

The Superior General's Homily
Delivered at the Eucharistic Celebration Opening the Jubilee Year of
the 100th Anniversary of the Renewal and Reform
of the Congregation of Marian Fathers
Rome, December 8, 2008

This Eucharist, which we are celebrating on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception – the Patronal Feast of our Community – is very special for us. Today, more than any other day, we feel our unity with Mary at Christ's side. We are bound with ties that are stronger than blood: one faith, one vocation, our fraternal love, and one goal, which is our guiding principle. Today, we unite spiritually with the Marians worldwide. We embrace them with our love and prayer and, as one, give our thanks at the altar, united in the holy sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In this Eucharist, we want to praise God for His love and mercy, which He has continuously shown to each one of us and to our entire Community for over three centuries of its existence. We continue to give Him our thanks for the Beatification of our Father Founder and for the first fruits of this gift: once again, over 300 years later, we go back to the roots of our Congregation to rediscover and re-ignite everything that God foresaw for us in His everlasting plan as our life and our mission. Returning to our beginnings gives us great joy. It inspires us and calls for conversion. How would it be possible, then, not to give thanks to God for this creative impulse to seek our identity and to discover that our roots go ever deeper and its influence expands in ever-widening circles?

Today, as we enter the Jubilee Year of the 100th Anniversary of the Renewal and Reform of our Congregation, let us give thanks to God for this gift of His mercy. The miraculous rescue of our Community from annihilation carried out by Blessed George was probably God's most powerful intervention in our history. It was an important demonstration of His concern for us and a confirmation that the Church needs our charism. We want to ask the Lord to breathe His Spirit into each one of us and into the entire Congregation today as well.

On this day, we turn to the Blessed Virgin, God's chosen one and she who is full of grace. We contemplate the mystery of her Immaculate Conception which fascinated Blessed Stanislaus and which is, from the first moment, the sign, strength and joy of the Marian vocation. May it also be today our sign, strength and joy; may it also become our inspiration, hope and the path for our conversion and renewal in our Jubilee.

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception communicates above all God's triumph over sin. Humanity is under the legacy of sin, but the power of evil has never been total. The realization of this ought to be a source of consolation and hope especially for us. In various ways, we struggle against sin in our lives, our surroundings, our communities, and our entire Congregation. Maybe at times, when we look at the human inadequacy in ourselves and in our Congregation, we are tempted to allow despondency to settle in. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception gives us courage and affirms that the powerful love of God is greater than evil.

Saint Paul wrote: "In love He [God] destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of His will, for the praise of the glory of His grace that He granted us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:4-6). Today, on our Patronal Feast Day, let us allow ourselves to experience the fact that we are deeply loved by God and let us rejoice in the gift of this grace, of which the Apostle speaks. May nothing turn us away from this joy, and may it not be obscured by anything! Let us be enveloped in Christ's loving gaze. Let us ask with faith, that we would be immersed in His grace, and let us become enraptured once again by the beauty of the life to which He has called us.

The truth of the Immaculate Conception reminds us that Christ is the One who saves us. Let us give to Him today all of our shortcomings and our helplessness. Let us give Him the present and the future of our Congregation. Note that Jesus did not expect any good deeds before performing one of the miracles: all He wanted was faith and trust. He was the first to embrace us with love, even before our conception in our mother's wombs. And He does not take His love away now, looking down on our lives which are marked by sin. It was the same for our Congregation. Out of love, God called it into existence. In a truly miraculous way, His love manifested itself in its rescue from annihilation. This fact gives us the right to trust that His love will come to our rescue again today, during our trials.

In our spiritual lives, we tend to get unduly focused on sin and on the things that enslave us. We give too much attention to our battle against sin, which we often lose. The Immaculate Conception teaches us an entirely different strategy. Instead of focusing on sins, let us give our entire attention to God's love for

us. Let us contemplate His love. The experience of God's love will allow us to conquer sin. What counts most in the spiritual life is not how adequate our love for God and neighbor is (naturally it is not!) but rather how much we believe that we are loved by God, completely undeservedly, and how we respond to His love with our trustful faith in imitation of Mary, who cried out: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

Today, as we renew our vows, standing in humility before the Lord, let us repeat after Mary: "Behold, I am Your servant. May it be done to me according to Your word." Let us state this on behalf of our entire community: "Behold, we are Your servants. May it be done to us according to Your word." Let these words express our desire and our readiness to fulfill, both personally and as a Congregation, the Divine plan for this very special moment in our history, which is our Founder's Beatification and our present Jubilee.

Dear Confreres: the Lord will take our dedication seriously, and He will act with new strength. By conscientiously uttering those words, we show our readiness to give God everything, which He will ask of us: to change our lifestyle, to give up our plans and visions, to abandon human securities in order to carry the cross. Yes, it may be painful, it may entail a struggle, but we will have life, joy and peace when we fulfill God's will and follow Jesus Christ. Nothing is a better reward than God Himself.

Maybe, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception can become the very key to understanding the life and work of our two Fathers: Blessed Stanislaus and Blessed George. They both let themselves be enveloped in the new life in Christ, the fullest example of which we see in Mary Immaculate. Neither Bl. Stanislaus nor Bl. George wished to do his work for its own sake. They had one goal in their lives: to unite with God and to spread His kingdom. They discovered their calling to specific actions as their lives unfolded, as a fruit of the grace of God acting within them. Because they gave themselves fully to the Holy Spirit and let Him guide their lives, their actions flourished in their fulfilling God's will and accomplishing the things which God had planned. At the same time, neither of them thought that he was doing some grand work, which was worthy of God's special gratitude or reward. In their lives, only God was to be surrounded by praise, not they themselves.

We reflect on the challenges that face us at this point of our history. Today's Solemnity and the witness of the lives of our Blessed Fathers suggests that what remains our most important and primary task is our conversion, or the opening of our hearts to a new life in Jesus Christ, the example of which we see in Mary Immaculate. All of the saints of the Church, along with our own Blessed Fathers, also gave witness to it. A new life in Christ enables us to accomplish new works or good deeds, which God had planned before time began, for us to carry out. Our deep roots in the life of God will allow us to discern His every call, while He continuously gives us courage and magnanimity to fulfill His will.

Throughout the first eleven centuries of the Church's history, the term "reform" had been exclusively applied to the man who needed to be formed in the image of Jesus Christ. This term reflected the essence of a conversion. It can only be done by the Holy Spirit. Dear Confreres: in the Jubilee Year of the Renewal and Reform of our community, *let us allow the Holy Spirit to reform us*. I address those words to myself firstly, and then to each one of you, to each member of our Congregation. Let us make the Jubilee Year a time of intense prayer to the Holy Spirit and our submission to His actions. He alone can kindle in us the Marian charism so that it may shine with new strength in each of us. Let us be less concerned with the future of the Congregation and the success of our enterprises and put more effort into pleasing God, because in this way, God will fulfill through us the work He has already planned. Let the Holy Spirit be the reformer of each one of us and of our entire community in the Year of our Jubilee.

I would like to close with Blessed George's words: *We have, dearest brothers, enough reasons for our trust in God: this is the power of the right hand of the Most High. Just as the Wisdom and Goodness of God, our Creator and Lord, has resuscitated and given life to this Congregation, so too will his Wisdom and Goodness preserve and govern it, help it to advance in perfection and spread in its holy service.*

Let us learn to place our hope, not in earthly riches, not in human beings, not in ourselves – but in Him, who strengthens us, and for whom nothing is impossible. For just as he gives us the grace to desire, so he bestows it to accomplish what has been desired" (Circular Letter to the Confreres of January 12, 1924).

Jan M. Rokosz, MIC