

**STRONG IN FAITH**  
**SPIRITUAL BIOGRAPHY OF FR. STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI**

As we await the beatification of the Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, it behooves us Marians, to once again look at his life and works. Since the chronicles of our Founder's life are generally well known, we will concentrate on certain aspects of his "spiritual biography" following the intuition of his first biographers – Fr. Mansueto Leporini, a Franciscan, and Fr. Casimir Wyszyński, a Marian – who convincingly characterized him as a holy man. Let us again try to discover the signs of his supernatural faith, as well as his likeness to Christ and Mary, the most perfect disciple.

The 300-year wait for the recognition by the Church of Fr. Papczyński's holiness may on the one hand, rise questions about its merit and "ability to influence" but on the other hand, it shows the enduring conviction of believers, that we are dealing with a holy man, who inspires new generations through the example of his life and the merit of his works. What does Father Founder's life and spirituality say to us Marians today?

### **The Experiencing of Divine Providence**

Father Stanislaus Papczyński's life was above all an experience of the living God, present in human history, near to the person, of the God, who reveals Himself in the mystery of the incarnation, and in the plan of salvation He shows each one His redeeming love. He wrote of this: *"God's love for men is so great, that neither the tongue of men nor angles is able to express it, and the mind cannot comprehend it. Even if you would dismiss other acts of love and even if nothing else had been revealed to us other than this, that for the salvation of all mankind God ordained to give as a burnt offering, His only Son, and actually did this, this would in itself be sufficient proof of an infinite, selfless, and unfathomable love"* (*Inspection cordis*).

Father Founder recognized this gratuitous love of God the Father, in the events of his life through many signs of Divine Providence. His first biographies (the trustworthiness of which has been validated during Fr. Papczyński's beatification process) evidence the conviction of the witnesses his life, that God Himself cherished His servant as *the apple of His eye*. To corroborate this truth, very many testimonies are gathered in them about the mortal dangers in which little

Jan [John] (the baptismal name of the Founder) met either because of an accident or illness, but from which he had been miraculously saved. This was to make clear the sublime goodness of God the Father, who concerned Himself with His child.

The oldest preserved writings of Fr. Papczyński, are from the time of his novitiate with the Piarists, around 1656, they give a indication of his gratitude to God for favors received, particularly for the spiritual graces. It was no different when he looked on his life in the face of approaching death: *“I give thanks to the Divine Majesty for graces, kindnesses, gifts, and benefits, with which I have been most generously showered”* (*First Testament*). From childhood he bore in his heart an awareness of God’s closeness and goodness, whose likeness dwells in the man of pure heart. During his studies in Nowy Sącz, when he perceived that his teacher -- reputed deserving of praise for his vast knowledge -- conducted himself immorally, corrupting the pupils, young John fled this school so as to escape this man’s evil influence. It was instilled in him, most probably in his family home, that the salvation of one’s soul must be placed above prosperity in this world. He was particularly grateful to God for preserving him from sin. He tried to look upon his times through the eyes of faith; that had the greatest value which led to salvation and that being pleasing to God was far more important than participating in the pleasures of this world.

The light of God’s love also flowed into Fr. Papczyński’s heart through his parents: his upright, but also exacting father Tomasz along with his mother Zofia, known for her piety and patience. It would be minimazing their role to stop only at such a general characterization. Tomasz Papka (Fr. Stanislaus changed his name to Papczyński during his time of studies) must have been regarded as an honest and trustworthy man since the people of Podegrodzie elected him time and again as their village bailiff{administrator}. Truly, directness and honesty will be the two characteristics that will mark Fr. Papczyński throughout his entire life. Thanks to his father’s resourcefulness and thriftiness, Johnny, after finishing the parish school, was able to continue his studies at colleges some distance from Podegrodzie. Tomasz also instilled in his children the virtue of hard work. When his son John did not make progress at school and consequently left, he was immediately sent to tend the sheep. Years later, the Founder of the Congregation of Marians will instill in his confreres the need to dedicate oneself to work; however, he never put it before prayer and spiritual formation: *“There are two features with which holy institutes shine – virtue and education. Virtue reveals the observance of the religious*

*rule; education commands the benefit of the neighbor [...] Thus, no one shall shirk from prayer either mental or vocal and from any other of our communal and traditional exercises or academic works” (Letter to the Marians at the Korabiew Forest, April 19, 1690).*

He most probably caught from his mother, a woman shining with simplicity and piety, his love for the life of prayer. Her membership in various confraternities was without doubt a sign of her religiousness, passed down to her children. The piety of Zofia Papka likewise manifested itself in her deeply evangelical attitude of forgiveness, which Fr. C. Wyszynski noted in his biography of Fr. St. Papczyński. Insulted and beaten by her neighbor, Zofia forgave him the transgression, and by the example of her attitude she was able to calm down the impetuous young John who wished to avenge his mother. Her patience also had a beneficial influence over her husband – a man sometimes impetuous, even at times aggressive – whom she also managed to convince to forgive the offender. Young Papczyński grew up in a family circle where piety influenced concrete choices and attitudes of life.

The history of young John’s “academic career” is also filled with signs of Divine Providence. He was sent to school at about the age of seven, quickly stopped studying, because of the inability to cope with their simplest demands. He returned home humiliated and was sent to tend sheep. However, during the following year something happened that totally changed his disposition toward studies. Father Papczyński’s biographers attribute this to a particular intervention of Our Lady to whom he turned for help in prayer. Unbeknown to his parents, he returned to school where he learned the entire alphabet in just a couple of hours. In the course of three years he successfully completed the elementary school program and started the high school course, unexpectedly he fell into a state of distaste for studies and returned to tending sheep.

Father Papczyński’s childhood shows a struggle between God’s grace and the instability of his character. His departures and returns, his spells of apathy and enthusiasm, decisions to flee and then to come back, were all intertwined in a truly dramatic story. A gifted student twice returned to tend sheep, after a time of reflection, he undertook a new attempt. John came through those interruptions so well formed, that at the age of 15 he left his family home to continue his education in Jarosław and Lvov, several hundred kilometers distant from his native Podegrodzie, where the school did not offer possible advancement. Overcoming inner trials, he now had to give his full attention to matters out of his control. Twice he became seriously ill. He had to leave colleges in Podoliniec and Lvov either because of advancing epidemics or war hostilities.

He also had to earn his living by tutoring. These struggles within himself and the outward difficulties had an inestimable value for the future Founder of the Marianists. They formed him into a man of faith and trust, who owed everything to the grace of God, but who also was an uncompromising man, not shrinking before the most difficult of challenges. Mansueto Leporini – Fr. Papczyński's first biographer – summed it all up in a generic but definitive statement, that he declared “*to place all hope only in Divine Providence.*”

### **Consecrated to God**

Drawn by the love of God, John Papczyński determined to consecrate everything to Him. His final decision to join a religious community was made at the age of 23, although he probably thought about it several years before. He had behind him a troubled academic path, grave illnesses, hunger, poverty and distance from his family home. Overcoming these obstacles he could finally look with hope to the future. His academic achievements (completion of high school and philosophy) assured him employment and position; they presaged a happy and secure life. His family found him a promising bride, reckoning that after years of studies and wandering in the world he would finally find peace in a family nest. He, however, decided to consecrate himself to God's service on the path of religious life.

Father Papczyński's later works and decisions showed that he envisaged the religious life as the most perfect way of realizing the Gospel life. He desired to live the evangelical ideal, so as to imitate Jesus and Mary. During his youth he had the possibility of closely knowing two religious orders, from which he obtained his education – the Jesuits and Piarists. He chose the latter, less known in the Church, in addition, undergoing at that time some sort of an inner crisis. From 1646 by a decision of the Holy See religious vows could not be professed within the Piarist order. This most probably influenced John so that he did not join a religious order earlier, waiting for the overturn of the prohibition of the right to make religious vows in the Piarists. This community, whose goal was to educate the spiritually neglected and poor youngsters, was to give witness to poverty and piety, he called in his later writings; *the most holy Congregation of Pious Schools, more precious than life itself this Congregation of Pious Schools, the most beloved Association of the Poor of Our Lady (Fundatio domus recollectionis)*, and he desired to remain therein until the end of his life.

Being invested with the Piarists' habit, he received the religious name of Stanislaus of Jesus Mary. This name was mirrored in his life. The new patron of Fr. Papczyński was the holy Krakowian bishop Stanislaus – a martyr for the faith and freedom of the Church, an uncompromising defender of evangelical values. Consciously Fr. Papczyński entered the course of defending values and often put it before his personal life. The prefix “of Jesus Mary” in his religious name would resonate in his love for the Crucified Christ and Mary Immaculately Conceived.

From the beginning of his life in the Piarist order, Stanislaus Papczyński gave himself whole-heartedly in fulfilling of his vocation. In 1675, (that is four years after he left the Piarists), when writing about his life in the Congregation of Pious Schools, Fr. Stanislaus admitted: “*I greatly cherished my religious vocation that came from nowhere else but God Himself*” (*Fundation domus recollectionis*). He regarded his vocation to the community founded by Joseph Calasanti as a tremendous grace, and he accepted the community's way of life as his own. He whole-heartedly dedicated himself to works assigned by his superiors, seeing them as a path to holiness for himself and the faithful. As the *Decree of the Heroic Virtues* states, Stanislaus Papczyński “made such a great progress in religious life during his first year of the novitiate, that he could be sent to study theology in Warsaw in the beginning of his second year. There [...] in 1656, he made simple vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience; and, after receiving four lower ordinations, he was ordained a sub-deacon.” His first years in following the way of the evangelical counsels predicted a beautiful and joyful vocation.

Submitting to strive for holiness above all else, aware of his past life's shortcomings, Stanislaus, prayed thus to the Lord before making his vows: “*Grant that, having done so many bad deeds, I may do good ones in my vocation.*” For the purpose of self-humiliation, the Servant of God described his “many bad deeds” in *Secreta Conscientiae*. This was a type of confession, in which he acknowledged the shortcomings and sins of his youth, committed before his entering the Piarist Order, he left these recollections as a second St. Augustin, so that others could condemn him (*Acts of the Information Process*). He recognized the doing of good as his primary task. There was no lack of occasions for this. Before long, Stanislaus became a teacher of rhetoric. After ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood in 1661, he promptly earned the prestige of an excellent speaker and a zealous shepherd of souls. Notwithstanding his young age, many distinguished persons – among them the Nuncio Antonio Pignatelli, future Pope Innocent

XII – approached him for confession, seeking his spiritual advice. Gradually he became more proficient in teaching and wrote a 6-volume textbook on rhetoric, the short version of which – *Prodromus reginae artium* (Introduction to Rhetoric) – was reprinted many times.

A particular sign of Fr. Papczyński's religious vocation was his profound spiritual union with the Founder of the Piarists – St. Joseph Calasanti. Father Stanislaus saw in him as a living witness to the Gospel and by this – his spiritual director. The young priest Stanislaus was assigned the function of Vice-Postulator of the beatification process of the Piarists' Founder. Father Stanislaus was entrusted with procuring from ecclesiastical and civic high officials, letters of postulation for opening the beatification process in Rome. Within a year, his enthusiasm and zeal prompted many prominent persons and institutes of the Republic to produce letters supporting the sanctity of the Piarists' Founder. Thanks to this, the Holy See was able to open the beatification process in Rome. Father Stanislaus Papczyński was gaining recognition among his confreres and the faithful. He could be easily called an accomplished religious order priest.

### **With Christ the Crucified**

The sincere desire to totally consecrate himself to God necessitated an encounter, in the life of Fr. Papczyński, with the suffering of the cross. Father Papczyński embraced it in union with the Suffering Christ. In the life Founder of the Marian's we find three stages of his characteristic participation in the Passion of Christ.

The first hardship came upon the 17-year old Johnny in Lvov, where he tried to enter the Jesuit College to complete his grammar course. Due to his insufficient academic training and the lack of letters of recommendation, he was not accepted. Instead of giving himself entirely to further studies, in order to secure a way of life, he had to give private lessons to two sons of the Lvovian townsmen for a year and a half. And as if this delay in his idle plans was insignificant, he became seriously ill with a contagious disease, because of which he found himself on the street. For many months he shared the fate of the homeless and the beggars, sleeping in the street or on a litter. He became acquainted with many humiliations and was overcome by severe physical fatigue that disabled him so that he could not even go to church on Christmas Day. It looked as if God had completely abandoned him. Some biographers compare him to the biblical Job, which does not seem a bit overstated. Overwhelmed with a fever in the middle of winter,

totally covered with ulcers on his body, almost starving Johnny was first cared for by unknown man, but for his recovery from sickness he thanked the Lvovian family of Snopek, who took him into their home, despite his highly contagious disease. From this time on, Fr. Papczyński showed exceptional love toward the poor, the homeless, and the afflicted.

Several years later he experienced another cross and this occasioned by his own confreres in religious life. The first years of Fr. Papczyński's life in the Piarist Order did not give an inkling of the dramatic conclusion of his history – his leaving the Order. The conflict between the young priest and some of his superiors began in 1665 in regard to the election of the superiors. Father Stanislaus was convinced, based on the advice of experts in Canon Law, that the superiors for the Polish Province of the Piarist Order ought to be elected by the Provincial Chapter instead of being selected by the Superior General. He proclaimed his views in public, which led to dissension. Meanwhile, the new superior was elected in Rome, not in the Province, which further aggravated the situation. With time another reason for dissension emerged: the reminder by Fr. Papczyński for observing the religious order's discipline. From the time of novitiate, the Servant of God was known for his zeal in the practice of the religious life and his daily faithfulness to the rule. Any relaxation or violation in regard to these values met with his disapproval, which was labeled during one of the Polish Province Chapters as a “firebrand attitude.” For these reasons, Fr. Papczyński's relations with his superiors became more and more tense, not so much because of disobedience, but because of his determination in defense of his reasons. He felt himself misunderstood and termed this time of his life “the way of the cross.”

The account of this quarrel could probably serve as a sensational scenario for a film: accusatory letters sent to the Nuncio, to civil authorities, and to the General of the Piarists. Fr. Papczyński summoned to Rome; an very difficult and trying trip; exoneration and further accusations; kidnapping and imprisonment; several times renewed petitions for dispensation from simple vows; and finally, the peaceful unraveling of the matter on December 11, 1670: releasing from religious vows and oath of persevering in the Piarist Order. During this trying time Fr. Stanislaus authored two series of Passion sermons: *Orator crucifixus* (Crucified Orator) and *Christus patiens* (The Suffering Christ), which give witness to his following the path of faith, which he measured with eyes fixed on Christ's Passion. Christ Himself was his guide on the thorny road of life and vocation, his companion in times of doubt and abandon, his master in forgiving the offenders and accusers. From contemplating Christ's Passion Fr. Stanislaus drew

strength for loving his enemies and staying faithful to God's calling. Hope for his salvation he saw in Christ alone: *"I grieve from the very bottom of my heart, and I desire to grieve most perfectly, because of love for God, for my sins, all of which I place in the precious wounds of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer"* (*First Testament*).

Fr. Papczyński himself, in the *Apology for leaving the Order of the Pious Schools* gave as the primary reason of his departure, his desire to restore peace in the Province, which the *Decree of Heroic Virtues* accented as Fr. Stanislaus's love for his Order. For many years he sought ways and means for clarifying all misunderstandings and calming emotions. He dearly loved his vocation and Order; he was fascinated by the personality of Founder – St. Joseph Calasanti. The charism of educating children and youth as well as living in the spirit of *utmost poverty* was very dear to him. Father Papczyński left the Piarists with a broken heart because he still yearned to follow the road of the Evangelical Counsels. However, he decided that peace within his beloved congregation was of greatest importance. His "way of the cross" lived out in faith and in the spirit of love brought about a blessed fruit. The subsequent 30 years of Fr. Papczyński's life showed that love and respect for the Piarists did not die away in his heart, inasmuch as they produced concrete forms of mutual cooperation. Examples of this was: timely spiritual direction provided by the Piarists, his delivering spiritual conferences to them, the fruit of which is *Inspectio cordis* (Discerning with eyes of the heart), his financially supporting the Piarists schools, but above all, receiving by his own request in 1691 and 1696 spiritual affiliation of the Marians to the Order of the Pious Schools.

Third test of the Servant of God's faith was related to the beginnings of the Marian Order that he had founded. It happened in 1671. In *Fundatio domus recollectionis* (Founding of the retreat house), Fr. Stanislaus recalled: *"I was tormented and nearly embarrassed by great dilemmas, scruples, doubts, uncertainties, fears. For who indeed, could have such a lax conscience that without it he would go from the state of a religious, even if only simple vows, to a purely lay state?"* Inwardly convinced of the necessity to continue the way of life of consecration to God and of his calling to found a new religious community to honor the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, he had to make radical choices. His refusal to accept the position of the Canon at the Cathedral of Płock was at the bottom of his losing Bishop Jan Gembicki's friendship, at the time he was bishop was the Ordinary of Płock, becoming later the Ordinary of Krakow. Bishop Michał Oborski, the Auxiliary Bishop of

Krakow, formerly well disposed towards Fr. Stanislaus, quite unexpectedly withdrew his support for the idea of founding a Marian Congregation. In addition, Stefan Wierzbowski, the Bishop of Poznań, in whose diocese Fr. Stanislaus lived, despite of his regard for the latter, made the establishment of the Marian Order in his diocese dependent upon the permission of the Holy See, on which Fr. Stanislaus could not count. Confessors, with whom Fr. Papczyński sought advise, held contrary views. Not a few candidates for the Order proved to be unsuitable. Although inwardly convinced of God's inspiration to found the Order of the Immaculate Conception, Fr. Papczyński spent the following months without any hope for its realization. In his *Fundation domus recollectionis* he declared: "I lived for almost two years in the house of a nobleman, named Karski, and was seeking ways of starting this Society of the Immaculate Conception that has been long formed in my mind through the inspiration of the Divine Spirit; however, there were no companions, whose presence is required to start such an undertaking." Disheartened by this situation, he even thought of returning to the Piarists.

A glimmer of hope was set aflame by Fr. Franciszek Wilga, the prior of the Cameldolite monastery in Bielany, Warsaw, – his friend and spiritual director – by suggesting that he start a communal life with whatever companions he could get, and seek the canonical approval for this community later. Father Papczyński decided to follow this advise. Shortly after he joined a group of so-called hermits living in the Korabiew Forest.

Even at a first glance this appeared to be an act of true heroic trust in the Lord. The following weeks displayed the great human poverty, upon which Fr. Papczyński had to build the foundations of the Congregation of Marians. Agreeable at the outset, his first companions proved to be reluctant to seriously regard their vocation and the rule. What is more: Bishop Jacek Swiecicki's canonical visitation forcibly placed the Marians within the structure of a heremical life, which was far from Fr. Papczyński's original intention. In time Stanisław Krajewski and others left the community, leaving Fr. Papczyński with one companion only. Those who left at once started false rumors about the Servant of God, calling him a severe and unsympathetic man. Father Stanislaus fell to such a low state of mind in regard to the realization of his mission that in 1676 he petitioned the Piarists for readmission to their Order. Only the negative response from the Superior General, which he accepted as the ultimate sign, that he conformably take the road which he had chosen five years earlier.

Years later he would speak about the disciples uniting with the Suffering Christ: “*God desires religious in His service to follow Him in suffering. They should not only courageously but also joyfully carry whatever cross put upon them. He [Jesus] thus commands us: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24). He is right, for a faithful and unusually virtuous servant stays with his Master both in joyful and hard times, in beneficial circumstances or adverse ones. Thus, the one who follows his Master going to a feast, but hurries away from Him falling under the weight of the cross is truly deserving of the stain of infamy*” (*Inspectio cordis*). The above-given examples allow us to place Father Founder among those faithful servants of the Suffering Christ.

### **Enamored by Mary Immaculate**

Father Stanislaus Papczyński’s first biographers gathered numerous reports of exceptional graces that poured upon him through the intercession of the Mother of God, incidents most probably recounted by the Founder himself. Let us mention at least the miraculous saving of his mother while crossing the Dunajec River, when she still carried him in her womb; or the unexpected gift of intellectual capacities granted to facilitate his school work; or special graces received during prayers and numerous recoveries from diseases. They were all expressions of Fr. Papczyński’s conviction that Mary had a particular care over his life and spiritual growth.

In addition, as M. Leporini first wrote in 1705, and Fr. C. Wszyński noted in 1754, shortly after Fr. Papczyński’s death a memory of his particular union with Mary Immaculately Conceived was very much alive among the Marians. Both sources confirm that Fr. Papczyński used to fly to Mary’s protection in various circumstances of his life, frequently reciting this short prayer: “*Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio, sit nobis salus et protectio*” [May the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception be our health and our protection]. It seems that the Marians perceived the spiritual makeup of their Founder through the prism of his relationship with Our Blessed Mother. In the narrative of the Founder’s birth Fr. Wszyński concluded with an amazing statement: “*For he was a ardent venerator and propagator of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. and later the founder of a congregation under the title of the Immaculate Conception of this extraordinary Mother of God, Mary.*”

The childhood and youth of the future Founder of the Marians strengthened a conviction of Mary's love for him and for all people. As a young priest in his conferences to Marian sodalities -- in a style typical of the times, which today might cause some surprise -- he spoke thus: *"Truly many different virtues of the Most Blessed Virgin revealed themselves in visible ways at different occasions, yet her love for us and her invincible fortitude of spirit during the saddest times of her Son's passion manifested themselves in a particular way. As far as love is concerned, I do not doubt that she was burning with such a desire to redeem mankind, that if it were necessary, she herself would supply the nails to fix her Son to the cross for our salvation"* (*Prodromus reginae artium*).

Certainly not a unique, but an important reason for Fr. Papczyński's choosing the Piarist Order, was its Marian spirit rightly expressed in its title "Poor Priests of the Order of Pious Schools of the Blessed Mother." Father Stanislaus was absolutely fascinated by the spiritual beauty of Our Lady. He thus spoke of it in *Inspectio cordis*: *"O my soul, up to this time you have benefited from books reflecting different aspects of learning; today review a new, fresh, and unseen Book – the Most Holy Mother of God, a Book – conceived, written, and embellished by God Himself. Could you possibly find anywhere else something that is not found in Mary? Could anyone possibly give you more than what Mary has?"* This poetic passage expresses the foundations of our Founder's mariology: Mary is the archetype of God and the most perfect reflection of His beauty and goodness. On this very axiom Fr. Stanislaus will base his conviction of Mary's Immaculate Conception as a singular grace granted to the Mother of God, the first of the redeemed. By granting Mary this unique grace, God wanted to show that He could save the world without any sort of human participation! For this reason Mary should rejoice with a particular admiration and veneration. In his *Inspectio cordis* Fr. Papczyński states that she must *be more greatly honored by love than by word*. Love is the necessary key to interpreting his public oblation of self to Mary as well as his vow of blood, namely, his willingness to lay down his life in the defense of the truth of her Immaculate Conception (*Oblatio*), as well as every other work that promotes devotion to the Mother of God.

Although Fr. Stanislaus admitted that giving honor to Mary in speech was not enough, he himself took every opportunity to sing the praises of the Mother of God. His preserved sermon entitled "In Praise of the Virgin Mary Mother of God" was preached to members of a Marian Sodality. A beautiful discourse interweaves therein together with a love for Mary, referring to the

Fathers of the Church, with fruits of his own meditations on the mysteries of life of the Mother of God. He praises her holiness with a clear entreaty to imitate her faith and life. *“Let no one expect to gaze on Mary in the heavenly home, who does not imitate her in this earthly exile, who did not always serve her with utmost zeal”* (*Prodromus reginae artium*). Our Founder manifested his Marian spirit in this concise manner, establishing to some extent the Marian apostolate of his spiritual sons. This had to be a Marian spirit drawn from the word of God, deepened through knowledge of patristic works, built on meditation of the Blessed Mother’s life in order to become Marian, similar to Mary in the way of thinking and acting. Father Papczyński’s *Oblatio* of December 11, 1670, allows us to discover yet another important element of his Marian thought: *“I believe everything that the holy Roman Church believes and whatever she shall give us to believe in time.”* Father Stanislaus said this in relation to the truth of the Immaculate Conception. The Marian spirit of the Marians ought to be based on the Church Teachings, constantly opened into the future: into new exploration and expansion. One almost would like to say that it ought to be a continuous experience of discovering the Immaculately Conceived Mother of God and the Church.

The proclamation of Mary’s holiness and immaculateness was externally expressed by the white habit, in which Fr. Stanislaus dressed himself in September of 1671, but even more so in founding of the order under the title of the Immaculate Conception. This act of honoring Mary did not result directly from Fr. Papczyński’s Marian piety, because Fr. Stanislaus was convinced that God Himself wished that Our Lady be honored in her mystery of the Immaculate Conception through establishing of a new religious foundation under this very title. He frankly spoke about *“a Divine vision that was imprinted in [my] soul in regards to founding a Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M.”* (*Fundatio domus recollectionis*). In this way, Fr. Stanislaus, to some degree participated in the love of the Triune God for Mary Immaculate; looking upon her according to the pattern of God, that goes beyond the human standard of love. This is why the founding of the Congregation of Marians – beyond fulfilling God’s will and creating a community for people wishing to attain holiness through their dedication to God – was above all the greatest expression of love that Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński had for Mary Immaculately Conceived.

## **A Friend of the Suffering Souls in Purgatory**

When reflecting on Fr. Papczyński's life, we should not forget the elements that intertwine forming of his spirituality: the lessons from his story of life, the light of knowledge from the lived inner experiences. As a youth, Fr. Stanislaus found himself facing mortal danger during his stay in Lvov. However, in his testament he recalled a different instance that happened during the Polish-Swedish war also known as the "Swedish deluge": *"I confess that I leave this world professing the Roman Catholic faith for which I was ready to pour out my blood during the war with Sweden. One day my companion and I were exiting the Old Town, when a heretic soldier, his unsheathed sword in hand, attacked us near the Dominican Fathers. My companion (...) fled, and I, falling to my knees, stuck out my neck for the blow. However, by the decree of Divine Providence, I did not sustain any wounds although I was struck three times with great force. Afterwards, I felt great pains for an hour and a half because of that"* (*Second Testament*). We may note that Stanislaus, still a novice, was ready to die not only of an illness, if it should happen, but also for the sake of a greater good, which was, in his opinion, the martyrdom for the Catholic faith.

Without a doubt, those two incidents made him aware of the imminence of death as well as of the unpredictability of its coming. *"Not only can no one avoid dying, but also no one can prolong his life in a natural way even for the shortest moment [...] thus everyone no matter who, should beware of this that any moment could bring the end of his life"* (*Inspectio cordis*). This view was proven tossed up against reality. In 17<sup>th</sup> – century Poland death reaped an abundant harvest because of numerous wars, widespread epidemics, and the poverty of people, often starving and lacking medical care. Many died ill-prepared to meet God. Death was a representative sign of the times, which Fr. Papczyński saw as an invitation to act.

A particular place within his heart and teachings reached brothers and sisters suffering in Purgatory – the poorest of the poor – for who nothing remains but to count on Divine Mercy, and who of themselves can do nothing to improve their lot. Father Papczyński received a charism of an extraordinary love for these persons. His natural sensitivity of heart and faith strengthened the mystical experiences given by God as a grace of discerning and understanding the suffering in Purgatory. It could be said that the Heavenly Father Himself pleaded for help for His sons and daughters. Much like in case of the "vision of the Order of the Immaculate Conception", Fr. Stanislaus had been inwardly prompted to support the faithful departed.

Father Stanislaus's three mystical experiences of the sufferings in Purgatory have been well documented. First, in 1675 when he was in the Ukraine as the army chaplain during the war against the Turks -- he received a vision of deceased soldiers asking for his intercession before the Lord. Upon his return to the Korabiew Forest he called his companions to pray, make acts of contrition, and perform works of mercy for the intention of the deceased, especially victims of war. The next incident took place at the Karski's courtyard, after he had already initiated the communal life in the Korabiew community. Fr. Papczyński had a vision of Purgatory during the meal that followed the Holy Mass. In the presence of many people, he fell into ecstasy (eyewitnesses corroborated this during the Informative Process), after which, deeply shaken, he immediately returned to the monastery. He said to his confreres, surprised by his unexpected return: *"I beg you, brothers, pray for the souls in Purgatory, because they suffer unbearable tortures."* After this he remained for several days in his cell, fervently praying and fasting for the deceased. Finally, the third experience of the mystery of Purgatory was granted Fr. Papczyński at the shrine of Our Lady in Studzianna, in 1676, where he made a pilgrimage with the goal of begging for the personal grace of good health. While he stayed there at the monastery of the St. Philip's Fathers his health worsened. There was fear that he might die. Precisely then -- being in ecstasy -- he was transported to Purgatory. He saw there the Mother of God praying for him, that he would receive a healing in order that he could further assist the dead. At the end of the vision, he quickly recovered strength and in the Studzianna Church he delivered a long sermon to the faithful on the need to assist the departed brothers and sisters. Finally, on February 11 of that same year, he accepted as one of the goals of his Order, that assistance be provided "with utmost diligence, piety, and zeal" for the Poor Souls in Purgatory, especially soldiers and victims of epidemics.

Father Papczyński's frequent appeals and personal witness intensified concern among his brethren for the faithful departed and gave it an entirely new scope. The Marian Order occupied, at this time, a very developed spirituality in regard to the last things, which above all expressed the idea of *ars bene moriendi* [art of dying gracefully], as an absolutely indispensable condition of obtaining eternal life. For this reason, Christians, and especially consecrated religious had the responsibility, to not only concern themselves with their own salvation, but also to assist dying and the deceased brethren. Equally numerous confraternities, comprising lay people, promoted various forms of support for the deceased. The Marians, as hermits, had a daily obligation to

recite the Office of the dead, prescribed for them by Bishop Jacek Swiecicki during his canonical visitation, which initiated the legal establishing of the Order, but only the personal charism of Father Founder made it a constitutional element of Marian spirituality. Let's not be afraid to say that Fr. Papczyński's fervent compassion for the deceased was of a divine origin. The charism of our Founder not only augmented the holiness of the Church in purification (deceased brethren), but also had a fundamental influence upon the community of his spiritual sons. We see that the Church's decision -- given through Bishop Świącicki -- did not show itself sufficient, to set the spiritual assistance for the souls in Purgatory as the community's charism. This was made possible thanks to Fr. Founder's spirituality and his zealous apostolate on behalf of the "cause of noble love" -- as he himself called it -- in his Order and in the Church, by promoting it among the laity joined in Marian spirituality through the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception. In accordance with the explicit directive of the Holy See, the renewed Congregation of Marian Fathers must continue the work of its Founder. The life of Fr. Stanislaus, friend of the suffering in Purgatory, and his first Marian companions, show, that the mandate of the Church has to meet itself in the interior flame within itself of the gift of God granted to the Marian community in the person of its Founder, so that this charismatic mission find its fruitful fulfillment.

### **Promoter of the call of the laity to holiness**

Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński also perceived helping others in attaining salvation and getting involved in the work of the Church as his particular mission. He shows this praise of pastors, who dedicate themselves to the spiritual formation of the faithful: "*O how admirable are Christ's helpers, who only because of His love, sincerely and carefully place before the children,[...] all that is necessary for salvation, for leading a life in a Christian manner,[...] No work of mercy is greater and more fruitful*" (*The Mystical Temple of God*). He wished to belong to such helpers of Christ. For this reason, while staying as chaplain with the Karski family, he wrote a book entitled *Templum Dei mysticum* [The Mystical Temple of God], which may be daringly called a handbook for striving for holiness, meant also for the laity. The book was to serve one's growth in the understanding of self and God, discovering the sure road to salvation, and the Christian model of perfection (cf. *The Mystical Temple of God*). In the opinion of historians, Fr. Papczyński's treatise was -- if not the first -- then certainly one of very first Polish

works promoting the vocation of laity to holiness. This work was so important in its time that it underwent several reprints.

In *The Mystical Temple of God* Fr. Papczyński expressed his firm conviction that lay people, and not only religious and priests, are called for holiness, and he also wanted to remind his contemporaries of this basic truth. He wrote: “*Man created by God and consecrated to Him through the sacrament of baptism, is His Mystical Temple. [...] Therefore, let everyone give greater attention to the magnificence of his primordial state and acknowledge in himself the image of the Holy Trinity worthy of honor and at the same time striving to this, so as to possess the honor of the divine likeness by the nobility of conduct and the exercise of virtues [...] that in the meantime, when it becomes manifest, who he is, he showed himself like to the One who wondrously formed him in His likeness in the first Adam, and yet more wondrously reformed in the second.*” The life of every person, if he offers all his thoughts and deeds to God on the altar of his heart and follows the Gospels teachings, will become a gradual path in the imitation of Christ, so as to participate in His glory. “*You, the Christians, “are the Temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:15). What a glory is yours! What a dignity!*” This universal vision of the call to holiness should be connected to the delight of the Founder of the Marian Community in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception – the grace of a new creation, which is meant for every person redeemed by Christ; as well as Mary’s personal holiness, whom he called the first *Shrine built in the center of the Church and inhabited by God (Inspectio cordis)*. Fr. Papczyński desired that all people would attain full blessedness, because of this he proposed a road to holiness for all believers, while also imploring salvation of the deceased. In this way he became the promoter of the call to holiness for the laity – an idea definitely seized in our times by the Second Vatican Council.

It is worth mentioning here that Fr. Papczyński’s longtime field of apostolic activity gathered many lay people into various confraternities. Pursuing the history of Fr. Stanislaus’s engagement in this type of pastoral work, it is not hard to see that it permeated the whole priestly vocation of the Founder of the Marian Community. As a Piarist, during 1663-1667, Fr. Papczyński was the promoter of the Confraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Grace at the Piarist Church in Warsaw, which according to some he himself founded, and according to the opinion of others he greatly popularized. In 1671, that is the moment of his “transition” in his religious vocation, for half a year he cared for the archconfraternity of the Immaculate

Conception of the B.V.M. allied to St. Jacob's Church in the Kazimierz a borough of Krakow. As Founder of the Marian Order, he obtained from the Holy See in 1681 -- that is prior to the pontifical approval of his institute -- a document, which was understood (at least the papal *breve* was so interpreted by Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski, and after him by our Founder and consecutive generations of the Marians), as permission to establish confraternities of the faithful allied to the Marian churches, which Fr. Stanislaus himself defined as the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception assisting the faithful departed. In promoting the idea of the confraternity he followed the accepted practice of his times: aside from seeing it as a form of personal sanctification for the laity, he perceived it as, maybe, a unique opportunity for the lay faithful to spiritually influence others and thus to include them in to the apostolate of the Church.

### **Father Founder**

Only in line with the above narrative can the designation "Father Founder" appear to be the most complete description of the spiritual identity of the Venerable Servant of God Stanislaus Papczyński. For he received from God a most singular gift – the gift of founding a new religious community. The charism of founding belongs to the rare gifts of the Holy Spirit, through which He builds the Church and makes her capable of reading the signs of the times and to answer to its challenges. From the beginning Fr. Stanislaus recognized – in accord with the explicit inspirations of the Holy Spirit – that the most important mission for founding his institute was to advance the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M.

Most probably, the idea of founding a religious community came to fruition for him in 1670. The very first time that he mentioned his desire to start such a work was in the presence of Fr. Michał Kraus, the Piarists Vicar Provincial, just after receiving permission to leave the Order on December 11, 1670, while making the so-called *Oblatio*: *"In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen. I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczynski, in the flesh, son of Thomas of Podegrodzie, of the diocese of Cracow, being 40 years of age, offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in like manner to the Mother of God, the ever-Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, whole mind, whole soul, interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself, so that henceforth I may be the servant of the Almighty and the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore, I promise Them, that I will serve to the end of my life in chastity and in zeal,*

*this Company of Marian Clerics of the Immaculate Conception (which, by the grace of God I intend to found). Further, I will to accommodate my manner of life to its laws, decrees, and rites [...].* It's worth mentioning here that the *Oblatio* on one hand reveals Fr. Papczyński's charism as the Founder; and on the other hand, it presents in some way a synthesis of his spirituality. He made this act in the name of the most beloved Crucified Christ. Its essence was an Oblation or the total offering of himself to God and Mary Immaculate, uniting to the offering of gifts made during Holy Mass. Our Founder made this entirely, freely, solely inspired – as he later confessed in his *Fundatio domus recollectionis* – by a particular inspiration from God. Without a doubt he had been preparing for this public act for a long time. The *Oblatio* was in writing, what proves this is that Fr. Papczyński did not make such an important declaration at a moment's notice. Aware of beginning a new phase of his life – along with the receiving of the decree releasing him from simple vows in the Piarists – he confirmed before the Church his will to persevere on the way of the Evangelical Counsels. His temporal future he consecrated to the task of founding of the Order of Marians of the Immaculate Conception. This act of total entrustment of himself to the Triune God and the Mother of God constitutes the foundation of the Marian religious community.

It is fitting to mention here that Fr. Papczyński did not wish to become a reformer of religious life. If that were the case -- following the general practice of the times – he would have tried to establish a reformed branch of the Piarist, for which he most probably might have obtained the agreement of the Holy See. Leaving the Order of the Pious Schools, *guided by true love and for the sake of restoring peace in the Province torn apart by the new controversy (Decree of Heroic Virtues)*, he resigned from the exclusive Piarist way of religious life. He nevertheless wished to live according to the Gospels as a consecrated religious, because he believed this way of life was closest to that of the Gospel. Thus, he was not an ideologue of the “Piarist way”, or later, of the “Marian way”, but fully aware imitator of the Crucified Christ and Mary Immaculate, to whom he offered himself totally.

In order to understand well this most important work of our Father Founder, it is worth realizing that his plan might have appeared as complete lunacy. Up until that time, no male order of Polish-origin existed. Fr. Papczyński envisioned his future institute as a community open to apostolic work, at one and the same time living an ascetic way of life. Already the situation in the Piarists had indicated that few of the Polish society of those times were inclined to agree to

such a life. Maybe the major obstacle was Fr. Papczyński's lowly, not noble birth. Additionally, he was "tempted" from many sides with various proposals promising important Church offices. Also, members of other congregations delighted in possibly seeing him in their ranks. One could say that all doors stood wide-open before Fr. Papczyński when he left the Piarists, just like it was at the beginning of his religious vocation, thus offering him a chance for an ecclesiastical career. Nevertheless in Fr. Stanislaus faith was victorious in the conviction that the Lord God wished to accomplish through him an important work – proclaiming the honor of Mary Immaculately Conceived by dedicating to her an Order.

In spite of the magnitude of the task as well as of his own insignificance and inaptitude, Fr. Papczyński, provoked by the voice of God, courageously dared to begin the work of founding the Order of Marians, placing his trust in God's power alone. The following is a moving testimony of his trust: *"In spite of innumerable difficulties barring the way, divine goodness and wisdom start and complete whatever they wish, even if the means, according to human judgment may be unfit. There is nothing impossible with God Almighty. It has been most explicitly proven in me – the poorest, most deserving of scorn for a sinner, the most wretched and most unfitting instrument [used by God] for founding of this most worthless and smallest Congregation of Marians of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without Original sin"* (*Fundatio domus recollectionis*). To prepare himself for this new task, Fr. Stanislaus left the Diocese of Krakow and went to Lubocza, to be a chaplain at the Jacob Karski's court. There he prepared a draft of the future Order's constitution entitled *Norma vitae* (The Rule of Life). In search of candidates, he traveled in 1673 to Puszcza Korabiewska, where a former soldier, Stanislaus Krajewski, had been leading a "hermitic way of life" along with a few companions. On the plot of land, received from Krajewski, Fr. Papczyński built and organized the first house of his institute, calling it a "House of recollection." On October 24, 1673, bishop Jacek Święcicki arrived at Puszcza Korabiewska for a canonical visitation. He confirmed the community living by "The Rule of Life" as a nucleus of the Marian Order under the guidance of Fr. Papczyński as its superior. The Bishop also gave them "Statutes" strictly hermitic and penitential in character, which was far from the character of life that the Servant of God had in mind for the Marians. Nevertheless, Fr. Papczyński accepted the Bishop's decision in a spirit of religious obedience.

From the beginning of the Congregation's existence, Fr. Papczyński's fatherly love for his small community prompted him to try to get papal approval for it. Even though the Holy See

decided that the Marians did not need its approval, Fr. Papczyński, just after settling down in New Jerusalem, petitioned Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski for it, and on April 21, 1679, his institute, composed of two houses, received the Bishop's approval as a Diocesan Order. In the same year, King Jan III Sobieski granted special privileges to the small community, which most definitely strengthened its position, but its status as a Diocesan Order still left its future depend on Bishop's good graces. Father Papczyński had a bitter taste of this after the death of his protector and friend, Bishop Wierzbowski in 1687. He and his community had to withstand a new wave of accusations and libels seriously undermining the right to existence of an institute based on simple vows, to which the new shepherd of the diocese gave ear and almost dissolved the Marian Order. This disturbed the vocation of a great majority of members, and even the Founder himself fell into doubts as to the appropriateness of his undertaking. He turned to the Superior General of the Piarist for advice: should he continue on this new road of religious life or should he return to the Order of the Pious Schools? This third petition of Fr. Papczynski, directed to his former order, clearly shows how much spiritual darkness and inner ambivalence were for him in his mission of founding the Order of the Immaculate Conception, and how painful the burden of the responsibility for the birthing of this new endeavor. Only his deep conviction that such was God's will and his obedience to his spiritual directors enabled him to move forward.

Gravely ill and weakened by the severity of life, he undertook to obtain the papal approval for the Marian Order in 1690. To this end, being almost 60 years of age, he personally went by foot to Rome. Maybe, this dramatic and difficult pilgrimage of Father Founder, which he made in the fall and winter – a time most unfavorable for travel, strongly teaches us the depth of his love for our community, and, indirectly, for each one of us. He arrived in Rome at the unfortunate time of Pope Alexander VII's death. Ascertaining that the Holy See was not prone to approve new orders with their own rule (although many exceptions are known), Fr. Stanislaus sought support from the Franciscans of the Strict Observance, which would take the Marian Order under their spiritual care. Among the existing approved religious rules of life one seemed to be most close to him – because of its name and its immaculateness spirituality – the rule of the Monastic Order of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. (also called the Conceptionists). All that Fr. Stanislaus had to do then was to procure the papal approval, but his poor health did not allow him to remain in Rome until the election of the new pontiff. After his return to Poland,

Fr. Papczyński did not cease at all in his efforts to strengthen the rights of his congregation. To this end in 1692, he wrote three times to the Holy See petitioning for approval of the Marian Order on the basis of the Conceptionist Sisters' rule of life. His efforts did not bring any positive results, because in the opinion of the Congregation of Bishops and religious, the approval of the local Ordinary was sufficient for the Marians' legal existence within the Church. In spite of this, Fr. Founder, himself already in very deteriorated health, in 1699 renewed his petition for the approval of the Marian Order and sent Fr. Joachim Kozłowski to Rome as his representative. The latter, encountering difficulties with the approbation of the Marian Order on "The Rule of Life", asked the Franciscans for "The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the B.V.M." The document issued by the General of the Franciscans of the Strict Observance, granting this rule to the Marians, was approved by Pope Innocent XII on November 24, 1699, in his letter addressed to the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland.

Although this rule had been accepted without Fr. Papczyński's agreement, it no way contradicted the specific characteristics of his institute and was later accepted by him with joy. From that time on the Marian Order became a congregation with solemn vows, free from the jurisdiction of local bishops, and that which also bound it to the confining state of hermits. The crowning date of Fr. Papczyński's almost 30-year long, nearly heroic struggle for the papal approval of the Order was June 6, 1701. On this day Fr. Founder pronounced solemn religious vows in the hands of the Apostolic Nuncio Francisco Pignatelli, pledging to preserve the rule of the *Instituto nostro non contrariatem* (*Scripta historica*). Then, at the Church of the Lord's Cenacle in New Jerusalem he received the vows of his confreres. Thus he crowned the work of founding of the Marian Order.

### ***Omnia apud vos in charitate fiant***

It is worth asking: what did Fr. Papczyński see as essential to both his religious vocation and the founding of the Marian Order? The response may be found in the second part of the *Norma vitae* and his other writings. According to Father Founder, the main principle of Christian and religious life is the love of God and people. "*Ponder this,*" he proclaimed in conferences published as a collection entitled *Inspectio cordis*, "*Looking with the eyes of the heart -- the measure of graces depends on the greatness of love. Thus it is like this: whoever attains greater love for the Highest Good receives greater graces and the rewards of love. O, my soul, what do*

you hear? What do you make of it? Are you still going to be so unwise and foolish that you won't dedicate yourself entirely to God's love in order to gain God completely? Are you still going to do your own will until you perish, and not act according to the advice of the Beloved for the good of your salvation? Will you not leave everything, so as to gain everything? Will you not rather deny yourself, so as to gain yourself and He who created you?" The road to God is to open oneself to His love, accepting and allowing it, that this love would draw us to Him, following the way of obedience, spiritual poverty, and self-renunciation. All sacrifices that men must make Fr. Stanislaus interpreted in the key to spousal love. Only for the love of God is it worth surrendering everything. *O love of God which brings infinite benefits! Through her is reached the One whom one loves! Indeed, it is good to love the Infinite God and to be loved by Him! Reading these lines it seems, that we have in hand verses from St. Augustin's Confessions. Father Stanislaus concluded his "hymn of love" with prayerful words: "O Lord, grant that I would truly love you and serve you in pure love, and when finally, seeing you in the blessed land, I will sing you the most sweet song of love: «I found Him whom my heart loves; I will take hold of him and won't let him go» for ever! (cf. Sg 3 :4). This is the matter of a personal, intimate relationship with the Divine Bridegroom, where union flows from love and embraces every moment of life. "Consecrate to Divine Love all your actions and experiences of your entire life, especially your daily [...] good moments, circumstances, [...] each and every action and experience. Consecrate them with trust [...] on the altar of love – a pure heart, I say – united with the merits of Christ the Lord and his Immaculate Mother [...]" (*Norma vitae*).*

In himself a person is not capable of such a love, if it is not given him by the Holy Spirit, in whom Fr. Papczyński saw the source of a true, in other words, spiritual love (*amor spiritualis*). *"The Holy Spirit transforms the souls of sinners into the ones filled with love [...] as He did with the Apostles; as when tongues of fire appeared and came to rest over each one of them, inside their hearts were burning" (Inspectio cordis).*

An equally important place in Fr. Stanislaus's teaching about the road of religious perfection pertains to his appeal for fraternal charity: *"Concerning mutual love: let it be known that the one who excels in mutual love is more dear to the Divine Majesty. Each of you should keep in mind that the soul of his Institute is love, and to the extent that he withdraws from love, he withdraws from life" (Norma vitae).* This instruction is first and foremost concerned with the love of confreres, given by the Lord. The example of this merciful love we can find in the way

Fr. Papczyński related to Stanislaus Krajewski – one of his first companions. It is sufficient to scan the pages of *Fundatio domus recollectionis* to get the idea about the problems that Krajewski brought to Fr. Founder. In 1675 a truly dramatic circumstance arose when Krajewski physically assaulted Fr. Stanislaus and fled the Korabiew monastery afterwards. Remaining outside of the Marian Order, he spread false rumors about the Founder and his little community, especially after Fr. Papczyński's settling in New Jerusalem. After a while, Krajewski founded a religious community of St. Onuphry and made an attempt of establishing a monastery in the village of Wagnanka near Lutków. His efforts failed in a short period of time, and Krajewski asked for permission to return to the Marians. Father Founder admitted him back into the community in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. This attitude full of mercy and goodness changed Brother Stanislaus Krajewski so much that he spent his remaining years in the Marian community (died before 1685) in a total agreement with Fr. Papczyński; what is more: he made him the sole executor of his last will.

In his book *Inspectio cordis*, Father Founder wrote more emphatically: “*A man without love, a religious without love is like a shadow without sun, a body without soul, totally nothing. What a soul is for the body, that love is for the Church, religious Orders and Houses. Someone rightly said once, recommending this virtue: ‘Take away the sun from the world and you take away everything; take away love from man and you won’t leave him anything.’ Love is the soul, light, and life of the Religious Life and of each human association.*” Those words can be seen as Fr. Founder’s spiritual testament left to his confreres.

In light of the above narrative, let’s take a look at the widespread rumor about the Servant of God as a man and religious of extreme severity in the observance of excessive ascetic practices, a rigorist demanding strict adherence to religious rules. This image of Fr. Stanislaus was painted by some of his Piarist superiors, and later -- spread among outsiders – by his companions of the early days of the Marian community in the Korabiew Forest. It may be possible, that such an outlook on the Founder could emerge from a superficial reading of the works that Fr. Papczyński left behind.

A closer examination of Fr. Stanislaus’s vision of the way to holiness allows the discovery of a deeply evangelical source of the ascetic program, which Fr. Papczyński proposed, particularly for consecrated persons. “*No one can serve two masters*” (Mt 6:24). *Consider that there are two masters: God and the world, spiritual and carnal desires; love of oneself and love*

*of God. By joining the congregation, you gave yourself to a better Master. Thus, you ought to declare war on the other one. Be sure that you will be given help from heaven for successfully conducting this war, on one condition that you will fight properly. God gives His blessing in battle to those whom He called to combat. Thus, attack everything that is of the world, everything that belongs to evil, all that you have of self-love, or all that tries to penetrate the heart already dedicated to another Master – tear it out or thrust in away” (Ispectio cordis).* In this perspective, the life of faith and realization of God’s calling appear as a spiritual battlefield between things of God and those of the devil; between what is holy and what is “of the world.” The ascetical means and exercises should help a religious to cleanse himself of the stains of sin and to preserve within himself the divine beauty.

Father Stanislaus kept more fasts than his confreres did; he practiced flagellation more often than the rule prescribed, and he dedicated more time for night vigils. However, he did not impose any of this on his confreres. In no way did the penitential directions contained in *The Rule of Life* go beyond the limits of the generally accepted principles of asceticism of hermits of those times (the only exception is the absolute prohibition of drinking vodka or any other hard liquors!). Those directives were not the goal in itself, but only a means of the sanctification of self; and in the case of Fr. Papczyński these were often the way of interceding for the others, especially for the souls suffering in Purgatory, thus they were serving the greater love. We can clearly see that neither ascetic exercises nor piety, nor even the rule of the institute are at the center of reflections about the road of religious perfection but the love for God and people. In his first *Testament* (December 9, 1692), Fr. Stanislaus wrote: *“To my beloved Brothers in Christ I specifically recommend the love for God and the neighbor, unanimity of intentions, humility, patience, sobriety, and modesty; faithful fulfilling of their vocation and firm perseverance in it; unchanging devotion to the Virgin Mary conceived without stain; zealous support of the faithful departed; observance of [our] rules; religious discipline and perfection; and an ever fervent spirit. May they remember that a most sure and infallible reward is in store for them for everything that they pledged to God and to the Most Elect Virgin.”*

## **Conclusion**

Looking at Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński’s life, one recognizes in him an encounter with God in human affairs, often with heroic trust and confidence. More than reports of miracles and mystical graces attributed to Fr. Stanislaus (vision of the Purgatory, foretelling of the future,

healing of the sick, or even resurrection of the dead), which were already present in his first biographies, we are astounded by his fortitude in following God's inspiration and his struggle with difficulties. His struggles and doubts is what makes more visible the work of the Holy Spirit in life of the Founder of the Marian Order. His way of faith and vocation is closely united with his appeal for self-resignation, for trusting in the fulfillment of things that seem to be impossible, and for faithfulness until the end. How similar is he, Fr. Papczyński to her whom he so loved and honored – Mary Immaculate, the *Trusting Virgin*.

Father Papczyński's holiness matured on the road of faith, and in some way found its consummation in the heroic work of founding of our Congregation. For the realization of this Divine charism the Founder, Father Papczyński, put all in perspective: he resigned from an ecclesiastical career, he agreed to the onus of forming ill-fitted candidates for his Order; faced painful waves of mockery, accusations, libels, and even physical suffering. He withstood physical assaults of his and the Order's enemies. For the sake of his institute he jeopardized his reputation and bore long years of toils and waiting. Recalling the words of St. Paul the Apostle, we may say that Fr. Papczyński in pain brought forth the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. The glory of this work he left to the Lord Jesus and His Immaculate Mother in his last testament: "*I, the unworthy superior of this small Congregation, commend it for all eternity to my Lord Jesus Christ and His Most Elect Virgin Mother Mary, the most holy, as the true and only Founders, Directors, Protectors and Patrons of this small Congregation of the Immaculate Conception supporting the deceased*" (*Second Testament*, 1699/1701).