

Let us draw from the grace of the Founder's beatification

**Message of the Superior General
on the beatification of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński
to the Associates of the Congregation of Marian Fathers¹
and the faithful entrusted to its pastoral care**

*For all who loved and supported this Order of the Immaculate Conception,
which by the Lord's inspiration through me came into existence,
especially to pray for the dead,
I promise a double reward from the hands of the Lord.
From the Last Will and Testament of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The day is getting near for which generations of Marians waited for 300 years. Our Founder, the Venerable Servant of God Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, will be raised to the honors of the altar. The ceremony of beatification, at which H.E. Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone will preside on behalf of His Holiness, will take place on September 16, 2007, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lichen. Joy and gratitude overflow our hearts. We receive yet another proof from the Church that our mission is timely and our way of evangelical life initiated by Fr. Stanislaus is truly Christian and leads to salvation.

In this exceptional moment lived out by our Congregation, I turn my eyes to you, our dear Associates, who participate in our spirituality and mission in various ways. I would like to share our joy with you and to invite you to live this great event together with us. You have a special right to rejoice with us at the beatification of Fr. Papczyński and to draw from it grace to strengthen your faith and work for the Church.

We ask ourselves: Why has the grace of Fr. Stanislaus's beatification, eagerly awaited by many generations before us, been given to us? We ask the Lord for the gift of proper understanding of the meaning that He wants to convey to our community and the entire Church by this event. If God planned for the beatification to happen in our times, then we are at liberty to think that Fr. Stanislaus's person is particularly important and opportune for our times.

What is a beatification?

By raising a person to the honors of the altar, the Church proclaims that the Gospel of Jesus Christ came to pass in this person's life and that it was touched and transformed through the presence of the living God. Thus, the beatification does not so much give homage to the person raised to the honors of the altar, but rather venerates Jesus Christ Himself who demonstrated the power of His own holiness in the life of that person. For this reason, each beatification or

¹ By that we mean all religious and lay persons working in cooperation with the Marian Fathers in Marian Houses and Institutes as well as members of the Association of Marian Helpers, Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, groups of the Eucharistic Apostles of The Divine Mercy, Marian Economic Committee, and the Cause of Spiritual Assistance to Vocations.

canonization signifies that Jesus Christ lives and acts in His faithful. It does not mean that we ought to regard the blessed and the saints as extraordinary people because, if that were the case, we would be right to say that holiness is a privilege reserved to only a very few particularly chosen people. Rather, holiness is, in a sense, the “normal” vocation of every Christian. To become holy means to fulfill our Christian vocation. For this reason, as the Book of Revelation of Saint John the Apostle tells us, the saints are a great multitude, which no one can count (cf. Rv 7:9). Among this great multitude, some are presented, through the act of beatification or canonization, as special witnesses to the faith who can inspire those of us still living on earth and draw us nearer to God.

Christ’s Gospel in the life of Fr. Stanislaus

In what way did the holiness of Jesus Christ make itself known in the life of Fr. Stanislaus? We see him as a man strong not so much by his own human strength, but primarily by his faith. Seeking and fulfilling the will of God became the centripetal force of his life, in imitation of Jesus who said: “I came down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of the one who sent Me” (Jn 6:38). Seeking God’s will did not allow for leading a peaceful and comfortable life at home, but it prompted him to strive for a total dedication to God in the religious way of life, in which Fr. Stanislaus saw the most perfect form of fulfilling the Gospel.

Having joined the Piarists, he made himself known for his great zeal and close observance of the rules of religious life. Father Stanislaus looked very seriously upon his life and his dedication to God. In the same way, he fulfilled the first and greatest commandment: “You shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Dt 6:5). Father Stanislaus’s uncompromising attitude in matters related to God and to the religious life brought him numerous troubles and misunderstandings. His constant readiness to fulfill only God’s will in his life allowed him to recognize the unusual vocation to which God destined him: the vocation to found an Order dedicated to honor the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.

Another feature of Fr. Stanislaus’s spirituality, in which he particularly resembles Jesus Christ, is his acceptance of suffering. From the human point of view, Fr. Papczyński’s life had its fill of hardships. But his living faith and union with God always helped him to see God’s presence in those difficult circumstances. As the first example, we shall mention his serious illness in his younger days, while he was waiting for admission to the Jesuit College, long before he joined the Piarists. Weariness, poverty, homelessness, and all the humiliations associated with that status, had become Fr. Stanislaus’s fate. Quite unexpectedly, he was given help first by an unknown man, and then by a family from Lvov. This serious illness and the help he received fostered in him sensitivity to the fate of the poor and those who are socially wronged or deprived.

On other occasions, he suffered from a lack of understanding on the part of some of his confreres and religious superiors. These difficulties arose by God’s plan in order for his main vocation — founding the Marian Order — to mature. Even though he left the Piarist Order with the agreement of the Holy See, to the end of his life Fr. Stanislaus preserved in his heart love and spiritual attachment to this Order. The beginnings of the new religious community — the Marian Order — were also marked by great difficulties, first from finding suitable confreres,

then in giving them proper formation, and finally, in obtaining official approval for the young community from the Church's authorities.

Father Stanislaus's experience of suffering and trials throughout his entire life fostered in him a love for the cross of Christ. In one of his conferences, he recalled Christ's words: "Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up this cross, and follow Me" (Mt 16:24). He then added: "This is very true. For it is characteristic of a faithful and exceptionally virtuous servant that he remains at his Master's side both in joyful and painful times, in propitious circumstances and in trials. On the other hand, the one who follows his Master on the way to a feast but deserts him falling under the weight of his cross, is deserving of disgrace." Father Stanislaus's love for the cross was a fruit of his own experience. However, it did not have anything of the morbid pleasure some take in pondering their past sufferings. Father Papczyński was a happy man, regarding himself as particularly endowed with gifts from God. Thus, towards the end of his life, he was able to say: "I give thanks to the Divine Majesty for graces, gifts, kindness, and blessings, which were so generously bestowed upon me."

Love of God and of neighbor is the heart of the Gospel and Christianity's most important commandment. The fruit of man's union with God is love for one's neighbor that embraces even one's enemies. To nurture such a love is to share God's love for sinners. We see this kind of love present in Fr. Stanislaus's life as well. There were times when he met with human unkindness and even enmity. His biography speaks of truly moving examples of forgiveness and magnanimity shown to people who had wronged him.

It seems that certain aspects of Fr. Stanislaus's spirituality may have great significance for modern man, regardless of his life's vocation. Willingly or not, we are all influenced by consumerism, which values success, prosperity, and possession of material goods. Above all, our mass culture promotes an egocentric attitude, proclaiming the need of constantly putting one's ego first. At the same time, many people suffer from the emptiness and senselessness of such a life and question the meaning of life in general. Then there are yet others who acknowledge the Church, but live out their Christianity in a shallow manner, on the level of a natural religiosity only. In this view, God's blessings are considered to be peace and quiet, stability, the fulfillment of material needs, good health, and so on. On the other hand, trials, sufferings, and problems bring about doubt, a sense of abandonment by God, and even a sense of being wronged by Him. It is as if God did not reward the fulfillment of one's religious practices with His blessing.

Looking at Fr. Stanislaus's life, we notice something totally new. We see that God is the basic fulfillment of man and that His presence can be experienced in both prosperity and trials. By accepting the cross in our own life, we are able to go through very painful moments and become truly happy. We can also be wronged by other people, but we can forgive magnanimously out of our own free will. Through the act of his beatification, Fr. Stanislaus will be shown as a witness of faith for us to strengthen our own faith. Thus, we will be given help, so that in difficult moments we can see how beautiful life can be, if only we place God first in our lives.

The Marian charism and its timeliness

The fact of Fr. Papczyński's being raised to the honors of the altar also emphasizes the timeliness of his charism, which he left as a legacy to his Congregation and its lay cooperators. The three main features of this charism are: honoring the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, praying for the dead, and assisting pastors in their ministry.

Father Stanislaus was profoundly fascinated with the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M., and he founded his community under that title. The Immaculate Conception means that Mary was preserved from original sin in view of the future merits of Christ, and in this way, she was made worthy to become the Mother of the Son of God. This truth of the faith is closely related to the mystery of God's mercy, because the Immaculate Conception means that Divine Mercy is greater and more powerful than the forces of evil and human sin. It seems there is a particular urgency today to live by and to proclaim this truth. One may often have the impression that evil triumphs and becomes omnipresent. In the face of evil, many people, even Christians, lose hope and begin to doubt the sense of living by evangelical virtues, honestly and faithfully. The truth about the Immaculate Conception is a powerful proof that the reign of sin has never been so pervasive and is not all embracing. Already evil has been conquered in Jesus Christ, and the last word in the history of the world belongs to God's love.

Mary's Immaculate Conception also helps us to respect the dignity of every human being from the moment of conception. It means that God has a plan for every human life and that He realizes it from the moment of conception until natural death. It has special meaning in our day when many countries recognize the right to kill unborn babies and some practice euthanasia as a matter of fact, or even as one of civilization's basic achievements.

Further, Father Stanislaus was deeply concerned about the fate of the deceased who weren't properly prepared for death. For this reason, he zealously prayed for the dead and urged others to do so. Isn't it true that his charism is timely also in that respect? For what can we offer to the dead? Our remembrance of the deceased is expressed in our prayer and the offering of Mass, as well as in the practice of indulgences offered for their intentions. It is an act of selfless help and mercy towards those who can no longer help themselves, but can only count on us.

Praying for the dead directs our attention towards the reality of death. One of the most significant problems of our times is the loss of a sense of human dying, which is a result of the loss of a sense of life. Dying without God is terrifying. Father Papczyński teaches us to live with our attention on dying as the point of our ultimate meeting with God, the point at which we will enter the fullness of eternal life. Only a person who accepts this vision of death and views it without fear can fully and joyfully live out his or her life. Everybody passes individually through the gate of death to new life, but it does not mean that one is totally alone. Death is the crowning of human life and our ultimate meeting with God. Father Papczyński teaches us that we ought to prepare ourselves for this event and to help the others to do so, both through our prayer and through staying at the side of the dying.

The third feature of Fr. Stanislaus's charism is assisting pastors in their ministry, particularly among those who are poor and socially deprived or wronged. This does not regard only priests, for the Church today reminds us of the truth that all the baptized faithful are called to participate

in this apostolate. One of the themes that often appeared in John Paul II's messages was the call for a new evangelization. This calling is addressed to every baptized and confirmed member of the faithful. In this regard, lay people may give support to priests by assisting pastors in their own parishes.

This evangelization does not mean exactly a direct participation in organized action or evangelical works, even though the involvement of the laity in such works is necessary and indispensable. Neither does it have anything in common with indoctrinating others through propaganda or impeding their freedom. It is essentially sharing with others the precious treasure of the Gospel, which we first received from Christ (cf. Mt 13:44-46). The foundation of such an evangelization is the continuous conversion of each one of us, to foster a life in union with Christ, and through this, His introduction into every aspect of our life.

The Christian as a temple of God

Father Stanislaus was an advocate of the general call to holiness. When he stayed with the Karski family after obtaining his dispensation from solemn vows in the Piarist Order, he wrote his work entitled *Templum Dei mysticum (The Mystical Temple of God)* that may be regarded as a textbook of striving for holiness for the laity. It was one of the first such books in Poland.

Father Stanislaus did not compose this book outside the realities of pastoral ministry during his time. On the contrary, he had before his eyes all the spiritual and social problems of the period. He was aware of the weakness of faith of many of his contemporaries. He also realized that many people were ruining their lives through sin. He observed the progress of demoralization in his nation of Poland, which had resulted from devastating wars and armed conflicts, as well as from the scourges of famine, epidemics, and general impoverishment. It is important to note in this very context that Fr. Stanislaus does not turn away from the "bad" world. He does not fall into the trap of simply condemning his difficult times. Nor does he stop at just pointing out the sins of his contemporaries.

Instead, he wants to direct man towards God who can renew his life. He also wants everybody to discover how much God loves people and that each one of us receives from Him a wonderful vocation. He thus writes: "It is so certain that Man, created by God, and consecrated to Him through the Sacrament of Baptism, is His Mystical Temple Therefore, let everyone pay more careful attention to the excellence of his first condition and acknowledge the venerable likeness to the Holy Trinity in himself, and strive, by the nobility of his conduct, the exercise of virtues and the dignity of merits to possess the honor of divine likeness" And again: "You Christians ... «are the Temple of the living God.» What a glory is yours! What a dignity!" The temple of God, about which Fr. Stanislaus wrote, is consecrated through Baptism. For this reason, he urged everyone to give thanks to God for this sacrament. This thanksgiving ought to be expressed through one's entire life, but also through an annual celebration of one's Baptism.

Father Stanislaus's teaching is particularly timely, and it remains in perfect harmony with the modern-day teachings of the Church that emphasize everyone's vocation for holiness. His teaching is also timely because of the contemporary circumstances of life, which are just as difficult as several centuries ago. Especially in Western civilization, we witness a progressive

secularization of culture, the loss of faith by large groups of people, promotion of norms and behaviors that are outside and even hostile to the Gospel. In the face of such circumstances, it is quite easy to either chose a defensive attitude, hostile towards the modern world, or to give in to the temptation of assuming the modern mentality. Yet, we can chose to take a different stand by following Fr. Stanislaus's example. We can return to the sources of our Christian vocation and discover the great gift of being the living temple of God. The source of our dignity is the Sacrament of Baptism. For this reason, the entire life of a Christian is nothing else but discovering more fully the riches of this sacrament, accepted in the past. By discovering in ourselves this gift of God, we may also help others to recognize the great dignity to which they are called by God in Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of the evangelization to which every baptized person is called without exception.

Father Papczyński's work today

Father Papczyński died 306 years ago, but his work — the Congregation of Marian Fathers along with its coworkers — survived. Now it continues to grow in spite of every reverse of fortune.

The community experienced a dynamic growth in the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Foundations were established outside of Poland in Rome, Portugal, on the lands of the present-day Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. However, some of the civil authorities' decisions came as a great shock to the Order. First, all foreign religious orders were purged from Rome upon the power of Napoleon's decree, which led to our losing our place at St. Vitus Church in 1798. Then, as a result of the liquidation of religious orders in Portugal, the Marian monasteries there were closed in 1834. And 30 years later, a similar decision of Czar Alexander II led to the suppression of almost all Marian houses within the Kingdom of Poland, except for the Marijampole monastery in Lithuania, where the last remaining Marian, Fr. Vincent Sekowski was still living in 1908.

He thus wrote in one of his letters: "Two coffins ought to be made: one for me, and another — for the Congregation." However, by the will of God, Fr. Stanislaus's work did not perish. A Marian pupil, Fr. George Matulewicz, of Lithuanian extraction, unbeknownst to the Czarist authorities, secretly joined the Marian Order and renewed it. He did it in cooperation with Fr. Vincent Sekowski and the Holy See, in such a way that it might develop and grow in secrecy. Thus, he not only saved the Congregation from annihilation, but also updated its charism, adapting it to new conditions. He gave the Marian spirituality a new dynamism and new interpretation, conforming it to the times by emphasizing the universal character of the Church and the Congregation. In addition, he harmoniously linked the Marian way of life with the idea of the universal apostolate, in imitation of St. Paul the Apostle. Blessed George also put a special stress on involving the laity in the Church's work of evangelization, allowing them a greater autonomy and freedom.

Today the Congregation of Marian Fathers has over 500 members serving in 17 countries. Their work is greatly diversified, depending on the needs of the Church in a particular location. To give an example: The Marians in Eastern Europe were among the few priests who continued their pastoral ministry under the communist regime, thus endangering their own lives. In fact, some of them suffered a martyr's death, while others were sent to prison camps in Siberia. Today

our confreres there work for the Church, which is returning to life after this period of persecution. Another beautiful page in the history of our Congregation speaks of our service in China for Russian immigrants of the Byzantine Rite. Still another deserving of attention is our mission in Alaska among the Eskimos, as well as the work in Australia and Argentina among Lithuanian and Russian immigrants and the local faithful.

In Western and Central Europe (including Poland), we fulfill our mission through scholarly work and publishing, as well as service in shrines, retreat centers, and hospices. We also run parishes. In the Americas, an important part of our work is The Divine Mercy apostolate. At the prompting of Divine Providence, during the Second World War, Fr. Joseph Jarzebowski, a Marian, brought from Lithuania to the U.S. documents about The Divine Mercy message in accordance with revelations given to St. Faustina by the Lord Jesus. Thanks to this, the Marians were the first Congregation outside of Poland that started spreading this devotion.

Marians also serve in Asia and Africa. In Kazakhstan, we serve the deportees who were sent there by the Stalinist regime and also the local population. In Africa we carry out the work of evangelization, formation, and charity. Because of the genocide in Rwanda, we were forced to leave the country three times. But we always returned as soon as the conditions allowed, so we could proclaim through our presence and word of mouth the Gospel of love and reconciliation. In Cameroon, we serve in the most difficult region of the country, both climatically and religiously. Wherever we serve, we strive to bring the spirit and charism of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński and Blessed George Matulewicz.

We are not alone. From the time of Fr. Stanislaus and, with his encouragement, lay people inspired by our spirituality have gathered around the Marian Order. They have been formed in their faith and have realized the Marian mission in a way that is proper for the laity. And it continues to the present day. Decidedly, our work would not be as effective — not to say, almost impossible in certain places — if it were not for the support of lay people. They generously support us with their prayers and professional, organizational, and financial assistance, as well as through concrete works of evangelization and charity.

Today, when we scrutinize with greater attention the person of our Father Founder, we feel an even stronger conviction settling in our minds that our charism is a gift to the entire Church. As a token of our gratitude for the grace of his beatification, in cooperation with our lay associates, we plan to establish our Congregation either in the Philippines or India.

Closing Comments

Dear Marian Helpers!

On the very special occasion of the beatification of our Founder, I would like to give you, on behalf of all the Marians and myself, our sincere gratitude for your cooperation and dedication. I would like to assure you that each Marian community worldwide prays daily for your intentions. And I'd like to ask you to pray for us, so that we may have the same spirit that prompted Father Papczyński to found our community. I specifically ask you to pray for the intention of new vocations to our Congregation, so the Marian charism may live and grow in the future. Along with you, we are the heirs to Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński's legacy. It is both a gift and a challenge. Let us pray that his beatification will stir in us a new desire for holiness. May it help us to

rediscover the fundamental truth that the Lord God builds His temple out of us — ordinary, sinful people — and that He makes us His cooperators in the work of the salvation of the world.

Rome, June 28, 2007

Jan M. Rokosz, MIC
Superior General
of the Congregation of Marian Fathers

Addendum

Prayer of the Congregation of Marian Fathers

Lord our God, You called Father Stanislaus Papezyński to found the Congregation of Marian Fathers. Graciously look upon this Congregation founded in Your Name and in the name of the Immaculate Mother of Your Son. Multiply its company and augment its joys. Grant that it becomes Your house, every stone of which is placed by Your sacred Hand. Awaken and increase in every Marian a Catholic evangelical spirit: a spirit of unconquerable faith, of unyielding hope, and of zealous love. Grant that inspired and filled with this spirit, we may belong to You alone, and that we may contribute to spreading Your Kingdom on earth by accomplishing Your works in the Church. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for vocations to the Congregation of Marian Fathers

Lord, our God, the harvest is indeed great, but the laborers are few. Lord of the harvest, we pray You, send forth laborers into Your harvest. Gather us from among all tribes, peoples, and nations, that we may praise Your holy Name, fight Your battles and, with ardent hearts, serve Your holy Church in justice and holiness, throughout all the days of our life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.