



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE
CONGREGATION OF MARIAN FATHERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

Consistory Hall

Friday, 17 February 2023

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

I thank the Superior General for his kind words, and I greet you all. You are holding this General Chapter in the context of the 350th anniversary of the founding of your Institute, that took place in Krakow in December 1670, by the work of Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary. We know that it was not an easy beginning, due to the search for suitable companions and the long approval process, but Saint Stanislaus did not give up, trusting in the strength of the Holy Spirit. And precisely in order to cherish the legacy left to you by his tenacity, I would like to recall with you three major features of his and of your spirituality, all marked by a lively ascetic and pastoral dynamism: love for the Virgin Mary, prayer of suffrage and attention to the poor.

First of all, *love for Mary*. It is interesting to see what Saint Stanislaus teaches regarding Marian devotion: he says that the principal worship of Mary Immaculate is imitation of her evangelical life. This is important, because true devotion to the Mother of the Lord is nurtured and grows through listening to and meditating on the Word of God: Mary is the Woman of the Gospel (cf. *Mt* 12:46-50).

Second aspect: *prayer of suffrage*, which characterizes the eschatological aspect of your congregation. Saint Stanislaus, however, inserts into this view of the ultimate horizon a special prayer for two large groups of the poor of his time: soldiers who fell in battle and those who died of

the plague. Today it is needed for soldiers: they are falling everywhere! Just think that in the 17th century, some 60 percent of Europe's population was exterminated by epidemics and wars! It was then necessary to pray for the souls of the dead and for the comfort of families and communities, marked by grief and mourning for the loss of their loved ones (cf. *Jn* 11:35-36).

And the third feature I would like to underline is *attention to the poor*, in particular in support of parish priests. The Marian Fathers thus contributed to responding to some serious problems of the time: the weakening of faith, especially among the humblest classes, the lack of priestly and religious vocations, and the state of poverty of a large part of the population (cf. *Mt* 9:35-38).

Dear brothers, Saint Stanislaus charted for your congregation paths of spirituality and action, well embodied in the concrete history of the men and women of his time. And it is important for you to "take up the torch"; continuing to respond creatively to the challenges that our age also presents. Do not be discouraged if you encounter opposition or difficulties. Think of the great trials that your religious family has faced over the centuries, for instance when at the beginning of the 20th century, it was reduced to just one member! With God's help you have recovered, so that today you consist of approximately 500 religious, present in 19 countries throughout the world. Let us recall, in this context, the figure of Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis (1871-1927), a Marian Father, priest, bishop and apostolic nuncio in Lithuania, one of the key figures responsible for your rebirth. He was able to restore vitality to the community, updating the Constitutions and promoting its work fearlessly, even to the point of having to act clandestinely and risking arrest, without ever giving up promoting charity and unity among religious and among the faithful.

I encourage you to keep fidelity to your origins alive in this prophetic attention to today. You have done so in recent times by including openness to the laity, the protection of life from conception to death, attention to the least, and support for families in difficulty — this is very important, today the family is always in difficulty — among your pastoral priorities. These are choices that are reflected, for example, in the centre of naprotechnology and help for the family that you have set up at the Shrine of Licheń, in Poland; and in the new mission areas to which you have opened up in Asia and Africa. May the Lord help you to continue along these paths.

And I would like to conclude our meeting today by mentioning three Marian titles with which Saint John Paul II invited you to venerate Mary Immaculate. Mary "Seat of Wisdom", so that your witness to the Gospel may be firm and solid; Mary "Consoler of the Afflicted", that the people of our time may find love and understanding in you, and may be drawn to God by your charity and selfless service; and third, Mary "Mother of Mercy", that you may be rich in maternal compassion for the souls redeemed by the blood of Christ and entrusted to you. [1] And on this, please, let us not forget God's style: closeness, mercy and tenderness. God is like this: he is close, he is merciful, he is tender. This is our God. A religious brother, a priest, must be close, he must be merciful, forgive everything, and be tender, not aggressive; patient and charitable every day. I wholeheartedly bless you and all your brethren. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank

you.

[1] Cf. St. John Paul II, *Address to the General Chapter of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, 22 June 1993.

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