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**THE PASSOVER OF OUR LORD DURING A PANDEMIC**

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God, When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with Him in glory (Col 3: 1-4).*

Beloved Brethren,

Recent events related to the pandemic have become for all of us – wherever we are in the world – a serious test of faith. Even though we have always been aware – as Hebrews (9:27) says: “Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment,” yet, generally speaking, this matter still seemed a bit remote. Today, when we daily learn about the increasing number of deaths, when we must comply with serious prohibitions restricting our freedom, which makes it even more frightful, the prospect of death has become so close that it is almost palpable.

We experience this in our General House in Rome. I realize that many of you who live in different parts of the world already know or will know the same experience. The mentality of today's world influencing us all also has an impact on this situation, even if this happens outside our consciousness: the trust in man's near omnipotence as to the development of new technologies; the promotion of an extreme individualism, combined with the cult of success and careerism; everyday libertinism in regard to moral principles, associated with abortion, euthanasia and the LGBTQ ideology; as well as the erasing from public life the fact of human death by making it look banal and ridiculous in mass media, particularly in movies and computer games.

The mentality of today's world refuses to hear about the Kingdom of Heaven, but instead promotes the building of an earthly one with its compulsive consumption caused by various forms of hedonism, “as if God does not exist” (as St. John Paul II said in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 9). And in this context, a pandemic strikes suddenly. The photos and news of many deaths transmitted by the mass media along with the sight of numerous coffins cause extreme shock and a fearful panic. Considering these events from the perspective of faith, we realize that the Good Lord reminds us in a powerful manner, “that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven” (2 Cor 5:1), and that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20). We look with trust to the faith of the early Christians, especially the martyrs who longed for the Risen Lord in order to be with Him in the Father's House.

The celebrations of the Jubilee of our Congregation's origin, which began last year on December 8, are also marked by the current events, which bring to mind the times of St. Stanislaus Papczyński, our Father and Founder. We feel pride from knowing that he, who lived in times of plague, bravely served the sick, the dying, and the dead, which brings us to further realize how much the charism of our religious community is up-to-date. Our spirituality is marked by eschatology. Trusting that God, in His providence, guides our history, both our personal as well as that of the whole community, we must humbly acknowledge the new challenges, arising from our charism, that we are facing today. We have already died to sin in order to rise to eternal life in Christ. Our life is hidden in God.

First and foremost, we should give witness to eternal life, the eschatological destiny of man, and proclaim by word and the example of our own trust that "the Lord puts to death and gives life" (1 Sam 2:6), that with Christ we have risen from the dead; and that we are going to the House of the Father, where we shall have a dwelling prepared; our earthly life is temporary and transitory. Faithful to our patrimony and tradition, we have the courage to proclaim – especially today – that God is our Father, He wants to unite us with Himself; that the hallmark of His love is His Son's Incarnation and death on the Cross, which delivers us from fear, sin, and eternal death; that Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for us and lead us through all the moments of our lives, including this time of fear, confusion, and dying. Current events are not "beyond God", nor did they "slip out of God's hands," rather, He guides us through them, as Jesus did during His Passover. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Ps 23:4) – as the Psalmist prayed in similar circumstances.

Secondly, following the example of Saint Stanislaus, our Founder, we must not fear to serve the lonely, the sick, and the dying – naturally, doing so with a prudent observance of the rules and guidelines of civil and Church authorities. The Holy Father Francis spoke about it during one of his Masses in the Santa Marta Residence: "Let us pray to the Lord also for our priests, that they may have the courage to go out and go to the sick people bringing the strength of God's word and the Eucharist and accompany the health workers and volunteers in this work that they are doing," (Mass in the Santa Marta Chapel in Rome, March 10, 2020). We know that there are countries where many people leave this world without the sacraments and in isolation. Perhaps, it may be still possible to encourage the faithful to avail themselves of the sacraments in advance, so that they are reconciled with God, before rigorous prohibitions take effect.

We must not neglect to pray constantly, as individuals and as a community, for conversion, for the end of the pandemic, and for its victims: for both those who survived the disease, as well as for those who died and for their families. Sharing our experience at the General House, I suggest that this prayer would include one part of the Rosary recited every day by the whole community. In Rome, we decided to have



it said at 6:15pm, i.e. half an hour before Vespers. This suggestion is due to the fact that – according to the norms of the Church – a part of the Rosary (five decades) continuously recited devoutly by a religious community and combined with meditation and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father, gives the opportunity to obtain a plenary indulgence (cf. *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum. Normae et concessionones*, editio quarta, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2004, see 17 § 1, 1 °). In this way, we come to help not only the living, but also the dead. I encourage this practice, which is a part of our Congregation's heritage.

In view of these circumstances, having consulted the Provincial and General Vicariate Superiors and having heard the opinion of the General Council, I have decided to forego the World Congress of Lay Cooperators of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, which – according to the Jubilee program – was planned for September 25-27, 2020, in Licheń. Although we all hope that the pandemic will subside much earlier, the organizing for the arrival of large groups of lay people should be under way already now. I am talking about such basic matters like buying tickets, booking hotels, etc. In the present situation, everyone is focused on the current events rather than on planning something that ought to take place six months down the road. According to the opinion of some major superiors, such a congress might be possibly organized in the following years: the Jubilee does not end until December 8, 2023.

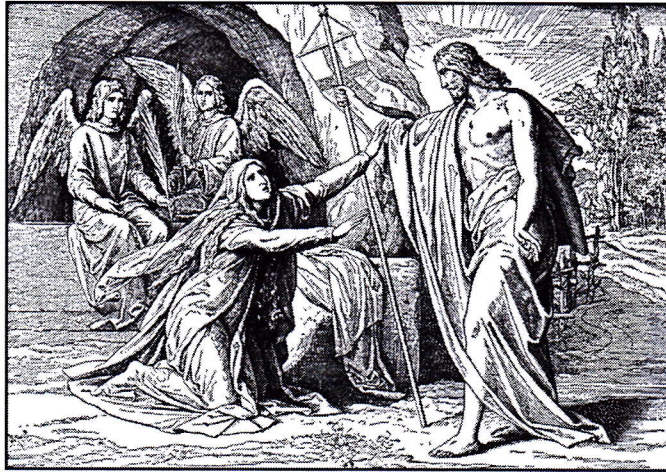
On the other hand, the General Convention is planned for October 19-24 of this year in Lichen. Since this is our Congregation's internal event, lodgings and meetings will be organized in our religious houses, and tickets for a small number of people from the provinces or general vicariates can be acquired shortly before the start of the Convention. I hope that we will be able to hold this Convention. I shall shortly issue appropriate letters that would include a list of the participants.

Dear Confreres:

In those difficult times marked by much suffering, God gives us many signs of His Providence which embraces and guides our Congregation. These signs are numerous; some of them are personal, related to the individual circumstances of our brethren, and I shall not reveal them here; while the others are external, of which I would like to mention two. First, all major superiors are staying in their own communities during this pandemic and thus, they can live through these difficult times together with their communities in a spirit of faith, and to ensure that their jurisdiction functions normally. It is also the case of the General Government. Secondly, last year, three confreres in our mission in India made perpetual vows and were ordained priests. Their ordinations took place during the epidemic, although it had not reached so many countries at that time. Today, our three newly ordained priests are members of our Congregation with full rights. In a situation where the ban on travelling is quite common, they can prepare their younger brethren for the profession of vows and they can receive their religious vows. Only Divine Providence can foretell the future with such precision and take care of His work.

Beloved Brethren,

Our Lord Jesus Christ marked this year's Lent with His special and difficult grace. We shall discover its meaning in the future and with faith. I am praying for a strong faith, an invincible hope, and a trusting love for the upcoming events of the Holy Triduum and Easter. Christ is truly Risen, and He accompanies and enlightens us along the path of our Passover as He did for His disciples on the road to Emmaus.



May our Mother and Patroness, the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculately Conceived obtain for us the grace of a complete trust in God. May our Father, St. Stanislaus intercede for us so that we may be able to give witnesses to God's mercy. And may Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, our Renovator, as well as the Blessed Martyrs of Rosica, George and Anthony be our example of entrusting ourselves to God and the Church.

Christ is Risen and our life is hidden with Him in God. Take courage!

Rome, March 27, 2020



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