

What do I have to apologize for? What does the Marian "infidelity" consist of?

When we do something inappropriate, rude – we apologize. When we hurt someone – we apologize. When we sin, we prepare for confession – we apologize to God. Important is to concentrate on the world "we." In all of the above cases WE are the ones who act without leaving a chance to either people or God to take a stance in regard to our "offences." Yet maybe, instead of apologizing we ought **to beg for forgiveness**. For an inattentive person there is no great difference between apologizing and asking for forgiveness. But the difference is there, and it is an essential one. Asking for forgiveness puts us into the position of a suppliant, which presumes certain dependency from the other person. This is a situation, when the offender or the person who inflicted pain or wound becomes totally disarmed by placing himself in a humbling position, giving himself to the "mercy" of the other. This is also an act of humiliation, the way to a true reconciliation. It is also a chance to come into the attitude of heeding.

Every jubilee is a time of grace, time of thanksgiving; but it is also a time of reflection and examination of conscience. In order to advance, as a community and individually, we ought to look back once in a while and to recognize our sins and infidelities, as well as to draw conclusions in the light of the Word of God and our charism. The ability to see the sin and infidelity is already a grace. Taking a stance in truth without making self-accusations or drowning ourselves in guilt allows us to see all those moments that bear death and cause that we miss the goal assigned by God.

Faithfulness to our vocation

Time after time, the Church has been calling religious order members to return to the sources – to what their founders have been inspired in their hearts and passed on to their communities. The communal examination of conscience should guide us in reflection on the question: do we indeed live by the charism given by Father Founder and brought up-to-date by Father Renovator? Historical circumstances and mentality change. This is the reason why, to preserve its vitality, our community must systematically discern the way of **how to put our charism into life today, here, and now**. Without proper vigilance and discernment we risk deviating from faithfulness to the Congregation's charism. A question arises: **do we make discernment** and **how** do we make it? Or maybe, instead of discerning, we carelessly give in to modern trends, fashions, and worldly influences. As "his legacy," our Founder left us the Divine Providence as the main point of reference. One could mockingly say that he did not have any choice since Bishop Wierzbowski distributed all goods and privileges among others and had nothing for the Marians except Divine Providence. Was it a pious ruse, or an accident, or maybe, God truly wants us to trust Him completely, just like Mary did? Indeed, doesn't it show the lack of faith, this sort of "discernment" in which the balance of gains and losses is of utmost importance? This is not the matter of cheap ideology or lack of prudence. How much attention is given to the Word of God in our communal discernment, which often seems to occupy little space in the process of discernment (here everyone must answer the question to himself). Before making important decisions regarding a house, a province, or our Congregation, do we pray for fulfillment of God's will? The fear of material loss may be great; it may obscure the God's plan. Not one among us, or at least very few, wishes to suffer privation or fear the uncertain future. Having tasted the poverty or some sort of shortage once, we tell ourselves: no more! We shall not eat margarine ever again and we cannot imagine life without the state-of-the-art gadgets, without stability and security, which we can provide for ourselves. The decline of vocations tends to summon forth accusations of neglect, without so much as considering what God wants to tell us by this. Our private comfort, both material and psychological, is able to obscure our clarity of vision, even clarity of mind, to say nothing of perseverance in the grace of God. The prophet Jeremiah (Jr 7:4) warns us about deceitful words, about taking the state of wellbeing for the final state of blessing.

Sins caused by the lack of discernment are like time bomb. They transform the communities, the nature of which is life according to grace of God, into structures more or less well-organized that urgently seek to adjust themselves, abiding by purely human principles and thus stopping to fulfill the role assigned by God.

Fraternity; love of the neighbor

Another reason, for which we ought to beg God and people's forgiveness, is the fraternal life. John Paul II reminded us that the **fruitfulness of religious life depends on the quality of fraternal life**. It has been said about early Christians: **look, how much they love one another!** Can this be said without sarcasm or sour smile about our fraternal life, as well? **"Am I my brother's keeper?"** asked Cain (Gen 4:9). Indeed, at times we are our brothers' keepers, although we often do it in a preachy, accusatory, and condemning manner. On the other hand, we do not want anyone to pay us attention too closely. Departure from the community often seems to be the way of dealing with problems. Lacking natural ties, we do not allow ourselves to be drawn in by the ties created by the grace of God, the love of Christ. Only too often we cannot to accept one another the way we are, taking offense in our many differences, weaknesses, mentalities. Men affected by weaknesses shun from those who believe themselves being better, more perfect. In turn, those people do not really know how to reach men who are confused. It

would be wrong not to mention here such sins as criticism, libel, gossip, spreading unverified hearsay, jealousy, egocentrism... Each of us should ask himself and the community what it is that kills its unity. How honest our interpersonal relations are and how much they have of superficiality, accented by mistrust and suspicion. It is necessary to remember that, wanting to destroy a community, the devil always starts with breaking down its unity in order to "finish us off" one by one. What is more, he does it with our own hands, or rather with our hardened and unfeeling hearts, and leads us to slaughter like some ignorant cattle... And this is by no means a sacrifice, out of which the life will spring forth...

Pro Ecclesia

We also ought to beg the Church's forgiveness. Not every pastoral work, or rather the manner of "managing" it, is the service for the Church. Our activity may become our self-realization, a way of fulfilling private ambitions, a department that only we know how to run properly. All others – hands off! For instance, a sin against poverty does not equal the accumulation of material goods only. Non-sharing one's work and its fruits may be a sign of lacking poverty. Some people think that they possess the best recipe for doing some special work, for the manner of carrying it out, etc. On the other hand, if they cannot play the leading role in some activity it'll lose its interest for them. This is how private "little fields" or even "great estates" come into being. They are some sort of one-man team, owned by this man. And when "the owner" leaves – transfers or dies – this "field" will overgrow and die out. Everyone who comes next must start afresh... This is like a wound inflicted on the Church, which by no means is our property. We are useless servants... Strongly adhering to our personal visions, which often are so very different from the ones given by the Teaching Magisterium of the Church, we sometimes advance the rifts within the Church community or confusion in the minds of people entrusted to our care. "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Kephass"... Our preaching becomes proclamation of human wisdom, recitation of stories, and it is unrelated to the Word. Once graduated from the seminary or completed our religious formation, we "safely" have little inclination to learn, to grow, to deepen our faith through study of the Church documents and reflection over the reality, as seen in the perspective of history of salvation. Our infidelity to our vows is a wound to the Church. There is no sin that wouldn't wound the community of the religious order and the entire Church.

It would be proper to inquire about our missionary spirit at this point. It is not only the matter of mission *ad gentes*. Today's missionary service, in its larger sense, includes **also** the openness toward new aspects of moral, spiritual, and material poverty that keep springing forth. The fear for one's own life, security, and wellbeing stifles the evangelical openness to those new challenges. The wounds of the Church demand a sacrifice (an increasingly unpopular word...), something that we are ready for only too seldom. And no moralizing, no appeals, not even some sort of coercing can do much here. This is the matter of openness of heart, continuous **metanoia** (change of one's mentality), true readiness to die for the Church.

Unfaithfulness of a Marian

By its burden, every sin takes us further away from God. In principle, the unfaithfulness of a Marian is no different than the unfaithfulness of any other Christian. It always concerns one's faith and fidelity. What can be a special sign for us is the person of Mary. Calling our community into existence, God in a special way gave us Mary as the example of a believer. The unfaithfulness of a Marian to his charism may begin with limiting his Marian characteristics to the devotional aspect only. This limitation brings along the danger of certain alienation. Above all, the prayer and pious acts ought to express one's lifestyle and everyday behavior. This is the way of seeing the reality through the prism of Mary's attitude towards it. And here we come back to the trust in God, Divine Providence. At the Annunciation Mary says to the Archangel Gabriel: "How can this be, since I do *not know* man" – *not know* meaning "I am a virgin, I have no relations with a man, so how will I be able to conceive a child?" This question allows for the interpretation: "I do not possess in me the power by which to conceive." The name 'Gabriel' means 'the power of God.' In answer, the Archangel indicated the source of the needed power, which comes to Mary from outside of her: "The power of the Most High will *overshadow* you," enabling to come about what humanly seems to be impossible. In the Old Testament the expression 'to overshadow' was used about the bright cloud, which was the sign of God's presence; therefore the conception of Jesus is effected only by God and His Spirit. In reference to the discernment, it can be said that the unfaithfulness of a Marian may signify his relying on his own powers, and abilities exclusively, without seeking the will of God. It is also the lack of patience in hardships, especially in the experience of the Cross, during which it is easy to succumb to doubts and resignation. If we accept the fact that the Immaculate Conception is the promise of a new life in Christ, given to us gratuitously out of the grace of God, than we must ask ourselves if our preaching, our lifestyle expresses the hope of fulfilling this promise. Are we truly the promoters of this truth (in a variety of ways)? Mary's feature was to see the reality, the history through the prism of the word of God revealed to her. One could probably say that by calling us to the Congregation of Marian Fathers God encourages us to see our life, the history that takes place all around us, with Mary's eyes. This manner of looking is the best way to perceive Jesus in circumstances, even those considered hopeless in human terms. The faith is born out of what we hear; and what we are supposed to listen to is the word of God. Do we truly display the attitude of heeding? Also, the Marian characteristic of a Marian

is also the quality of fraternal life that shows itself in mutual help extended daily. It is also the magnanimous forgiveness given to our confreres and people around us. It is also the directing the attention to Christ not to ourselves, so that we may *do whatever He tells us...*

Naturally, the unfaithfulness transpires in everyday life, in regard to prayers, duties, and regulations. It signifies the lack of faith and trust. We ought to recognize and accept in our hearts, individually and communally, the truth about ourselves, by being constantly open to conversion.

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Questions for reflection:

1. In your opinion, what are in the light of the Word of God and the Congregation's charism the gravest sins and neglects committed in your community (house, province, Congregation), for which we need to beg for forgiveness?
2. What the renewal of our religious community may consist of today?
3. In what way and to what extent do you see Mary as a particular symbol of the Marian vocation?