1997, p. 982).

In the face of these problems Card. Franc Rodé, the Prefect of the Congregation for Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, addressed some consecrated persons with this meaningful message: "It is very urgent to change our mentality and to recognize these great challenges to be not difficulties and obstacles, but the new *kairos*, the time of grace, in which the life-giving breath of the Spirit manifests itself. (...) Therefore, it is necessary to understand and to retrieve the sense of being the leaven, the prophetic sign, and the sign of hope" *Interrogativi e sfide alla vita consacrata*, II Convegno diocesano dedicato ai religiosi, ("Questions and Challenges to the Consecrated Life, II Diocesan Convention Dedicated to the Religious") Naples, February 3, 2010).

The Immaculate Conception – an Inspiration and a Hope

Within the framework of the preparations for the Chapter, let us draw light and strength from the radiance of the Immaculate Conception of Mary so that we may receive the grace of God which renews us.

From the first moment of her existence, Mary, who is unstained by sin, manifests in her person, her complete availability to the inspirations and actions of the Holy Spirit. There was nothing in her which would distort His actions, which would refashion them in a selfish, egotistical manner. She is completely receptive, docile to the guidance of the One who is the source of holiness. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and the Giver of Life, but the life that He gives is frequently hampered, blocked or downright poisoned. When the Holy Spirit evokes in our minds a vision of things worthy of accomplishing in the Church and in our Congregation, when He awakes in our souls an surge of the will to give ourselves to this work at once, God's inspiration frequently becomes immediately engulfed in our fears, ambitions, selfish dreams or hopes, while our imagination puts forth various difficulties that suggest that we lack the power, that it's a waste of effort, not worth our while because it would change nothing or, perhaps, someone else could take care of it. And this is how God's plan can become suppressed or forfeited. Mary Immaculate shows us that it is possible to give ourselves to the Holy Spirit, to believe in His guidance; that it is possible, with effort and humility, to purify the ideas suggested by the Spirit from the muck of our egotism, ambition, and opposition.

Mary's constant readiness to be guided by the Holy Spirit is an invitation for us to assume a posture of availability, which is pure and unmarred by our ideologies, to the sanctifying grace of God which is the only source of life in the Church. When we say: "Do not look on our sins, but on the faith of your Church," we unite ourselves with the faith of all the saints throughout the history of the Church, and particularly with the faith of that Woman who is the leader of the Church's faith, because we hope to be cleansed of everything that blocks the power of the Lord and Giver of Life within us. The more we submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the more we become witnesses and instruments of His sanctifying power, the faster we will find solutions for our life and ministry which will point out what the Church is in need of most today, in accordance with our charism.

It is the Holy Spirit who unveils the Lord's movements in history for us; He explains to us the signs of the times, as well as sanctifying us and endowing us with the necessary gifts. On our own, we are very weak and frequently helpless in the face of the secularization that penetrates our communities through our hearts and minds. But we become very strong when we ask for the supernatural power of God to work in us through the Holy Spirit.

The Role and Importance of the General Chapter

Each Chapter ought to be regarded as a salvific action of the Lord who enters into the history of a religious community in order to perform the work of redemption "here and now." The Chapter refers to the holy gatherings of the chosen people, in which the people of God could better understand and live out the truth about being chosen, as well as to find an impulse for renewing their faithfulness. The Chapter is a time of grace for a religious community, a time of intensified action by the Holy Spirit who lays out the foundation for all of God's works and decisions.

Animated by the power of the Holy Spirit, a religious congregation becomes "the salt of the earth (...) and the light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14). However, if the spirit of the world takes over, "it is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Mt 5:13). The Congregation will be renewed as a result of every crisis and every difficult circumstance only if it accepts, in imitation of Mary, the Holy Spirit – the Lord and Giver of Life. For this reason, all Chapter decisions ought to enable the brethren to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. Should the decisions of the Chapter be limited only to proclaiming obligations, it would be exasperating. Instead, if the Chapter invokes, here and now, help from above, it will become the leaven for the renewal of the entire Congregation.

We need God's courage to break away from everything that hampers our community in its following the chaste, poor, and obedient Christ. We need the gift of discernment to comprehend the meaning of the

exceptional gifts of God which were manifested in the Beatification of our Founder and in the Jubilee of the Community's Salvation through our Father Renovator. We need God's light to interpret the relevance of our charism in the context of modern challenges and to answer the question as to what specific contribution can be made by our Congregation and its single communities to the work of the new evangelization.

The Chapter becomes an encouragement for a communal conversion joined with the difficult task of *metanoia*. For us to be able to speak of the "action" of the Holy Spirit that a Chapter ought to be, we must make its preparations and experience into one great act of prayer and listening to God. I particularly ask our sick and elderly brethren to offer their sufferings for the intentions of our deliberations.

The preparation and celebration of the Chapter is also a time for attentive listening to one another. This is the spirit in which the pre-Chapter Committee has been working. I wish to thank them today for their hard work and dedication. This Committee has prepared and mailed to all of the confreres a survey about important matters for our Congregation. By sharing the fruits of our reflections and experiences, we shall become witnesses for each other as to what it means to be a Marian today. Thanks to this survey, we will be able to more clearly learn what are our joys and pains, our desires and disappointments. This will then help us to truthfully take a look at ourselves, and to further open ourselves to the healing power of the Holy Spirit, and to the beauty of our charism. The fruitfulness of the Chapter will also depend on the degree that we allow ourselves to be transformed by God's grace, and on the degree that our decisions become a reflection of God's word and will for us.

Conclusion

The Chapter will elect the Congregation's new authorities for the next six years. I consider it my special privilege to serve the Congregation in such a special period of our history that has seen the Beatification of Father Founder and the Jubilee of our Salvation. Mindful that a day will come when I shall "render an account to God of my stewardship" (cf. C 223), I beseech His mercy already today. I thank all my confreres for their prayers. I know that some of them have been commending my person, my health and my service to the Lord God in a particularly fervent manner. I give heart-felt thanks to the General Councilors and to all of the confreres working at the General Curia, to the Provincial Superiors and to the many brethren who supported me and the General Government in our work. I give thanks to all for their witness of faith and fidelity. I ask forgiveness if I did not show sufficient charity to someone or if I somehow gave offense or did an injustice. I thank God for each one of my confreres, because each one, without exception, is a priceless gift of God for the Church and our Congregation.

The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God is the greatest victory of the Lord in humanity. Let us hope that, through His love, God will triumph in the heart of each one of us and that He will make us witnesses of His love for the world.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!

Jan M. Rokosz, MIC
Superior General