

**AD HONOREM
IMMACULATAE CONCEPTIONIS
MARIAE**

On the charismatic mission

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REFLECTIONS

Edited by
Fr. Tomasz Nowaczek MIC

The General Curia of the Congregation of Marian Fathers

PROMIC

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A manuscript of the *Norma Vitae* and a portable altar
with an image of an eye in a triangle – a symbol of Divine Providence
– at the Sanctuary of St. Father Stanislaus Papczynski in Marianki,
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List of abbreviations

- ChV** *Post-synodal exhortation “Christus vivit” of Pope Francis to young people and the entire people of God*, Loreto, 25 March 2019.
- DC** *Encyclical letter “Deus caritas est” of Pope Benedict XVI to the bishops, priest and deacons, men and women religious and all the lay faithful on Christian love*, Rome, 25 December 2005.
- EE** Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, *“Essential elements” in the Church’s teaching on religious life*, 31 May 1983.
- GS** Second Vatican Council, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “Gaudium et spes”*, Rome, 7 December 1965.
- C** *Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, Editio typica*, General Curia of the Marian Fathers Rome 2018
- CCC** Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018.
- NW** Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wineskins. The consecrated life and its ongoing challenges since Vatican II. Guidelines*, Libreria Editrice Vatican, 2017.
- PF** *Apostolic letter “Porta Fidei” of Pope Benedict XVI announcing The Year of Faith*, Rome, 11 October 2011.
- VC** *Post-synodal apostolic exhortation “Vita consecrata” of the Holy Father John Paul II to the bishops and clergy, religious orders and congregations, societies of apostolic life, secular institutes and all the faithful on the consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world*, Rome, 25 March 1996.

Foreword

On the charismatic mission, the publication in the series *Ad honorem Immaculatae Conceptionis Mariae* edited by Fr. Tomasz Nowaczek MIC PhD, and mostly written by him, is the fourth and the last book planned for the 350th anniversary of establishing the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. It closes the series of reflections on the history, spirituality and charism of the religious community founded in 1670 by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński. The three previous publications focused mainly on issues regarding the history and theology of the spirituality of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers, in particular on what relates to the foundation of the Congregation, i.e. the act of the Oblatio made in Cracow on 11th December 1670 by our Saint Founder; then on the founding charism and its most important elements; and last year (the third book) on the very difficult history of the Congregation and its Paschal path.

This book has a little different purpose. The intention of the editor, who is the author of the whole project and most of the chapters, is an attempt to translate the earlier reflections, i.e. what is considered our charism, into praxis, both in relation to the Marian style of life (of course, we are talking about the quality of life) and, maybe above all, to the apostolate, or, more broadly, to any external activity of the Congregation. Hence the title: *On the charismatic mission*. In the Introduction, Fr. Tomasz Nowaczek MIC humbly points out that: “In the proposed texts for the Days of Recollection, you will not find calls for sudden changes or even a ruckus intended to revive the Congregation.” However, my dream is that these deep and seriously thought out lectures cause a ruckus. Because if the word ruckus means disturbance or commotion (ruckus – *The Free Dictionary*) the best fruition would be provoking a serious, or even controversial, discussion on how the charism of the Congregation founded by St. Stanislaus should be updated and expressed in the context of modern cultural trends, social changes, today’s sensitivity and the needs of the Church and the world. This is, indeed, the subject of the reflections in this book. The editor himself expresses the same wish writing with hope a little further in the Introduction that he would like these texts by him and two other authors (Fr. Krzysztof Stąpor MIC and Fr. Łukasz Mazurek MIC PhD) to raise “our faith and courage

to participate in the discussion about ministry as an emanation of understanding and living the charism of the Congregation.”

The key issues taken up in the book concern the problem of consistency between historical, theological and spiritual reflections and the practice of both the religious life and apostolic activity. Today’s Church in the person of Pope Francis urges everybody, including consecrated persons, to make an evangelical discernment which is listening to the Holy Spirit and responding to His call. This call always comes in specific historical circumstances which, in the language of the Church, means reading the signs of the times. For the Congregation of the Marian Fathers, the Jubilee of its 350th anniversary is, undoubtedly, such a sign. Thus, there are several questions of fundamental importance to us: how in the context of the Jubilee do we recognize the message of the Holy Spirit, what does He call us to, are we open to His voice and are we ready to leave behind not only our conceptions and old ways of thinking but also our habits and comfortability. In other words, do we have this newness and freshness of the heart and mind which allow us to step off the beaten mental track and risk into what is unknown, new, not our way but what the Holy Spirit expects of us.

The Authors of this book try to answer these, and other, questions, though maybe differently expressed. I would like to thank the Editor for the original approach towards the subject. I am also grateful to all the Authors for their effort of undertaking the research, noting their thoughts and sharing their reflections. I believe that these reflections will deepen our love for the Church and our Congregation and help us to better understand many vital issues of our faith to ultimately make it stronger.

Andrzej Pakuła, MIC
Superior General

Rome, 6th August, 2022,
On the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus

Introduction

The General Jubilee Committee had prepared a program of celebrations for the 350th anniversary of the origin of the Congregation for the years 2019-2023 which, due to the pandemic, needed updating. Not only many interesting conferences, symposia and congresses planned for the entire congregation were not held, but also enthusiasm for the celebrations in individual communities died rather quickly. The significant elements of that time which will firmly remain in the consciousness of the Marian Fathers are: the discovery and the rereading of the *Oblatio* of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, a beautiful jubilee cross with iconography illustrating the essence of our charismatic vocation and mission, the texts of the monthly Days of Recollection and, most of all, the conviction that the Word of God is true when He says: “for my thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways” (cf. Isa 55:8-9).

Let us hope that this conviction will translate into an authentic need for practising spiritual discernment of the signs of the time and the courage to confidently undertake the practice of seeking and fulfilling only “the will of the One who chose us before the world was made and commissioned us to go out and to bear fruit” (cf. Jn 15:16). Such spiritual experience may lead us towards man who, as always, “without Christ, is not able to understand his deepest calling – the *from where* and *to where* of life”¹. Therefore, let us try, remembering more than the 350 years of history of our Congregation, to touch the present time of the charismatic mission which we have inherited and which, by God’s will, still needs to be undertaken in a new way for the glory of God and for the salvation of the world.

In the proposed texts for the Days of Recollection, you will not find calls for sudden changes or even a *ruckus* intended to revive the Congregation. I would like these texts to raise our faith and courage to participate in a discussion about the ministry as an radiation of understanding and living the charism of the Congregation which is God’s gift to the Church. A truly fantastic thing would be the engagement of the confreres who, with a calm

¹ Cf. John Paul II, the homily at the Victory Square in Warsaw on 2 June 1979 <https://www.ekai.pl/dokumenty/homilia-jana-pawla-ii-wygloszona-podczas-mszy-sw-na-placu-zwyciestwa> (access on 28 April 2022).

confidence in themselves and in the Marian mission, would warn the people of today against the errors and a blind belief in the supposed triumph of ideologies that reject God. For this, we need a vision inspired in a similar way as can be seen in our Founder himself, then in the Renovator and later in numerous fathers who found the appropriate means to proclaim Christ. God has always been their inspiration: “But just as God Himself (to whom be everlasting, endless glory and thanksgiving) lovingly, mercifully, wisely, and miraculously inspired me to this work of His Providence, so also He Himself has brought it about – and He will bring it to completion, forever and ever.”². In this spirit and with hope for a good last year of the Jubilee, we give the confreres these reflections for every month of 2023.

² Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, The Foundation of the House of Recollection, *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*, in: Selected Writing of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 901.

TOMASZ NOWACZEK MIC
Warsaw, Poland

January 2023

Pro Christo et ecclesia versus fluid Catholicism
on evangelical faithfulness

The Word of the Lord: 2 Tim 4:1-5

Before God and before Christ Jesus who is to be judge of the living and the dead, I charge you, in the name of his appearing and of his kingdom: proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, give encouragement – but do all with patience and with care to instruct. The time is sure to come when people will not accept sound teaching, but their ears will be itching for anything new and they will collect themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes; and then they will shut their ears to the truth and will turn to myths. But you must keep steady all the time; put up with suffering; do the work of preaching the gospel; fulfil the service asked of you.

SOURCES

St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Examination of the Heart*,
in: Selected Writing of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw,
Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022 p. 234-237
Sunday of Pentecost

“If a man loves [M]e, he will keep [M]y word” (Jn 14:23). Consider that the essence of perfect love is to observe the divine words. Just as children who truly love their parents try to fulfil their will exactly, in the same way, as the sons of God, those who would like to be lovers of the best and greatest Father should take great care to fulfil His commandments most diligently. On the other hand, he is unworthy of the name of “son” who, deaf to all commandments, receives them as fairy tales and considers many of them to be unnecessarily imposed by the Father.

Thus, the one who does not pay attention to God's will is not to be regarded even as a servant of God. For the infinite Goodness says in complaint about such people: "Why do you call me 'Lord,

Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Lk 6:46).

Therefore, it will be your duty to strive for a perfect union through the true observance of the laws and commandments of God, and of those who represent Him.

"My Father will love him" (Jn 14:23). Consider how those servants rejoice, who have won over by their services not only the hearts of the children but also of their parents. When they have gained their favor, they rejoice and believe that they will lead a very quiet and calm life, as if carried by the favorable west winds. The Truth promises the same to anyone who is obedient to Him, because by true obedience and service, a person will gain not only His love, but also the love of the eternal Father, the almighty and gracious Lord: "And My Father," He says, "will love him."

O the happiness of the soul that loves Jesus! O the bliss of the spirit submissive to the Holy Spirit! Consider: What greater happiness could you experience in this life than being loved by God? For the most wonderful thing has already happened when someone is loved by God. But make sure that you respond to the divine love extended to you with an equal love (although who is able to achieve this?), with humble submission, eager readiness, steadfast service, and constant obedience. [...] And this is the way to recognize the Spirit of God: Namely, if a trial precedes Him. For this is a peculiar sign of the divine grace being poured into man's soul, according to someone's saying: "We almost never have God nearer to us, than when we find ourselves in a difficult situation." And Nahum says: "His way is in whirlwind and storm" (Nah 1:3). The Holy Spirit comes to a man with a loud clamor and sound, when the soul is disturbed, frightened, and worn out.

Finally, He comes from Heaven, sent by Christ the Lord from that immortal ark of the triumphant heavenly Sovereign. For the inspirations proceeding from the infernal marsh (namely, the whisperings of the evil spirits) seductively approach the soul and gently caress it; but on their departure they leave a thousand vexations of conscience, a thousand stings, and a thousand severe pains. On the contrary, it is clear that the Spirit of the Lord (preceded by anguish) comes in a whirlwind and with noise. However, signs of joy, a thousand consolations, a thousand fruits and a thousand goods immediately follow Him. If, therefore, you were tormented before the Sacred Banquet because of your imperfections, or because of

a desire to regain divine grace, or for any other pious reason, believe that you received the Spirit of the Lord, who will be accompanied by incredible consolations.

REFLECTIONS

The last decade of the Church's history has been a period of exposing certain weaknesses and the gradual discovery of trends of schism which have become unprecedentedly noticeable e.g. in the Church of the German-speaking regions. In the process of the consultations during the Synod on Synodality summoned by Pope Francis for the years, 2021-2023, several interesting and yet alarming postulates have been formulated. Cardinal Reinhard Marx, the Archbishop of Munich and Freising, calls for lifting the rules of celibacy for priests in the Catholic Church and he does not preclude the priesthood of women; Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg, following some circles of lay Catholics in Germany, postulates changes in the teaching of the Church on homosexuality claiming that the socio-scientific grounds of the teaching are no longer true.¹ Also, the chairman of the German Bishops' Conference, Bp. Georg Bätzing, calls for a change in the teaching of the Catholic Church on sexuality, particularly homosexuality. He believes that sexuality is not a sin and a sexually active homosexual may be a good Catholic. He claims that when a gay couple lives together faithfully and responsibly, they do not in any way break their relationship with God. Like others, he advocates for lifting celibacy and for the ordination of women.²

George Weigel, commenting on the above-mentioned stances, thinks that Germany's synodal path abandons the Gospel. The American theologian describes these pursuits as the Catholic Lite project. It is an attempt to detach the Church from the Scripture and Tradition. It is a Catholicism that could not tell you with certainty what it believes in or what makes righteous living; a Church of *open borders*, unable or unwilling to define those ideas and actions by which full communion with the Mystical Body

¹ Cf. <https://www.fronda.pl/a/kard-marx-chce-zniesienia-obowiazkowego-celibatu-lepiej-aby-byli-zonaci,173170.html>; <https://www.fronda.pl/a/z-niemiec-homoherezja-wylewa-sie-na-caly-kosciol-kard-hollerich-kosciol-musi-zmienic-nauczanie-nt-homoseksualizmu,173204.html>.

² Cf. <https://pch24.pl/bp-georg-batzing-chce-zmian-cel-blogoslawienie-homozwiazkow-i-kaplanstwo-kobiet/>.

of Christ is broken. However, will the Catholic Lite project lead to a vibrant Catholicism, doing the work that Pope St. John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council set before the Church: the conversion and sanctification of the world? Weigel also observes that it is Catholicism that embraces the symphony of Catholic truth as the answer to the world's yearning for genuine human liberation and authentic human community is alive and vital today. *Catholic Lite*, or in other words, *fluid Catholicism* that takes its cues from the modern world is a dying Catholicism. Weigel sees it in full display in the German "Synodal Path". He writes about its two apostasies. The first apostasy holds that history judges Revelation; there are no stable reference points for Catholic self-understanding; we are in charge, not Christ the Lord. He gives an example: The Lord Jesus says that marriage is forever; the Synodal Path can change that. St. Paul and the entire biblical tradition teach that same-sex activities violate the divine plan for human love inscribed in our being created as male and female; the Synodal Path can change that because we postmodernists know better.³ The second apostasy teaches a false notion of freedom as "autonomy." And yet, freedom as arbitrariness is self-induced slavery. Authentic freedom is liberation through moral truth towards goodness and beauty. Fluid Catholicism reigns supreme in the deliberations of the German Synodal Path. The result will not be evangelical renewal but a further abandonment of the Gospel.⁴

This is vividly reminiscent of the era of the crises of the Church at the turn of the 15th to the 16th century when new humanist trends emerged manifesting themselves in changes in mentality and social morality which put at the centre, not Christ, but the new man, who replaced the love of God with the love of oneself and transcendental love with love of earthly goods (pleasures, honours and wealth). These trends played an increasingly important role in the Papal court. This new morality and way of life substantially affected the perception of the faithful towards Rome.

An important note: The above mentioned humanism also had a different – a Catholic face which did not necessarily mean giving up an existing perception of the world and questioning Christian civilization. This humanistic trend and a certain style of piety resulting from it influenced Renaissance art, painting, sculpture and architecture. There is no sign of a retreat from the theocentric image of the world or a complete loss of piety.

³ Cf. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/02/liquid-catholicism-and-the-german-synodal-path>.

⁴ Ibid.



Raphael, Michelangelo, Perugino or Botticelli, following theologians, depict in their work the reality that is sanctified and permeated by God's presence. They try not to omit showing God's work of creating the world, the importance of the Church, heaven, judgment, the glorification of Christ or emphasising the power of Peter. The artists of this period (15th – 16th centuries) show Divine wisdom in action, the living temple built of living stones chosen by God. They speak of the papal power of the keys, the power of binding and loosing both in the temporal and the eternal world. It is God, not man, who is the centre of attention of the Renaissance masters. "Man himself, with no relation to God, locked in temporality, focused on his own greatness and power was of no interest to them".⁵

An example of such an approach may be, *The Disputation of the Holy Sacrament*, painted by Raphael between 1509 and 1510. There are three meanings attributed to the fresco. The upper part of the painting anagogically depicts the Church triumphant, while the lower part is an allegory of the struggling Church. The saints depicted come from the most important books of the Old and New Testament. The third heaven represents an intellectual vision of God. *Disputation* is a symbolic presentation of the whole

⁵ Paweł Lisicki, *Luter. Ciemna strona rewolucji*, Fronda, Warsaw 2017, p. 65.

realm ruled by God. The first heaven is to know ourselves, the second one to know creation perfectly and the third one is the vision of God— *contemplatio Dei*. Petrus Galatinus summarises the efforts of the theologians of his time who, to a significant extent, inspired contemporary artists: “whoever, therefore, desires to fathom the mysteries of God (*Dei arcana inspicere*) in contemplation of divine matters, should reject fleshly things and climb spiritually to the heaven of the Scriptures – like Paul taken to the third heaven – and stand at the open gate of the Scriptures themselves – to see secret words, too sacred to be uttered by a man”.⁶

It is clear that the Bible is the source of the understanding and interpretation of the world, the reality surrounding man. Heaven, understood as the place of God’s presence, is a point of reference. The Church is God’s bride. The Pope is to lead the faithful to eternal life, to God. Rome is the symbolic New Jerusalem, the holy city, the centre of the world where one can enter heaven and experience interaction with God. Pope Sixtus IV wanted the main chapel of his palace to imitate Solomon’s Temple. The painters were supposed to bring out adoration, to direct the attention of the faithful toward what is eternal and unchanging. Asceticism was meant to lead to contemplation and fulfilling God’s will. It had nothing to do with just aesthetics. Theologians, popes and artists followed the idea to present a very precise theological program; that is how they understood their mission and they tried to engage the best masters and to use the best means of expression.⁷

This is the reality into which the figure of Stanislaus Papczyński arrives. He was a child of his times shaped not only by the situation of 17th century Poland but also by the reforms of the Council of Trent as, among others, an answer to Martin Luther’s Reformation. The Council saw the religious life as the pursuit of excellence which was confirmed in the then commonly used terms *via perfectionis* or *via spiritualis*. *Inspectio cordis*, a work written by Father Stanislaus, a collection of reflections and sermons, was intended to introduce the listener or the reader to eternal and everlasting matters which take specific forms in striving for evangelical perfection. According to Father Stanislaus, evangelical perfection has to be based on the Bible, especially the Gospel, which the apostles of Christ accepted and put into practice.⁸ He clearly says that *via perfectionis* or *spiritualis* is the

⁶ Ibid, p. 66.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁸ Cf. Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, *Wprowadzenie*, in: *Błogosławiony Stanisław Papczyński, Wejrzenie w głębi serca (Inspectio cordis –IC)*, Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów MIC, Warsaw 2008, p. 9.

right style of life for the apostles and that “all the followers of Christ are His adopted children and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. However, more so for religious who - undertaking the Evangelical counsels – make their profession of the apostolic order and attempt to faithfully follow the life of Christ the Lord.”⁹

Religious perfection, according to our Founder, is a process. At its beginning, there is God’s initiative which encourages us to totally reject sin and to follow the principles of the Gospel to become perfect in imitation of Christ. Following Christ in His love and obedience to God the Father is accompanied by an awareness of the finiteness of the earthly life which directs us toward an eschatological future.¹⁰

Therefore, Christ is at the centre of the life of a religious – a spiritual person – a Christian. The essence is not an intellectual fascination with Christ but following Christ’s way of life. Following Christ is the fundamental duty of a religious man. His aim is reaching the Father in heaven (see Jn 14:1ff). Christ showed this aim in His teaching and actions. His life was the fulfilment of His teaching on the Kingdom of the Father. “Fr. Papczyński warns that rejecting Christ’s call to follow Him not only poses the danger of spurning the glory which God prepared for the followers of Christ but also of spurning God Himself. Therefore, whoever thinks that salvation and glory can be obtained without following God the Son Incarnate deludes himself”¹¹ The Founder of the Marian Fathers presents following Christ as timeless (*sequela Christi*) and demands a similar relationship between a disciple of today and the Teacher as is described in the pages of New Testament. Summing up, the following hypothesis is being confirmed that the current attempts to make Catholicism more fluid are the result of a renunciation of the Gospel in favour of fashionable, ideologically tinged trends which are supposed to make Christianity more “with the times” – easy and pleasant – which leads to the annihilation of the life-giving power of Catholicism directed towards eternity.

Striving to follow Christ comes from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He brings about the *desire of the heart* (*desiderium cordis*) to follow Christ entirely – His words, acts, all the way up to the heroic love which can be seen in the Passion of the Saviour. This inspiration by the Holy Spirit lasts for the whole life of a religious – He excites and sustains it. One can meet

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 27.

¹¹ Ibid.

Christ most fully during the Eucharist. That is when the *desire of the heart* rekindles and the initial intention and ideal of a life devoted solely to Jesus is cleansed. Human effort is equally important – a commitment involving a radical decision to renounce sin and to make an effort to follow Christ in sinlessness in order to live for God and His affairs.¹²

Father Papczyński says that an authentic test of following Christ is conversion. He recalls here the figures of Judas and Matthew, the tax collector. Each of them followed Christ's call but one can clearly see the difference in fulfilling this calling. Our Founder expresses it as follows: Consider that the evidence of a true conversion is the true imitation of Christ the Lord. Judas Iscariot was not converted, because although he followed Jesus, he was following Him deceitfully; he followed Him with a false disposition, thinking of his moneybags. Saint Matthew, on the contrary, was a true follower of Christ because, getting up, he followed Him. From where did he get up? From sin. To where did he follow Christ? To the virtues. Behold, a simple rule of following Christ is given to you: get up and follow Him [...] Get up, therefore, and follow Him; because you will by no means follow Him, unless you get up.¹³

A radical break with sin is a fundamental condition for following Christ which resonates even more strongly in the call of the Marians' Founder to take up the cross and to renounce oneself (cf. Mt 16:24). Father Founder, based on this passage of the Gospel, contrasts the way of life shown by Christ with a life lived according to earthly ambitions. Behaviours which need to be renounced if one wants to follow an evangelical life are: wickedness, vainglory, envy and pride. Following Christ, according to Father Founder, calls for renouncing everything one owns or may own in the future: honours, riches, deference, fame or even relatives and parents – one needs to follow Christ firmly and resolutely. "Totality and uncompromisingness in following Christ should be the essential principle rule of following Christ in perfection. [...] He not only wants to be followed but also He helps those who – binding their life with Him – seek to become like Him."¹⁴

¹² Ibid, p. 28.

¹³ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, Examination of the Heart, For the Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist in: Selected Writing of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 424.

¹⁴ Cf. Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, *Wprowadzenie*, w: Błogosławiony Stanisław Papczyński, *Wejrzenie w głębi serca* Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów MIC, Warszawa 2008, p. 29; IC p. 8–10.

It is worth noting that although renouncing sin and *the world* is already in itself an expression of following Christ, this is only the first step. Evangelical perfection directs us towards further steps which aim to form a true man within us, like Jesus. Following Christ entirely indeed means becoming like Christ in relation to God, to neighbours and to oneself. In practice, this means living in perfect obedience to the Father – to die to everything that is not divine in order to live, like Christ, only for God.¹⁵ Next, it is practicing love of neighbour, including enemies, which comes from Christ's sacrifice on the cross. A disciple of Christ, just like his Master, should be consumed by the desire for the redemption of all people – not sparing himself for their salvation. Finally, religious perfection is characterized by an appropriate relationship to oneself, i.e. following Christ in a way which leads the disciple to properly shape his own personality: through acting properly and accepting suffering, by which he means consciously accepting what befalls man in a way beyond his own control.

Father Founder is concerned with the strict observance of the rule of the Congregation, practicing and developing the virtues, observing the evangelical counsels and the ministry of salvation and the sanctification of others. He does not hesitate to call his spiritual sons to take upon themselves various occasions to suffer such as: mortification, injustice from others, the burden of work. Following Christ, according to the Father Founder, leads to meeting and accepting the cross (cf. Mt 16:24). A true disciple of Christ will carry the cross serenely, bravely, with holy persistence which can be an antidote to the vision of fluid Catholicism.¹⁶

Questions:

1. What is your self-awareness – who are you?
2. What is your awareness of the creation and the world in which you live and to which you are sent?
3. What is your knowledge of God and the vision of heaven?

¹⁵ Cf. Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *Examination of the Heart: Selected Writing of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński*, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 424-428, 548-553.

¹⁶ Cf. Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, *Wprowadzenie*, w: Błogosławiony Stanisław Papczyński, *Wejrzenie w głąb serca*, Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów MIC, Warszawa 2008, p. 31.

TOMASZ NOWACZEK MIC
Warsaw, Poland

February 2023

A gene of mercy
on war and peace

The Word of the Lord: Lk 12:49-53

I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.

SOURCES

**Prayer for the Beatification of the Servant
of God Fr. Janis Mendriks**

Lord Jesus Christ, you called your servant, Fr. Janis Mendriks, to the Congregation devoted to the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Please, if it is in accordance with your holy will, let us soon rejoice at his beatification. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Dmitrijs Artjomous, Servant of God Jānis Mendriks MIC,

True man and priest, PROMIC, Warsaw 2019 – Letter 2

Father Mendriks wrote the second letter in Jaunborne on 13 July 1950, a few months before he got arrested. He addressed the letter to his sister, Veronica. It is titled: *Blessed are those who suffer as they shall be com-*

forted. He writes: these words of the Saviour Himself may comfort every man on his thorny way of life. Only a man can suffer, and suffer patiently, gaining merits before God in this way. No one can leave this valley of tears and move to eternity without suffering. The Saviour Himself is called by a prophet a suffering King. His Mother, the Virgin Mary, is called Our Lady of Sorrows. Are we not to drink from the chalice which Our Saviour and His Immaculate Mother, many saints and pious men drank from? Saint John Chrysostom says that suffering is more valuable than the ability to perform miracles. If we could work miracles, we would be God's debtors, but when we suffer, it is as if God is our debtor. People have always suffered and they will suffer till the end of time. It is sweet to suffer because of the iniquity of others if you feel that you yourself don't owe anybody anything. But even if you suffer through your own fault, your heart is filled with a certain peace because you know that God has not rejected you but He wants you to become an offering for others. One thing is clear for all of us – all suffering will end one day. God's wisdom is so great that He found a way to put crosses on all the paths of life. That is why all we have to do is just to be patient and to trust in God's care. It is best to repeat often: "Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in You." It is necessary that unfailing trust is placed in the Saviour because then a man can find peace for his wounded soul.

It is a very good thing to offer up all one's difficulties in life for honourable intentions, especially for other sufferers so that God will give them strength and that their suffering would bear fruit. People don't even suspect how much the one who gives them spiritual help is suffering. May such a life cross do them good so that one day they could work their land with even greater success.

I have been living in the same old way, under the same conditions, for some time now. So far, I have all that I need.

Give my best to your whole family and to the other relatives, including from the house of Smilga, Vera and others,

J.M.

Jaunborne, 13 July 1950

REFLECTIONS

From 1863-1869, Leo Tolstoy wrote one of the greatest literary works, a historical novel, *War and Peace*. In it, the author describes three important

events in 19th century Russia: the Napoleonic Wars, the December Revolution and the Crimean War.

The Russian writer is convinced that history is doomed by some unspecified power. The executors of this doom are masses of people and the ruler who is able to organize and use them in such a way that together they can fulfil some kind of historical mission. Tolstoy assigns this role to the tsar who, in order to execute this doom – mission, may turn to using power. The author of the Russian national epic also recognizes the idea of a *just war*. Based on the Gospel, Tolstoy believes that war is justifiable only when it is waged to defend land and people. He condemns a war to capture land or to satisfy the ruler's ambitions, which does not guarantee long-term success and peace.

An image of the Russian soul emerges from the novel. There is no shortage of mad love, pride and ambition. You also have envy, wickedness and pettiness. An image of the condition of the Russian soul can be found not only in Tolstoy's work. Among numerous Russian writers and thinkers, it is enough to mention Fyodor Dostoevsky who perfectly characterizes the spiritual condition of his contemporaries – not only Russians. His insightful analyses can be found in such works as: *The Gambler*, *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*. A life of misery, envy, full of lies, overpowering laziness, meanness, exploitation, mental and physical suffering, unrepented crime, the consequences and punishment of which will be another crime. All this adds up to the pain of a spirit in the dark searching for mercy. And so on through the centuries.

One can get the impression that Russia's greatness, usurped or not, is disproportionate to the condition of its spirit, which does not even try to rise above blind fate that supposedly, no one can influence. However, what is hidden beneath blind fate? What power, despite brilliant spiritual insights, pushes a Russian man to choose the worse options which bring suffering to himself and others? Where does this inability to do good come from? Where does cruelty and the desire to dominate everyone come from? Isn't it similar to the state of man described by the famous desert father, Evagrius Ponticus as *acedia* – *the noonday demon*? In this way, Evagrius characterises a situation in which man is subject to complete numbness of the psyche, powerlessness of soul and body. It is an inability to undertake any struggle for oneself, to save the greatness of humanity which can understand and accept itself only through an authentic relation to someone far superior to us and at the same time close to us – a personal God.

Saint James the Apostle instructs us: “Where do these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Is it not precisely in the desires fighting inside your own selves? You want something and you lack it; so you kill. You have an ambition that you cannot satisfy; so you fight to get your way by force. It is because you do not pray that you do not receive; when you do pray and do not receive, it is because you prayed wrongly, wanting to indulge your passions.” (James 4:1-3). The reason for praying badly may be a false idea about the One to whom I pray.

Father Jānis Mendriks personally experienced this ungodly state when he was faced with communist Russian torturers. Unchanged in its essence, the system of structural evil manifested itself again on 24 February 2022. That day in the morning, Russia’s barbaric war against Ukraine began. It wasn’t the only incident bringing misery and unthinkable suffering to people. It is enough to mention Chechnya, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Syria with the totally massacred Aleppo where people were not spared. Unatoned crimes repeatedly pay back and bring still new tragedies, just like Raskolnikov’s murders in *Crime and Punishment* by F. Dostoyevsky. Moreover, last year, in the light of Russian aggression against Ukraine, again we can clearly observe the fiasco of a jaded and tired Western culture which, cutting off its own heritage, for centuries rooted in God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, began to believe that it could create a new man, capable of creating himself according to any ideas of gender, influence, possession and dominance over others. Hence came the bubbling up of myths without ethos: myths about solidarity, the rule of law, dialogue, compromise, tolerance, ecology, human rights, etc. What’s more, besides promoting surreal theories completely detached from people’s everyday experience, they would readily remove from human experience and language not only the idea of sin – which, in fact, has already happened – but also the idea of evil, not to mention the negation of its very existence. This is just an outline of the problem which brought this great culture into a state of acedia – spiritual powerlessness.

Unfortunately, these attempts always happen first on an individual dimension before they take their institutionalized shape, dressed in the comprehensive apparatus of terms, rules, regulations and authorities enforcing this new bureaucratic order, constructed beyond God and His law. We, religious, are no strangers to a state of acedia, either. We know only too well that giving up the radicalism of being a witness to the Gospel of Christ for the mediocrity of the consecrated life is one of the reasons for today’s lack of authority among ourselves, and indirectly – who knows? – in the wider

society. Luckily, we are protected from this spiritual apathy by our martyr brothers, including the martyrs of the communist era. They are people capable of confronting evil because they trusted God and committed themselves to Him. They nurtured in themselves the mentality of mercy – “Jesus, I trust in you”. In their openness to Jesus’ Spirit, they had courage to give up their lives for God and others. Because the mentality of mercy includes the gift of courage to spread the Gospel, trust in the omnipotence and goodness of the Creator, the imperishable testimony of a life greater than pain, sin and death. Their way of life shaped a generation of mercy. Mercy can be compared to a kind of gene which had been instilled for good in the generation raised on the life of Saint Faustina, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint John Paul II and many saints and blessed, including Marianas: Saint Stanislaus Papczyński with the imagination of mercy reaching Purgatory that led Father Stanislaus to entrust those fallen in the battlefields of the then Republic of Poland to God; the blessed martyrs of Rosica - Antoni Leszczewicz and Jerzy Kaszyra, with the imagination of mercy allowing them to accompany others to the last moments of their life so that they could *look death in the eye* with hope and courage, enter together the Glory of Christ who comes forth from the future to lead them to it; and finally, contemporary candidates for the altars, like, those already mentioned in these reflections, Jānis Mendriks, Andrzej Ćikoto, Fabian Abrantowicz, Vladas Mažonas, Eugeniusz Kulesza, who with the imagination of mercy amidst communist terror, mental and physical abuse, resisted suffering and amid savagery bore witness to the human dignity of a person immersed in the grace and goodness of God. Mercy in martyrdom – *ex aerumnis carceris* – a slow death from torment, exhaustion, harassment in a prison or a prison camp. Although it wasn’t a sudden death for faith, those who were slowly dying were ready to accept it. Their readiness to accept suffering leading to death was an expression of the deepest faith. Mercy embraces in itself a horizon of infinity which breaks through the humanistic restriction to temporality and opens up to heaven which we pursue throughout our entire lives – where Christ is seated at God’s right hand. Mercy also verifies the value of the culture we live in. It accurately exorcises any ideas which are supposed to help man, especially humanism without Christ which, while trying to tame evil, becomes incapable of fighting it and wallowing in acedia pushing to crimes.

A gene of mercy is incarnated. The Incarnated Mercy is Christ. Mercy delivered is the disciples sent by Christ, filled with His Holy Spirit which at the time of trial tells them what to do and say. In addition to the above-men-

tioned disciples of Christ, we also have contemporary heralds of the Divine Mercy – a multitude of people opening their hearts, including conscious, ordinary, humble witnesses of God’s merciful love like those who for decades grew in its *mists* and sought God virtually in the dark; many times finding Him in neighbours, sometimes in themselves. Ironically as it may sound, that is how God took care of His followers accompanying them in their suffering in Aleppo, Chechnya, once in Rwanda, in today’s Ukraine and many other dark places around the world. These dramatic places and times are a *lectio divina*, in which God reveals His name – Mercy. He does not get tired of us and our sin. It is He who seeks us, never condemning us. His wounds are the proof of love towards us sinners – it is the hour of Jesus’ death, the time to stop to call: “Jesus, I trust in You, ... For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world!”

Since the time of St. Faustina, humanity has been consciously wandering the paths of mercy. As Marians, we have our little share in it. We know that Fr. Józef Jarzębowski travelled around the globe with the *Diary* of Sister Faustina to ultimately share this spiritual work with the world. The spiritual experience of Saint Faustina is her personal story about God’s Mercy read by our life. In the dramatic events around and inside us, we are trying to read the book of Divine Mercy to imperceptibly find ourselves in the centre of the world. Because where the Merciful God is, and we are together with Him, there is always the centre of the world, the place of spiritual formation where God throws us off our comfortable selfishness and teaches us to love like He does. Thus, we notice that the essence of the Gospel is the good news about the inconceivable Mercy of God. Mercy is the most important attribute of God – it is the pure Gospel. If so, there is nothing left to do but to accept the challenge of the testimony of faith that God is greater than spiritual numbness, more powerful than the *noonday demon*. He grants us His grace so that we are able to actively recognize the times and places of His visitations and join in through active love.

Active love is a prophetic sign, it is the rooting of a good deed in the merciful love of God. This rooting reaches back to a baptismal consecration which, in fact, is the beginning of the only formation known to the Church: to be called to *christiformitas* – shaping oneself in the image of Christ – living the life that He was living. This is our path – witnessing to the life of the new man formed by the Spirit of Jesus who is the Servant of Yahweh and the Lamb giving up His life; killed and yet alive. This is our charism and mission at the same time, it is radical, we enter into all that is the Church, including those dramatic situations described above in which

God reveals His mercy. Those situations best describe what evangelical radicalism means – adopting the life of the Son of God wishing only to fulfil the will of the Father, accepting the ties which show the union of Christ with His Church (the evangelical counsels, the vows) and finally entering into the reality of the eschatological New Jerusalem – demonstrating that heavenly goods are already present in the world despite its imperfections and unimaginable suffering.¹

Radicalism entails having a prophetic character – being a prophet. Prophecy is what marks out the life of the consecrated. They partake, like all Christians, in the priestly, kingly and prophetic mission of Christ, but their special prophetic mission is to awaken the world. To be a prophet is to recognize God's acts in everyday life and to be able to reveal a sense of all this. "In the church, the religious are called to be prophets in particular by demonstrating how Jesus lived on this earth, and to proclaim how the kingdom of God will be in its perfection. A religious must never give up prophecy".² Having a prophetic character is an anticipation of the world which is yet to come and its power is from the future. If so, inspired by those living with the gene of mercy, we free ourselves from the fear that causes excessive focusing on ourselves in order to go out to meet the gift of the Gospel and to show how God creates heaven on earth, how He carries out the work of mercy towards everybody. Blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers.

Questions:

1. In which difficult life events were you found by God?
2. Which facts allow you to develop the mentality of mercy?
3. What does your spiritual struggle with the *noonday demon* look like?

¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 44; *Vita consecrata* 6.

² *INTERVIEW WITH POPE FRANCIS* by Fr Antonio Spadaro, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html (access: 20.07.2022).

KRZYSZTOF STĄPOR MIC
Warsaw-Praga, Poland

March 2023

A Marian in service of the sick
on closeness in sickness and pain

The Word of the Lord: Mt 25: 37-39

Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?"

SOURCES

Saint Stanislaus Papczynski, *The Mystical Temple of God*

in: Saint Stanislaus Papczynski, Selected Writnigs, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland,
Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 641

The remarkable work of visiting the sick is praised by our Lord and Savior Himself, who said, "[I was sick], and you visited me" (Mt 25:36) [LV]. Those who practice this work in a truly praiseworthy manner do not approach the beds of the poor and the sick with empty hands. John of God, as he is called, a most blessed man, founded an Order that has the duty and the vocation to seek out the sick who have become poor and to take care of them. In all the regions of Europe, among the Christians of true faith, this most pious Order has become so famous for its distinctive charity, that we commonly call them the Good Brothers because of their truly good work, with which they are very occupied. In many places, especially in Rome, there are houses for the sick, for whom the generosity of merciful people provides every-thing; [and] along with [providing] medicines, [this generosity] paves for itself a sure path to Heaven(...).

REFLECTIONS

Father Stanislaus

Our Father Founder, St. Stanislaus, already at the very beginning of the *Oblatio* (11.12.1670) invoked *Jesus Christ Crucified*, as it were, giving a character to the whole formula. Bringing forward an aspect of the life of Christ involving the passion can be considered a starting point for understanding the founding charism of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. It is Mary who in the immaculate pureness of Her heart exclaimed in prophetic elation during the Annunciation about God's Mercy "age after age" (cf. Lk 1:50) which was revealed in the Immaculate Conception of Jesus.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary was the plan of God who after the first sin "did not wish to leave humanity alone but wanted to respond with the fullness of mercy"¹. The mercy of God announced by Mary in the *Magnificat* developed in Jesus who came into this world to cure "*all kinds of disease and illness among the people*" (cf. Mt 4:23) and at the same time making "*healing*" (cf. Lk 9:2) a part of the mission of His disciples. Bringing this up in the introduction of the *Oblatio* seems to be an important mission in a practical execution of the immaculist founding vision.

Father Founder devoted two of His works to the subject of suffering: *The Suffering Christ (Christus patiens, Warsaw 1690)* and *The Crucified Orator (Orator Crucifixus, Cracow 1670)*. This mission has been presented many times in the Marian sources and works which speak about *assisting the dying (Constitutions and Directory [...], Rome 2018, C 3; Ibidem, cf. C 13)* and service to the suffering in hospices, hospitals, war territories and married couples suffering because of endangered pregnancies².

Also, in the daily Marian Prayers recited after the Liturgy of the Hours, there are prayers: to God for the sick and the suffering to restore them to health and grant them perseverance in suffering (Evening Prayers): through the intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul to support us in service to the needy and the suffering (Morning Prayers); through the intercession

¹ Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, 2015, No. 3.

² Cf. *Resolutions of the General Chapter 2011, Recommendation*, No. 5, 7.3; *Message to all of the members of the Congregation*, No. I.2.c; *Summary of work on the survey about matters important for the Congregation*, qn. 7, 8, 22, [in:] *Documenti Capituli Generalis Congregationis CC. Marianorum A.D. 2011 Romae celebrati*, Romae 2011, p. 17, 29, 39, 65-66, 70; *Resolutions of the General Chapter celebrated in Rome between 6 and 23 of February 2017*, Resolution, No. 3, [in:] *Documenta Capituli Generalis Congregationis CC. Marianorum A.D. 2017 Romae celebratum*, Romae 2017, p. 14; *Constitution and Directory [...], Rome 2018, K 123*.

of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński who took pity on every misery (Prayer to obtain a grace through intercession of Father Founder).

This dimension of the Marian mission is a part of the service of the whole Church in which – as Pope Francis says – “closeness to the sick and their pastoral care is not only the task of certain specifically designated ministers.”³ The texts mentioned here, and many others, indicate the important place of serving the sick in the Marian apostolate.

In these reflections, let us try to focus only on selected proposals for assistance which can be addressed directly to a sick person and also to their family suffering at the same time.

Supporting the sick

There is a need to delicately recognize the inner aspect of the sick person who is suffering in order to offer help which is adequate to the person's experience and will. Three situations of assisting the suffering can be distinguished:

- ◆ When we notice that the sick is blaming God for the pain they suffer, it is often best to remain quiet, to just listen and be present praying quietly through the intercession of Mary, Immaculately Conceived for the grace of openness to God's love; maybe it will be necessary to undertake a conversation about the fact of suffering itself because we may come across the sick or their families who believe that suffering is a punishment: “God has punished me for my sins”, “God's punishment”, or to express grievances: “Why has God punished me? After all, I've been a good man” based on the Truths of the Faith: “God is a righteous judge who rewards the good and punishes the wicked.”
- ◆ If a sick person shows signs of accepting suffering, we may turn their attention to the enormous value of suffering on a personal path towards holiness, as well as the holiness of others. One's own suffering can be offered for someone, e.g. for the conversion of a son, for the Holy Father, or for oneself as a compensation for the unatoned for consequences of one's sins. We may also talk about the value of the suffering on the cross of Jesus which in God's eyes was not a destruction, but an elevation to something more beautiful for ever – resurrection.⁴ The value of the suffering of Jesus presented in such a way may raise hope and give a

³ Francis, *Message for XXX World Day of the Sick*, 2022, No. 5.

⁴ John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, 1984, No. 14, 22,

positive sense of partaking in Jesus' cross without complaining: "I have no choice, I have to accept suffering".

- ♦ If a sick person seems to be open to a conversation about spiritual matters, we may use this opportunity to offer the holy sacraments, pointing to the spiritual good received with them.

In a catechesis, it is a good thing to assure the sick person that God is good; He is full of mercy and does not look for vengeance as a judge. Then, we may invite the sick to apologise to Jesus from the heart for all the sins and ask for His mercy and to forgive those who hurt him or her. It is also worth mentioning that one may invite Mary Immaculate so that She is also present during this suffering and pray for the grace of peace of heart, just like She was present at the cross.

Additionally, we may ask the sick if they would like to pray together and talk about his or her favourite prayers or religious songs. We may also read Bible passages together (e.g. Psalms: 1, 8, 16, 19, 23, 25, 27, 40-42 and following), pray a decade of *the Holy Rosary* or *the Chaplet of Divine Mercy*, especially with the dying, *because* – as Jesus said to St. Faustina – "*they have most need of trust, and have it the least*"⁵. Such a conversation and prayer may restore hope to the sick, especially, when they experience great anxiety because of their departure from the community of the Church and from a relationship with Jesus.

During a meeting of a priest with a sick person, a touch, stroking the head or the cheek, plays an important role. For some families and the sick who suffer, such gestures are extremely important and touching. Both the sick, and their families, experience a true paternal presence. Sometimes, they say: "thank you, Father, for a visit which was not formal and reserved but you made it feel like a family meeting". These are purely human gestures, meaningful when you encounter the human side of a person who feels and experiences various emotions which are also a gift from God. Christ Himself, when He said "Let the little children come to me" (Mk 10:14), laid His hands on them and gave them his blessing. Suffering or elderly people, in their helplessness, become child-like and they also need a healthy human gesture, a touch of a priest showing, in the image of God, "the strength of a father and the tenderness of a mother"⁶.

⁵ Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary, Divine Mercy in My Soul*, Marian Press, Stockbridge, MA 01263, 2005, No. 1777.

⁶ Francis, *Message for XXX World Day of the Sick*, 2022, No 1.

Supporting the family

Sometimes it is the family who needs spiritual support. They may be exhausted from caring for the sick relative and have the same attitude towards God: a) blaming God for the illness; b) bitterness because of a lack of help from Him; c) or accepting the situation and remaining in a prayerful relationship with God. In the first two instances, it is best to adopt the same approach as in the case of a refusal to accept the illness and grievance against God by the sick – just to listen and remain quiet.

When the family accepts the situation, we may assure them that their heroic attitude is an expression of love towards the sick person and that along with the suffering, there comes God's blessing to the house and the caregivers "since love covers over many a sin" (1 Pt 4:8), also, the sins of those who take care of the sick person. Although the blessing may not be visible at the moment, objectively it comes along with caring for the sick person (cf. Mt 25:36) which Blessed Mother Czacka confirmed with her life when she, "*with full clarity saw that we are closest to God when we are close to a person who suffers and is in need*".⁷ It is best to contact the family in person at the sick person's home or in another place (e.g. parish), or by phone. Although an online meeting cannot replace direct contact, it also reinforces the feeling of safety and not being alone. It is important to always call back. Often, we can hear "thank you, Father, that you called back – it is very important to me".

If a meeting takes place outside the home of the sick or by phone, a good piece of advice would be to suggest talking to him or her about a priest's visit. We may, if only generally, tell members of the family, especially when we see that they lack in the foundation of their faith, that just the presence of a priest and his accompanying the sick person may bring a valuable comfort and that the main fruit of receiving the sacraments is peace in the soul in suffering and an improvement in spiritual, and sometimes even physical, health.

It is also important to suggest to the family to make it possible for the sick person to hear Mass in silence and concentration live on the radio or television and to receive Spiritual Communion. We may also propose participating in other religious events through the mass media. Above all, it is

⁷ Diocesan Bishops Council, *Połączyła ich świętość. List z okazji beatyfikacji Kard. Stefana Wyszyńskiego i M. Elżbiety Róży Czackiej*, Częstochowa 25.08.2021, cf. https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/listy/salvifici.html (access 28.04.2022 r.).

worth suggesting that the family offer a Mass for the sick person as it is the most effective form of prayer.

In the parish

In times of a growing social acceptance for voluntary work, it is a good thing to consider setting up a group of volunteers for sick people staying in their homes. Also, parish Caritas teams may be reorganized to enable visiting the sick in their homes so that they do not suffer their cross in solitude but could meet Mary standing at their cross in the person of a priest or a volunteer. Anointing of the Sick still remains a common problem as there is still the perception of the sacrament as “the last rites” which implies imminent death, not God’s blessing “*being for the sick person salvation and strengthening*” (cf. James 5:15). There is a similar attitude towards Holy Communion when the sick person says: it is not time, yet – I received Communion at the hospital two months ago. These sacramental issues should be addressed more often during the ministry of the Word – homiletics, preaching, group formation meetings. It would be useful to prepare a special booklet, sort of a *handbook* on the sacraments of healing and to distribute it among parishioners.

Conclusion

Spiritual support for the sick and their family by a chaplain, encouraging them to call upon in a prayer Mary, Immaculately Conceived, standing at the cross, may be an invaluable gift of helping the sick person to open the door to meet the merciful God after the death.

Questions:

1. To what extent do I want to help the sick and suffering on my own initiative?
2. What is my personal prayer for the sick like?
3. How often do I bless suffering people whom I meet in person or virtually: on the phone, over the Internet, etc.?

TOMASZ NOWACZEK MIC
Warsaw, Poland

April 2023

***Oblatio by Papczyński versus Narcissus by Caravaggio
on lost bravery***

The Word of the Lord: Heb 11:1-3; 32-40.

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen. It is for their faith that our ancestors are acknowledged. It is by faith that we understand that the ages were created by a word from God, so that from the invisible the visible world came to be. [...] What more shall I say? There is not time for me to give an account of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, or of David, Samuel and the prophets. These were men who through faith conquered kingdoms, did what was upright and earned the promises. They could keep a lion's mouth shut, put out blazing fires and emerge unscathed from battle. They were weak people who were given strength to be brave in war and drive back foreign invaders. Some returned to their wives from the dead by resurrection; and others submitted to torture, refusing release so that they would rise again to a better life. Some had to bear being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison. They were stoned, or sawn in half, or killed by the sword; they were homeless, and wore only the skins of sheep and goats; they were in want and hardship, and maltreated. They were too good for the world and they wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and ravines. These all won acknowledgement through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection except with us.

SOURCES

St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Historical Writings – Self-Offering*,
in: St. Stanislaus Papczynski, *Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński*,
PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage,
Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 871-872

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen.

1. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, according to the flesh the son of Thomas from Podegrodzie, in the Diocese of Krakow, being forty years of age, offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, and to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary conceived without the stain of original sin: my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, emotions, whole mind, whole spirit, interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself, so that from this moment forward I may be wholly the servant of this same Almighty God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

2. . Therefore, I promise that I will serve them chastely and zealously until the end of my life in this Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which, by God's grace, I intend to found), and that I will adapt my way of life to its laws, statutes, and rules, and that I will never cause or permit, nor will I agree to it, even indirectly, that these things should in any way be removed, or changed, or dispensed with, except in grave and legitimate necessity.

3. Moreover, I promise reasonably understood obedience to His Holiness, the Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated power, as well as to all my mediate and immediate Superiors, and that I shall not possess anything privately, but will consider everything as common property.

Św. Stanisław Papczyński, *Zwiastun Królowej Sztuk*,
in: Św. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane*,
PROMIC – Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów MIC,
Warszawa 2016, p. 480

17. We need true men, not good-for-nothings, not dregs of society. [...] Give us people who are strong, brave, capable of great efforts, battle-hardened, prepared to participate in councils (*ad consilia*)."

REFLECTIONS

Let's start with an observation by Prince Rashid Al Maktoum – “Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times. Good times create weak men, weak men create hard times.”¹

The progenitor of our Congregation is St. Stanislaus Papczyński, a “mighty man of God”, who, despite his humble origins, was able to fight for his future. Without recalling all his struggles, let's just mention his desire to get an education which *the athlete* Papczyński begins with learning the alphabet, putting together letters into words, then words into sentences, training his memory, reaching the truth and love of the good coming out from countless pages of texts, most of all the Bible teaching about the mystery of God and the world. This is just an example how hard times forge a strong man open to a limitless future. Our Father Founder faced many more such exemplary struggles. They formed his mentality as a fighter capable of sacrificing a lot to identify and reach the right goals.

All the battles of Father Stanislaus have one common denominator: *oblatio*. Some people are of the opinion that this sacrificial feature of his personality born through his existential experience should be described from a charismatic point of view. Father Founder expresses and teaches his spiritual sons about the value of sacrifice which nowadays becomes a sign of the times having the power to run counter to an individualistic mentality, selfishness, narcissistic attitudes, laziness and hedonistic comfortability. The portrait of a modern representative of Western culture can be enhanced with a few strokes of a brush adding a tint of intellectual and spiritual confusion. We come from a culture which as a theme of success adopted the truth of foreign eyes, forced to see in the way in which we want to see. We are the children of our times – “men of the people and for the people – in which to survive our life needs to be full of false mirrors”.² It must be accepted as probable that we as well – hopefully not too easily – will find our own image in the man in love with himself whose apt symbol may be the face of a young man from *Narcissus at the Spring*, a painting by Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio.

¹ Cited after: Rafał Ziemkiewicz, *Strollowana rewolucja*, Fabryka Słów, Lublin-Warszawa 2021, p. 192.

² Cf. Karolina Lewestam, *Wszyscy jesteście narcyzami*, p. 2, cited after: <https://magazynpismo.pl/idee/esej/narcyzm-seks-lewestam-roupenian/?seo=pw>.



The painting shows the figure of a young man who, surrounded by darkness, is staring at a perfectly smooth water surface. Most likely, he is delighted with his beautiful image although we can clearly see sadness in his face. The painting is shrouded in majestic silence. The canvas has two parts: one is the figure of Narcissus and the other is his reflection. The painting is dark. On the well-defined shirt, we can see an element clearly describing the main character – a flower called narcissus. The sharp contrast of light and shadow has great importance in Caravaggio's work. Using this intentional technique, the artist suggests that some things are not visible

to us whereas others are overly exposed. The narcissus emerges from the darkness – his hands, face and knee are most lit. Unfortunately, we cannot see the direction from which the light comes. It is as if the light was coming from within himself which can be interpreted that he does not need any other light from outside to better understand himself and his relation with the world around him. Even that short description opens the whole map of paths for interpretation, including most subtle ones. I will leave further delving to the receptivity of those undertaking the day of recollection and those more inquisitive are invited to reach for a brush and paint to colour a reflection of their own face. This is not an activity foreign to the spiritual heritage of the Congregation as Father Founder himself wrote: ‘I leave the portrait of my person for the curious to look at; whereas, the image of the life of my Lord Jesus Christ [for the religious] to follow’³

To refine my own painting skills and to further differentiate between the images of modern narcissistic figures and that – having little in common with them - of our Father Founder, I will quote a large excerpt from an article by Karolina Lewestam from 2 February 2021 – coincidentally, on this day, we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord - remembering the mythological story of Narcissus. “In *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, we read that Narcissus (his name comes from Greek *narke* meaning numbness, denial) was a beautiful son of Liriope and Cephissus. Liriope, according to a custom of mythological parents, went to a blind prophet Tiresias to find out if her son was going to live long. His answer was strange and mysterious: **He will live long if he does not know himself.** ... Handsome Narcissus had many admirers – among them, the famous nymph Echo whose own voice was taken away by wrathful Hera – but he didn’t love any of them, he took no notice of anyone. He preferred running through the woods and hunting. He was not interested in love. Eventually, one of the women, shocked by the young man’s rejection, asked for help from the dreaded Nemezis: let Narcissus fall in love with someone who will not reciprocate! Nemezis fulfilled the request of the scorned lover and led Narcissus to a spring. He looked into the water, saw himself for the first time (how is it possible, you ask: he lived so many years not ever seeing his own reflection? You are right to be surprised!) and immediately fell in love with his own reflection. And because the reflection didn’t exist for real it could not love him back.

³ Cf. St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Second Testament*, p. 9, in: St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński*, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 936

So the young man just sat, looking into the water, did not hunt, did not run through the woods; often forgot to eat and to drink and only yearned for his own face reflected in the spring. Some say that he killed himself in despair; others that he finally died from exhaustion and that now he is still unsuccessfully trying to see himself in the water of the river Styx; **...love for his own reflection did not end well for Narcissus. His life, long or not, ended before he really died when he looked into the spring.**⁴

Narcissistic people carry inside a serious issue of agency; they have not developed a real image of themselves, an authentic personality allowing them to face others and the world. Not knowing themselves, they experience emptiness and trying to escape it, they create a better version of their image. This in turn causes fear of exposing the truth about their false identity; paralysing anxiety about being criticised or insightfully looked at. Such people will not listen to anybody; they imagine themselves as someone of exceptional importance; they suffer if they are not the centre of attention, they are stuck in superficial relations. Their interactions with others are just delusions about their own wisdom, beauty, uniqueness; enchantment by the self-drawn and self-coloured image of themselves. *For them, identity is not an actual state but the most important job, not the one in reality, but in dreams, at the other side of a mirror.*⁵

The *Oblatio* by Papczyński versus *Narcissus* by Caravaggio throws us off the lethargy of self-admiration and calls us to break away from the numbness, aggression, superficial relations and feeling of emptiness, i.e. an attitude of idleness. Imitating Jesus Christ is the foundation of the *Oblatio* – sacrifice whose heart is *love being the perfect bond*, leading a man towards maturity. Making the act of the *Oblatio*, our Father Founder indicates in the very beginning the source from which he draws his strength for the sacrifice and the courage to face any difficulties: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified.”⁶ A person formed in a mature way is able to create relationships, sacrifice life for those whom he or she loves. Immature persons, on the contrary, can at best escape into relationships, feed off drawing attention to themselves and nurture the need of being admired by others. Such relationships are superficial, lacking a fundamental element – a

⁴ K. Lewestam, *Wszyscy jesteśmy narcyzami*, p. 2, cyt. za: <https://magazynpismo.pl/idee/esej/narcyzm-seks-lewestam-roupenian/?seo=pw>.

⁵ Cf., *ibid*, p. 3–4.

⁶ St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Historical Writings – Self-offering*, in: St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński*, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 873.

bond. Such a person is, in fact, alone, just as the figure from the painting by Caravaggio who keeps looking into his own reflection until he is exhausted. Mature relations are a challenge, work on the character, facing up to obstacles, sometimes to an uncertain future, risking by undertaking unexpected tasks without sufficient safeguards or adequate data to trustfully accept the often uncomfortable otherness of situations and people coming along. To carry out such a life project requires a lot of effort, commitment and work blessed by God's grace.

In the sacrificial mentality of Father Stanislaus, we find a readiness to laboriously shape himself in the image of Jesus Christ. The Founder of the Marian Fathers, when saying, "I sacrifice and *offer*", clearly stated the goals to be achieved. He knows well that on this road, one needs an uncompromised commitment in order to better know and imitate Christ. The example of his life shows the path to developing the virtue of hard work which is often insufficient not only in the realm of shaping one's own personality, but also when undertaking necessary new tasks. A lack of readiness to make an effort is a symptom of the illness consisting in the vanishing of the virtue of bravery in favour of narcissistic self-admiration.

The *Oblatio* of St. Stanislaus is a program of mental and pastoral renewal based on bravery capable of standing up to difficult challenges. In the first paragraph, we can see the self-awareness of a man who totally entrusts himself to one God in the Holy Trinity and to the Mother of God; his heart, his soul, intellect, memory, will, emotions, his whole mind, his whole spirit, internal and external senses, and his body. This act is total: *leaving absolutely nothing for myself*. The goal of this total entrustment is equally total - becoming a servant of God and Mary - a lover of the Church.

The virtue of bravery is supported by faithfulness and perseverance. These are personal qualities which constitute the foundation of the life of a community. The *Oblatio* is total also in this respect, because there is no way to avoid being a servant in the Society of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception where resolutions and rites fundamentally shape us and the specific way of engaging in pastoral work which God intended for us as a community. The rule and way of life of the Society are effective tools against the narcissistic tendencies of individual visions, self-centeredness, disrespect for community and even escaping from it.

In the third paragraph of the *Oblatio*, we can see two elements dedicated to the formation and life of the *Marian Society*. These are reasonable obedience to the will of the superior power, to *His Holiness, the Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated power, as well as to all my mediate and*

immediate Superiors and also giving up any private possession to share everything with the community. Here again we can see the virtue of bravery which allows us to eagerly undertake good deeds recognised by the mind as true and to courageously help the truth when reason has noticed its deformities. This is the element which the tradition of the consecrated life calls active obedience. Such courageous engagement in a cognitive process is an invaluable contribution to shaping the community of *the Congregation and the Church*. What's more, it has nothing to do with narcissistic admiration of one's own face in a spring water reflection because critical thinking and courage to share the thoughts often result in an inevitable loss of face. Therefore, also in the process of learning, the Founder of the Marian Fathers calls for bravery.

The fourth paragraph of the *Oblatio* is a testimony of love of the Roman Church and Mary, the Most Holy Mother of God conceived without the stain of original sin. Father Stanislaus concludes the totality of his entrustment through expressing readiness to sacrifice his own life, especially defending the honour of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. And maybe this love of the Immaculate of a religious man addresses and overcomes this strange incapability of taking an interest in love and engaging in it by many narcissistic religious, and in a pastoral dimension, it calls for the type of formation of the young men which will have nothing in common with narcissistic self-admiration.

Questions:

1. Where do you place your "me" – where does it come from, where are its roots, the environment in which it was born?
2. What is the condition of your religious life like today – your ability to make sacrifices?
3. What would you say are the signs of your commitment and love of our religious community?
4. How significant for you are the rules and rites of our community?

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May 2023

The Marians
on men truly consecrated

The Word of the Lord: 1 Kings 2:1-4

As David's life drew to its close, he laid this charge on his son Solomon, "I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong and show yourself a man. Observe the injunctions of Yahweh your God, following his ways and keeping his laws, his commandments, his ordinances and his decrees, as stands written in the Law of Moses, so that you may be successful in everything you do and undertake, and that Yahweh may fulfil the promise which he made me, 'If your sons are careful how they behave, and walk loyally before me with all their heart and soul, you will never want for a man on the throne of Israel.'"

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in: St. Stanislaus Papczynski, Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 140.

And how are you spending your years in the house of God now? In negligence, listlessness, and insolence! Watch out lest it may seem that you imitate Jesus by your religious garments, yet are a villain by conduct, and show yourself worse than a man of the world. The religious state does not save anybody, but the religious life does. Perhaps you have heard about that condemned soldier who, having entered a certain religious institute, traded his military uniform for religious garb, but did not change his conduct. Therefore, after his death, he appeared from hell, bringing back the

religious garb on a horse's tail. May the heavenly host forbid that you be a religious in name only and not in fact. If you do not abandon your evil worldly habits, and if you do not respond to your vocation, then you shall have a similar and most unhappy end.

Michał Ziolo OCSO, *Związek oddzielonych*,
„Pastores” 48(3) 2010, p. 58–59

If you want to see God, you cannot be fanatically blind or self-righteous like Zebedee's sons – learn what awaits you and don't think you will avoid it. If you don't know how to do it, have the canons and the rule of the community read to you and then don't lie by saying that you didn't know. Just like everybody, you are afraid of rejection and you try to earn love strengthening and emphasising your social role – don't run away and don't judge when your superior asks you to do something impossible (it may be something beneath your abilities); that's how you will find out that you are loved for something completely different than you think. Do not control everything – look; there are communities where also the youngest are asked about their opinions on important matters because experience shows that it is the youngest that God gives right solutions through. Not because there are the youngest but as youngest, they are poor and thus more open to a gift. Because you can logically justify everything and in this way you sink in self-deception into deeper and deeper isolation – you have to find another man who, at least occasionally, contradicts you. Also, respect the elderly. They have already walked the road you are now walking full of pride, anxiety, irony and weariness. (...) People in the twilight of their lives may give you a very important information about themselves: you are not that different from them despite different times – but in one respect, you are very different: you still think that it is you who decide about strength and the depth of faith of people entrusted to you. Your efforts and your saintliness, your new ideas also contribute to it. But it is God who from your colour palette chooses hues that He needs right now. And besides, you think too much about yourself and that is death. Meanwhile you have to think about death to find yourself and Life.

REFLECTIONS

The essence of Christianity, or even more so of the religious life – also in our Congregation – is not an idea, one or another philosophical or world-view trend, nor is it any social system. Limiting its value to just one of the areas of influence known to the human conceptual apparatus would be not only intellectual ignorance but above all, spiritual annihilation because it is rather about “discovering the true God who wants to put every man in the true light and make him permanently happy.”¹ Pope Benedict XVI very precisely stated that “Being Christian is (...) the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” (DC 1). Just like at the beginning of being a Christian, there is that encounter, at the beginning of our vocation to the consecrated life there is a special kind of intense call of a loving God who “(...) encounters us and invites us to be part of a great undertaking”², as Pope Francis wrote in his Message for the 2019 World Day of Vocations.

Consecrated, therefore, relying on God

The decree of the Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis* (No. 1), cited in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraph 918 says that “from the very beginning of the Church, there were men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practicing the evangelical counsels. They led lives dedicated to God, each in his own way.” Earlier, in paragraph 915 the Catechism clearly states that all the baptized are invited to practice the evangelical counsels but “*the profession* of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, (that) characterizes the life consecrated to God”³.

This life, as far as men are concerned is a concrete challenge, and, as such, is part of the biology of the male way of functioning and understanding the world and all its components. The very understanding of a challenge constitutes, in modern language, the “attractiveness” of a religious vocation to the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. After all, e.g. denying oneself, enduring the hardships of building a community together with,

¹ K. Pek, Światło i radość wiary, „Pastores” 62(1) 2014, p. 127.

² *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 2019 World Day of Vocations*, Vatican, 31 January 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco_20190131_56-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html

³ CCC, 915.

salutary for us, the expository role of our lay helpers, parishioners, friends who see what and how we live in reality, are a concrete challenge for true men. Therefore, there is no need to create artificial enclaves to exercise masculinity in yet another series of computer games where one does not take responsibility for anything and still less for anybody. Instead, there is a need to clearly show a really interesting form of the religious life, full of unexpected challenges, such as life in the apostolic religious community of the Marians. At the same time, we need to remember the words of our saint confrere, Father Stanislaus who makes it clear that “the religious state does not save anybody, but the religious life does.”⁴ And maybe already at this stage, in these words, we can find an answer to the question why in today’s Europe there are not many candidates who would like to share the life we are living? Maybe we believe that the religious life is in itself a sufficient guarantee of everything, and we forget that we need to simply start living the religious life that we have been invited to live. It is not us who are doing God a favour in answering His calling but it is He who has shown and is showing us grace (EE 5; cf. VC 17) enabling us to live a real religious consecration, not just pretending that we do. So, am I really consecrated, i.e. do I rely on God? Or did I just solemnly sign such a declaration on the day of my first or perpetual profession and now I only meet – more or less diligently – the basic package of commitments because it is a challenge worthy of my little, still seriously revered, efforts?

Consecrated – far from desertion

All the consecrated, among them men, under the special calling that they have received (VC 14), are invited to “enter into a communion with God in faith to such an extent that when people standing or passing by the cross say: come down from the cross, God has forsaken him, let’s see if He comes to save him (see Mt 27:40-43), or even if a man himself feels as if he was no longer in this communion and had been deserted, he will nevertheless persevere and remain in this loneliness to experience that ultimately the Lord has not deserted him (see e.g Lam 3:28-33). So it was with Jesus on the cross.”⁵ This highest example – the life of Jesus Christ, God and a

⁴ St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Examination of the Heart*, in: St. Stanislaus Papczynski, Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 140.

⁵ Z. Kiernikowski, *Formacja wiary wyzwaniem Roku Wiary*, in: *Teologiczne Studia Siedleckie Rok IX (2012)*, p. 14.

man, is the source and help for modern man answering to the gift of being called to deepen the baptismal consecration in the religious life according to the evangelical counsels. It is also a testimony of relying in every situation not on the intellect which has its limits, not on changeable, often disordered, emotions, nor on misunderstood tradition (that is the way it has always been), but on God!

In fact, it is also a foundation known to us, but still being explored, the *Oblatio* of Father Founder which proposes to each of us, Marians, not only a spiritual renewal, but first a mental and a human one. While today's Church often finds itself in a diaspora which assumes various names of the multicultural world where whole groups of people live according to the principle *etsi Deus non daretur* (as though God did not exist), it is religious men who prove – contrary to “psychological types of masculinity according to which a man should not reveal his weakness and dependence on others – that “it is good to rely on Someone, there is Someone worth holding on to whatever it takes.”⁶. Thus a Marian truly consecrated to God, giving up, so called, “male pride”, as a Christian is no longer a point of reference and the essence of life for himself but becoming free from himself and his plans, following the path of a disciple of Jesus, like Him enters into *kenosis*. He becomes “empty, without content, without meaning – towards the infinity of complete emptiness”⁷ in order to enter into a real communion with God who has the best plans for his, and not only his, life.

Consecrated in confrontation with *the shattered mirror of Western civilisation* ⁸

It is not a coincidence that Saint John Paul II in the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation already cited very clearly reminded us that the obliterated traces of God's presence in the modern world reveal even more intensely the urgent need for the prophetic witness of all consecrated persons (cf. VC 85). Then, while consecrated men, by their very presence become a sign of opposition to the moral relativism of 21st century man, their spiritual and

⁶ Z. Kiernikowski, *Pan i Jego świątynia. Katechezy na temat życia konsekrowanego*, Legnica – Wrocław 2015, p. 46.

⁷ Z. Kiernikowski, *Formacja wiary*, op. cit., p. 15.

⁸ The term *shattered mirror* comes from *Roztrzaskane lustro. Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej (Shattered mirror: Collapse of Western civilization)* by W. Roszkowski, Biały Kruk, Kraków 2019. In the book, Prof. Wojciech Roszkowski looks at Western civilisation analysing, among others, numerous symptoms of decadence and exposing hypocrisy of modern “progressive” thinkers who, rejecting the heritage of Western civilisation and culture, lead to its collapse.

apostolic life becomes more and more useless to the pragmatism of this world which today, is simply going wild without God. This is believed by not only theologians, sociologists and cultural scientists, but also by e.g. physicists. So in the wider context of the vision of an open society and the practical atheism promoted by various institutions, the sign of the consecrated life may be a turning point for “the shattered mirror – the mirror in whose shards today’s world is looking at itself.”⁹.

In the history of the Church, we can see many examples of brave men, full of God’s spirit, whose consistency in the evangelical revision of the life of their contemporaries made it possible for specific communities and societies to survive. Among those men of God, there is the fourth bishop of Rome, Clement (who came after Peter, Linus and Anacletus). He was the author of an extensive *Letter to the Corinthians*. Also of interest is the third Bishop of Antioch, Ignatius (who came after Peter and Evodius). He exposed false teaching about Christ, e.g. in the *Epistle to the Ephesians*. We cannot forget Bishop Melito of Sardis who we owe the Catholic canon of the Old Testament, or a disciple of St. Polycarp, the Bishop of Lyon, Irenaeus and his valuable work, *Adversus haereses*. The special person in the male religious life is the father of Western monasticism, living at the turn of 5th and 6th centuries, known thanks to Book II of the *Dialogues* by St. Gregory the Great, Benedict of Nursia, the first patron saint of the Old Continent. The list of these men, consecrated to God and His Kingdom includes also the founder of our Community, newly discovered after his canonization in 2016, Father Stanislaus Papczyński, a prophet of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, an advocate of the suffering in purgatory and a zealous preacher of the Gospel. The distinctive feature, common to those great men, is their faithfulness and determination in fulfilling the vocation they received. Each of them is an excellent example confirming an invitation by Holy Father Francis who in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit* states: “You have to discover who you are and develop your own way of being holy, whatever others may say or think. Becoming a saint means becoming more fully yourself, becoming what the Lord wished to dream and create, and not a photocopy. Your life ought to be a prophetic stimulus to others and leave a mark on this world, the unique mark that only you can leave.” (ChV 162).

⁹ W. Roszkowski, *Roztraskane lustro*, p. 7.

Consecrated as a remedy for modern tendencies

We all know that Western civilisation, not only in the face of the pandemic or the war in Ukraine, has been gradually losing its identity, and the man who is building this civilisation, against the biblical revelation of God, has been trying to explain the world and himself according to the principle “man makes himself”¹⁰. In this context, looking at the mission and vocation of men consecrated to God, we need to go back to Christian anthropology, especially since the directions in which man is heading are really alarming. Experts on the subject distinguish the three most important tendencies which allow us to better understand the profile of today’s man:

- ❖ the tendency for “unbridled – or even unlimited – development of desire in consumerism and the same pleasure in hedonism”¹¹;
- ❖ the tendency for “total exhaustion, the tragic impossibility of being which manifests itself in the death of great desires”¹²;
- ❖ the tendency for “an over-intellectualized approach to man which not only draws on the Enlightenment beliefs about the primacy of knowledge, but also ventures into the gnostic conviction that knowledge is the most important.”¹³.

Faced by the triad of disturbing tendencies deeply touching human life, the Marians – as men truly consecrated to God – bear witness to a different triad: chastity, poverty and obedience. Thus each one of us – not only being in the religious state but truly living a religious life – as St. John Paul II teaches in *Vita consecrata* – “by embracing *chastity*, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only-Be-

¹⁰ G. Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, New York 1951. A similar observation was made by M. Muggeridge who said “Western man has decided to abolish himself. Having wearied of the struggle to be himself, he has created his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own impotence out of his own erotomania, his own vulnerability out of his own strength.” M. Muggeridge, *Jesus. The man who lives*. Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, 1980, p. 34.

¹¹ M. Zawada, *Homo desiderans Deum. Dynamika pragnienia Boga w wymiarze antropologiczno-duchowym*, Kraków 2011, p. 13–14.

¹² “Living according to the vision of existentialism in the midst of not only numerous opportunities, but also in their chaos, one can reach an absurd state *where the moment of greatest ambiguity is the infinite number of possibilities which turns out to be an impossibility*.” (cf. E. Paci, *Związki i znaczenia. Eseje wybrane*, translated by S. Kasprzysiak, Warszawa 1980, p. 453). Desire dries up and bores and man starts to live without any direction. We may call it a failure of desire, its collapse. The last word in such a situation is the desire for annihilation – not only striving for the death of desire but seeing it as the only reasonable solution.” Ibid, p. 14–15.

¹³ Ibid, p. 15.

gotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. *Jn* 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ's *poverty*, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. *Jn* 17:7, 10). By accepting, through the sacrifice of their own freedom, the mystery of Christ's filial *obedience*, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the One who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. *Jn* 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything." (VC 16).

Consecrated – brave in maintaining an appropriate style of life and work

Summing up the presence, life and mission of modern men consecrated to God in the context of cultural and civilizational challenges, one may conclude together with the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life that we are being constantly invited "to respond to the calls of the Spirit and provocations of history" (NV 32). However, to respond to them credibly, one has to know who he really is, he should not be afraid of discovering his own identity and fighting to preserve it, just like, among others, our Father Founder did. We know only too well how much effort is needed to be faithful to the smallest components of the Marian life: daily prayer (overworked, we struggle to participate in common liturgies), monthly days of recollection (devoted to evangelisation, we don't want to "waste time" reading the reflections of others, and we don't feel like making our own), participating in person in annual retreats (instead of the joy of silence, we give in to the temptation of discontent), the proposed renewals of the religious life (we can always do some additional fraternal "business" instead of truly engage in, after all, lifelong formation), or simple, un-feigned fraternal kindness and interest in the life of my brothers, Province or the whole Congregation.

The high price of this faithfulness should not discourage us. On the contrary, it should motivate us to true courage in preserving the style of life and work proposed to us by St. Stanislaus. Because it turns out that this "style of life, the acceptance of difficulties and faithfulness to God's will" make the youngest generations of Marians love Father Founder. Here is a very moving testimony of one of the newly professed in our community in Vietnam who answers the question *Why do I love St. Stanislaus Papczyński?*: "Not because of many miracles which God made through him; not because of his wisdom or extraordinary service to the Church, not because he founded the Congregation of Marian Fathers. I love him

for his style of life, the acceptance of difficulties and faithfulness to God's will"¹⁴.

Questions:

1. Given my experience of the religious life, do I still want to discover and fulfil the *great project* which God wants me to be part of? How will I do it?
2. In the face of various situations in everyday religious life which crucify my ideas, desires and plans, do I find myself as a man truly relying on God, or rather as a boy running away from the Paschal Mystery?
3. How would I describe today the Marian style of life and work in accordance with the spirit of Father Founder, Father Renovator and the history already written by our confreres? Why do I identify with their guidelines and how do I meet them where I live and work today?

¹⁴ P. Nguyen Van Ha MIC, *Dlaczego kocham św. Stanisława Papczyńskiego*, w: *Ad honorem Immaculatae Conceptionis Mariae. Oblatio i konsekracja. Materiały I Symposium teologicznego Mariańskiej Szkoły Duchowości*, red. A. Pakuła MIC, Rzym 2020, p. 195.

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Towards “youthfulness of disposition”
on a person in cyberspace

The Word of the Lord 1 Jn 3 :1-21

My dear friends (...) This is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we must love one another, not to be like Cain, who was from the Evil One and murdered his brother. And why did he murder his brother? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's upright. Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you. We are well aware that we have passed over from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love, remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you are well aware that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine. This will be the proof that we belong to the truth, and it will convince us in his presence, even if our own feelings condemn us, that God is greater than our feelings and knows all things. My dear friends, if our own feelings do not condemn us, we can be fearless before God.

The Word of the Lord Jn 1:43-51

The next day, after Jesus had decided to leave for Galilee, he met Philip and said, 'Follow me.' Philip came from the same town, Bethsaida, as Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see.' When Je-

sus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.' Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.' Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.' And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'

The Word of the Lord Mt 13:14-15

So in their case what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled: Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me.

SOURCES

Jurgis Matulevicius, Instrukcijos bei nurodymai, p. 421

"Therefore the whole congregation, as much as its individual members, in all the work they undertake, should only care for the greater glory of God and the salvation of themselves and their neighbours with the Catholic Church, in the Church and through the Church".

Tadeusz Górski MIC, Blessed George Matulaitis,

Warszawa 2005

(Saint Petersburg, a fragment of the letter to Fr. Jonas Totoraitis,
18/31 October, 1909)

"The Congregation gives a man new strength. The vows through which you bind yourself to God detach and pull a man away from any wickedness, from flimsy everyday mundane concerns and lift him up to a new, nobler life and, what is most important, in a special way they direct the whole man, his thoughts, will and emotions towards God. [...] Although I am still a poor religious, I can already see that through these vows with which I

tied myself with my dearest Saviour pledging to Him: «Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi» [My love is mine and I am his; Song 2:16], my life has changed. I have noticed that I do things I could not force myself to do before.

Tadeusz Górski MIC, Blessed George Matulaitis,
Warsaw 2005 (Saint Petersburg, a fragment of the letter to
Fr. Antanas Civinskas, 21 October/3 November 1909)

“I believe, Brother, that when we gather together and we sincerely love God seeking Him everywhere and trying to serve Him in everything, we will be able to do more good for the Church and we will be supporting each other. We all will look to each other for encouragement for excellence and work.”

REFLECTIONS

It happens that in our communities, there is a tendency to hide the Renovator of the Congregation, Blessed Father George Matulaitis in order to bring out even stronger St. Father Founder Stanislaus Papczyński and his charism which he passed onto his spiritual sons, i.e. devotion to the Mystery of Immaculate Conception of Most Blessed Virgin Mary which the Congregation's identity and mission come from (*Constitutions* 2). I would like to warn against such thinking. If Divine Providence hadn't raised in the heart of Blessed George the desire to renew the priestly life in the Lithuanian lands, being inspired by the spiritual formation received since childhood in his hometown, Mariampole where the Marian Fathers worked, he would probably have not directed his first steps to Fr. Vincent Sękowski, the last Marian in the once thriving Mariampole monastery. It was there that Blessed Father Renovator confessed to the General of the Marian Fathers his intentions and plans, thus beginning his way towards the consecrated life. If those two men hadn't met, our Congregation would have not existed in its current form; most of all, there would have been no creative struggles to faithfully read the charismatic feature of our community and mission; that would have not happened because we would have not been there. Therefore, we shouldn't dismiss the heritage of the so called “black Marians” which we attribute to the process of the renewal initiated by Father Matulaitis. Let's remember that *pro Christo et ecclesia* is a call from the

Matulaitis period of our history although its roots can be easily identified in the *Oblatio* of the Father Founder: “I confess that I believe everything which the holy Roman Church believes and everything that she will henceforth teach to be believed.”¹ Even if it is hard to see an intentional act of referring to the *Oblatio* in the disposition of the Blessed Father Renovator, we cannot exclude the mystic bond of those two men and the supernatural mutual completion of their pursuits coming from the Holy Spirit in His continuous creative and renewing activity.

It is worth remembering that the Blessed Renovator brings with him the enormous richness of his personality, intellect and spirit. Father George successfully practiced discernment of place and time so as not to miss God’s will but to fulfil it to His glory and to the benefit of people, more or less consciously needing the Gospel. The discernment that he practiced has remained the most significant space for decisions concerning evangelisation and all pastoral work, effective only when undertaken in accordance to God’s will. God’s will is not a coincidence, it is not just rubber-stamping something that a man carelessly and without proper preparations has decided and is now trying to execute. The Holy Fathers of our Congregation teach us to avoid such an attitude and to earnestly regard God’s presence. Let’s try to examine this process in our Blessed Renovator.

Spiritual discernment / listening to the Word of the Lord

A sower is someone who first of all listens to and seeks the Word of the Lord and God’s will in everyday life, of which the *Journal* of Blessed George Matulaitis is distinctive evidence.² It is a testimony of how the seed of the message of the Gospel falls on the good soil of the heart. It is the opposite of spiritual minimalism which could be imagined by another soil: its barren and shallow layer, a paved road of rigid routines, stereotypes, conformity in thinking and acting where nothing is going to sprout. The words of Christ, full of truth and creative spirit, cannot be absorbed by such soil – they remain fruitless

Father Renovator regards the Word of God as something which is not spoken without reason: it calls and it acts. It cannot be understood at any time because the Word itself sets the time when it wants to be heard. Not

¹ St. Stanislaus Papczyński, Historical writings, in: St. Stanislaus Papczynski, Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 872.

² George Matulaitis – Matulewicz, *Journal*, Stockbridge, 2003.

having found an eager ear, it goes away. In the story about the centurion, we read: “(...) many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.” (Mt 8,11-12). The hour of the arrival of the Word to the chosen can pass and then it is being taken to others. The mystery is that the opportunity to hear the Word and the salvation coming with it does not disappear; however, whoever does not want to hear it, unfortunately cannot hear it any more. The Word of the Lord, when coming to us, sets the time for a decision – makes us declare if we are *in favour* or *against* it. Moreover, if the Word is not accepted, not only its hour passes, but the Word works against the addressee. Not having found a readiness to be heard at a specified time, it moves away from a heart which makes the heart even harder. So a man organises the world around himself, installs himself, becomes industrious and reasonable, maybe even noble, but, unfortunately – closed to the message which comes in Christ: What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life?” (Mt 16:26). But God is patient and He can stretch this decisive hour when His Word comes in time, or even bring it back. This saves us from despair.

Spiritual discernment / a person amidst the signs of the times

The most significant sign for Father Renovator is a human being. He discovers them through love. It means renouncing focusing only on oneself and not seeking one's own benefits. To love – is to support spiritually and materially, but also: “respect for every man and being where there is need to make life better, more just and human.”³

Father Renovator, living at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, sees man in the difficult social space of that time which resulted in the rapid development of Catholic social doctrine with Christian personalism as its foundation. Man as a social being is called to happiness.⁴ Sister Maria Bogumiła Pecyna, commenting on the work of Father G. Matulaitis, points to the formation for the development of the human person which he emphasised. She says that *learning moral standards and the law of nature and making choices of measures for reaching one's own personal goals, a man somehow assimilates natural laws. His standards become the means*

³ Maria Bogumiła Pecyna SJC, *Osobowość i działanie błogosławionego Jerzego Matulewicza (Personality and activity of Blessed George Matulaitis)*, Wrocław 1990, p. 55.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

to achieving his own personal happiness and the source of his own good. That is why the full development of the human personality and its improvements may be called self-realisation.⁵ She also describes two other personal growth factors: a society as a life environment and God who bountifully gives man all material and spiritual goods for his or her full development.

Social life is a vital part of personal growth. If so, every man has a right to live in a society in order to successfully grow as a person. It happens through very dynamic processes. A socially engaged person cannot be static. And even more so, a priest-religious called to *give birth* to offspring for the Kingdom of God, to the great community of saints, to make disciples of Christ out of people to whom he has been sent, to set up communities of faith – the Church, he must be a dynamic and courageous man who effectively feels the needs of his times. Father George was such a man.

The originality of his charism lies in the fact that “reaching to earlier examples, far from copying them, he was able to transform the rich experiences of the past and skilfully and harmoniously use them in the contemporary problems of life.”⁶ He loved learning very much. He laboriously studied the Tradition of the Church and was diligently exploring individual and distant periods drawing from them conclusions for the present in order to better uncover the truth falsified for his contemporaries by novel erroneous theories or even ideologies. Sister B. Pecyna says about a specific feature of the Renovator which she calls **youthfulness of disposition** which has nothing to do with artificial simplicity or infantile adaptation for the benefit of the young. In practice, it is about a fascination with a person, how he or she thinks, acts, reacts, what brings joy or pain to him or her – He loved motion, the dynamics of life and all that served a true life. Reportedly, “when he became a priest, he did not fight with anyone. On the contrary, he sought God and His image in the human soul and God’s traces in the whole universe.”⁷

For Blessed George, society wasn’t just a group of individuals but an organism established by deep bonds and mutual relations, often threatened by 20th century contradictions. To defend a person and their basic environment – society, he put an effort to promote education to make people aware of the dangers which may threaten especially workers so that

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, p. 56.

⁷ Ibid, after F. Bucys, *Baznycios ir tautos darbininkas*, w *Arkivyskupas Jurgis Matulevicius* – edited by K. Cibirasa. Mariampoleje 1933, p. 8.

they could develop effective preventive measures for themselves and their families. He did not prepare any systematic study on human nature in the context of threats. In his comments and actions, he had a more practical disposition. However, his drawing attention to society as a necessary environment for the full growth of the human personality is valuable enough not to be omitted or forgotten. For the purpose of this catechesis, let us just recall his essential view on the subject: “human nature is both social and individual, and its social nature does not exclude or diminish an individual one because both social and individual characters constitute its personal dimension.”⁸

Spiritual discernment / actions to be taken

A thorough catechesis on man based on Christian anthropology is one of today’s most urgent issues. It is undeniable that various modern ideological trends try to change the meaning of human nature, gender and sexuality. It seems that definitions of these terms are formulated on the basis of subjective perception. This individual *me* claims the right to determine: who I am, who I am becoming and who I want to be. The fundamental rule derived from the natural drive for self-perpetuation determining pursuits specific for a man and for a woman is expressed in statements: I am a boy/man, I want to be a man, I am becoming a man; and similarly I am a girl/woman, I want to be a woman, I am becoming a woman. It is banal but nevertheless it is still subject to primitive and harmful indoctrination which is trying to shift the emphasis from natural getting to know yourself and understanding your own nature to a subjective decision that I don’t have to be a man, I *might as well* be a woman or *something* else, and also in variations depending on time and place. This preposterous ideology called LGBTQ+ causes a lot of confusion and destruction in the identity of many young people.

Understanding the specific nature of modern communication, it is a realm of advanced technology of Internet communicators. It is social media and an Internet of things. This interesting phenomenon becomes an ever-growing land for evangelisation but also a very difficult area to understand for older confreres, and it does not necessarily mean confreres in a well advanced age – middle-aged ones often struggle, too. It was manifested during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. While a face-to-face

⁸ M.B. Pecyna, *Osobowość i działanie błogosławionego Jerzego Matulewicza (Personality and activity of Blessed George Matulaitis)*, p. 57.

meeting has been the proper way for sharing and receiving the message of the Gospel, an invitation to do it through the Internet becomes a challenge for many. You don't have to leave your desk to travel through continents. There is a growing number of enthusiasts of virtual travelling. Advanced communication technologies, artificial intelligence, etc. enter strongly into social life - they are in banking, they make shopping easier, they help with writing down a contract or with medical treatment, they dominate the entertainment industry, they even enter into the world of spiritual needs. This constant technological progress sets new trends which cannot be ignored in pastoral work. It is important to realize that everything becomes a cyberspace creating a new mindset which changes fast enough so that grasping this new mentality alone is a serious challenge, not to mention to adequately adjust the ministry. Science fiction? For those born in the middle of the 20th century – maybe, but not for young people born with a thumb already adapted to handle a smartphone who less often visit the church. I intentionally do not expand the topic because this is an issue for a much bigger material; here, I regard it just as a provocation for reflections on the **youthfulness of disposition** which characterised Father George in his time. It is not difficult to observe that the outlined problems by all means fall within social life and thus also within Catholic social teaching – an area close to Father George.

Degrees of exclusion. Technological development is a common phenomenon, but uneven. In all situations, it can be helpful but at the same time, it excludes many from a large area of social life. No access to these new technological possibilities and a lack of skills to benefit from them create a new kind of poor – people pushed to the margins of life – continuously excluded. Life in so-called cyberspace means access to knowledge, work, treatment, and even spiritual experience. It means a change in the way our memory works, a new quality of mutual relations – it's hard to say if it's for the better. However, if we don't understand and learn how to operate in it, we will be more and more marginalised. It's enough to mention the necessity of using new regulations created to make life easier – e.g. Covid-19 certificates or toll collection, etc. For many older people, these are insurmountable things – *no country for old men*, to paraphrase the title of a 2007 film directed by Joel and Ethan Coen, based on Cormac McCarthy's novel of the same title, describes *cyberspace dilemmas* significantly affecting today's ministry. How to counteract this kind of exclusion?

For the purpose of the day of recollection, we'll leave it at those few inspirations allowing room for questions and discussions – with yourself,

in a local fraternity, in groups responsible for pastoral work, knowing and trusting that God's Spirit continuously permeates our reality, brings order into our inner life and guides everything so that man may not perish but may have eternal life. Let the Spirit help us live in **the youthfulness of disposition** which marked Father George.

Questions:

1. How do I practice personal and fraternal discernment?
2. Today, what specifically emerges as a sign of the times, a task to be done?
3. What areas of exclusion do I see for myself and for others?
4. *Youthfulness of disposition* – how do I search for traces of God in the modern world?
5. What is my experience of the past and how do I use it in identified issues?

TOMASZ NOWACZEK MIC
Warsaw, Poland

July 2023

A dwarf on the shoulders of a giant
on lost conscience

The Word of the Lord: James 1:2-18

My brothers, consider it a great joy when trials of many kinds come upon you, for you well know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and perseverance must complete its work so that you will become fully developed, complete, not deficient in any way. Any of you who lacks wisdom must ask God, who gives to all generously and without scolding; it will be given. But the prayer must be made with faith, and no trace of doubt, because a person who has doubts is like the waves thrown up in the sea by the buffeting of the wind. That sort of person, in two minds, inconsistent in every activity, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord. It is right that the brother in humble circumstances should glory in being lifted up, and the rich in being brought low. For the rich will last no longer than the wild flower; the scorching sun comes up, and the grass withers, its flower falls, its beauty is lost. It is the same with the rich: in the middle of a busy life, the rich will wither. Blessed is anyone who perseveres when trials come. Such a person is of proven worth and will win the prize of life, the crown that the Lord has promised to those who love him. Never, when you are being put to the test, say, 'God is tempting me'; God cannot be tempted by evil, and he does not put anybody to the test. Everyone is put to the test by being attracted and seduced by that person's own wrong desire. Then the desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and when sin reaches full growth, it gives birth to death. Make no mistake about this, my dear brothers: all that is good, all that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow caused by change. By his own choice he gave birth to us by the message of the truth so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all his creation.

The Word of the Lord: Mt 12, 30-32

Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather in with me throws away. And so I tell you, every human sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And anyone who says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but no one who speaks against the Holy Spirit will be forgiven either in this world or in the next.

SOURCES

St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Mystical Temple of God*,
in: : St. Stanislaus Papczyński, Selected Writings
of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage,
Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 625

Cleanliness is greatest if the temple is swept out at least once a day. In this regard David should be imitated, who said of himself: "I swept my spirit" (Ps 77:6) [LV]. This is done by the examination of one's conscience: the more frequently and diligently it is used, the cleaner it makes the dwelling place of God in man. Truly there is a deplorable negligence of not a few people, and a most serious error: they cannot bear their bedrooms, clothes, and dishes unless they are wholly spotless, yet they do not remove the dirt of the conscience; they wash their body, oil [perfume] it, cleanse it in every way, yet neglect the cleanliness of the soul. O Christian! Every day you wash your face, every day you clean your clothes, every day you sweep out your house, so why do you not do this every day with the Temple of God, which you are. Take notice then of your thoughts of the whole day; consider what you have said, and much more carefully what you have done. Have you omitted some good or committed some evil? But indeed examine the very intention of your deeds, and moreover attend to this: whether some good could not have been made better. You have a method for this most holy exercise of sweeping out the Mystical House of God at least every evening, in this well-known poem: Thank God, ask for light, examine your mind, ask pardon for sin, and resolve, make satisfaction.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1700¹

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God; it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct himself to this fulfilment. By his deliberate actions, the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth. With the help of grace they grow in virtue, avoid sin, and if they sin they entrust themselves as did the prodigal son¹ to the mercy of our Father in heaven. In this way they attain to the perfection of charity.

REFLECTIONS

In the subtitle of these reflections, we refer to an analogy used by an English scientist, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher, Isaac Newton: “If I see further, it’s only because I’m standing on the shoulders of giants”. What Newton meant was that he wouldn’t have made so many discoveries if he had not used the work of his predecessors. So did Viktor Emil Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist when he commented on his own achievements based on the earlier work on the human psyche carried out by, among others, Sigmund Freud.²

An imperative of the conscience is the key to our reflections. It is our dwarf, the inconspicuous *something* on the shoulders of a man. From the point of view of the surrounding reality of a wanderer, it sees the best, all the way to the horizon. In time, it sees the dangers and the goals to be achieved and chooses the best ways to reach them. In St. Paul the Apostle, we find the characteristic triad: *sarx*, *psyche* and *pneuma* – or body, soul (psyche) and spirit. A man is seen here as a psychophysical unity supported in existence by an immortal spirit. Frankl observes that a sick person expe-

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P5E.HTM

² Elisabeth Lukas, *Der Seele Heimat ist der Sinn. Logotherapie in Gleichnissen von Viktor Emmanuel Frankl*, Kösel-Verlag, München 2005, p. 213. The above passage, translated from the Polish translation of the original passage by the author: „...ein Zwerg, der auf den Schultern eines Riesen stehe, könne weiter und mehr sehen, als der Riese selbst.” The above sentence was used by V. E. Frankl in his work titled *Ärztliche Seelsorge w: Viktor E. Frankl, Ärztliche Seelsorge*, Deuticke, Wien, 10. Auflage, p. 10.

riences destruction both in psyche and in the body. Mental illness is often reflected in the body. This pattern is expressed in a popular saying: *a sound mind in a sound body*. At the same time, the spirit, in Frankl's view, is not psyche but an important element integrated into the human psycho-physical condition which never deteriorates and is not subject to illness. It is a healthy core thanks to which, it is possible for both psyche (*psyche*) and body (*sarx*) to return to health – it is a space for conscience.

Today, this image of man is effectively broken, intellectually and spiritually ignored, hence the attempts to redefine man and reduce him or her to the dimension of body (*sarx*) and emotions (*psyche*). This narrowing down makes it possible to generate ever new needs, to succumb to a consumerist lifestyle with whose primary goal is to multiply profits. From consumption, it is very close to all the well-known -isms: egoism, hedonism, egotism, individualism, pragmatism, etc. The inability to satisfy the awakened expectations creates further -isms which become serious diseases: defeatism, pessimism, opportunism, fanaticism, nihilism. They may be defied by an eternal spirit (*nous*) which is a healing resource of a person. It points out the meaning – it is led by a strong urge: **do good and avoid evil!**

The pastoral challenge is to strengthen this voice and form the conscience. It is the space inhabited by the Holy Spirit; it is the sanctuary where persons meet. The self of the human person meets the person of the Paraclete who leads to the person of Christ. Meeting Christ makes it possible to get to know the love of the Father. In the power of the Holy Spirit, a generous love of truth, goodness and beauty takes place; acceptance of the self and an openness to accept others in all their originality – unique and unrepeatable. If anywhere, it is right here, in the conscience – the Sanctuary of the Meeting of Persons – the Kantian quandry, *what can I know, what should I do, what may I hope for* and *what is man* finds its proper answer.

In this year's reflections, I want to use a painting by Michelangelo Merisi (Caravaggio) entitled *David with the Head of Goliath* from 1609/1610. One of the authors writing about the paintings of Caravaggio put his thoughts in an essay, *A confession of a sinner (Spowiedź grzesznika)*.³ The author presents Caravaggio as a remorseful adventurer, a fugitive, or even a murderer. The artist supposedly did not suffer from a mental illness but he was tor-

³ Tomasz Derulski, *Spowiedź grzesznika*, 29 April 2016 r., in: <https://niezlasztuka.net/o-sztuce/spowiedz-grzesznika-caravaggio/>.



mented by demons deep in his personality shaped by a series of events he either only witnessed or participated in.⁴ The darkness emanating from his paintings seems to be the key to understanding the demons of Caravaggio. Some Caravaggio experts say he murdered a man named Ranuccio Tomasoni who was allegedly his lover. They say that this event aroused a deep

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

feeling of guilt; over time, it brought an obsession with death which was the reason for the ever-present darkness of his paintings including *David with the Head of Goliath*. The author wonders, however, whether darkness is the same thing as gloom and concludes that they are different.⁵

Gloom embraces death. Darkness is a space to be entered in order to gain confidence.⁶ The difference is well described in *Dark Night* by St. John of the Cross:

On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings —oh, happy chance!—
I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.

In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised—oh, happy chance!—

In darkness and in concealment, My house being now at rest.

In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me,
Nor I beheld aught, Without light or guide,
save that which burned in my heart

The darkness in the painting suggested for meditation is active, it takes part in a series of events important for Merisi. It is a part of his life. Frankl, and especially Freud *et consortes*, would have seen in the darkness subconscious sensations, complexes, wounds to be worked out, opened and treated. But let's ask a question whether after a psychotherapeutic sorting out of a difficult life history, smoothened in an almost inhumane manner, Merisi would be able to paint *David with the Head of Goliath*? The author of the essay, Tomasz Derulski, claims that if Caravaggio had been brainwashed in psychoanalysis, he would have never *destroyed the safety barrier between the painting and the viewer*⁷.

The darkness of Caravaggio's life is infused with the atmosphere of Rome where he lived and worked. Existential themes emerged in his work, taking the form of promiscuity, crime, beggars, prostitutes and loan sharks, violence to the extent of murder. The artist, deemed a murderer, had to keep running away and living in fear which shaped his aesthetic sensitivity. Hence a series of paintings with cut off heads. Themes of the paintings

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

were also inspired by the Bible which may suggest that Merisi confronted the God of the Bible to whom his conscience led him.

There is also light which plays quite an important role here. It brings out a young boy from the darkness of the painting. He is sad, even compassionate. It is David. There is nothing of confidence, of a conqueror in him. You cannot see any triumphalism, the scene seems to slow down, almost freeze in the horror of annihilating human life. Goliath's head with the face showing the last traces of life is somewhat reflected in David's face. It is not only compassion, not even sadness. It is deep grief over the loss. Taking someone's life is a stinger that painfully stabs the killer, too. Killing someone means killing something within yourself. "Anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court" (cf. Mt 5:22-23). Both characters are frozen in death. They both lost – each other. They live in a cemetery. Evil found a person and wants to remain there for ever. "Oh, an invisible, hypodermic cry. You look at someone, his eyes are dry, face is still, but he's crying. He's sobbing and shaking, but he won't move..." (Edward Stachura).

David hands us Goliath's head. It is facing us – extended towards us who are sitting or standing in front of the painting. We become a part of the space and the tragedy which takes place in it. We look close and cannot leave without declaring our position, exploiting the whole scene to ourselves and acknowledging the tragedy of the sin affecting both the characters and ourselves. That's where serenity ends. Here are your emotions – anxiety, aggression, guilt, remorse. Do you want to push the cut off head away, suppress resistance towards such a gift in the face of making you an accessory to the murder? Do you want to hide anger caused by an embarrassing acceptance of the triumph which turned out to be a failure or an aggression which wants to scream and cry out something? Goliath's face is not only frozen but also scared and surprised as if it has one more thing to say but the life draining from it makes it impossible. David's face is sad and still – is it the swallowed sadness which is going to destroy him from inside? This painting provokes, prompts, serves as an examination of conscience; at times, it screams, at times, it makes you quiet. Caravaggio, a murder suspect, took this painting to Cardinal Scypione Borghese as his confession, remorse and a request for pardon. There are, however, hypotheses that Caravaggio was not a murderer after all. Some say that Ranuccio Tomassoni was killed during a duel with Caravaggio. That is what Andrew Graham-Nixon claims in his book *Vita sacra et profana* in which he refutes many other false conjectures about

the brilliant painter.⁸ Michelangelo Merisi died before he managed to reach Rome.

Trying to find an answer, appropriate for our times, to the question about conscience, we cannot ignore the charismatic message of Father Founder, St. Stanislaus Papczyński. Father Founder gives us a little work entitled *Templum Dei Mysticum*. It is a special anthropology guide, a catechetical tool for saving the human spirit – creating an inner painting, not at all worse than the one by Caravaggio. A pastoral challenge for shaping the human conscience can be found particularly in chapter 16, *The Cleanliness of the Mystical Temple* where Father Founder emphasises the importance of the examination of conscience. He encourages us to, following King David, “shake down your own spirit” (cf. Ps 77:7). And he adds that that’s what an examination of conscience does: “the more frequently and diligently it is used, the cleaner it makes the dwelling place of God in man.”⁹ Of course, it should be described more precisely that an examination of conscience is a special activity of a person consisting in a dialogue carried out between an eternal human spirit and God who never gives up the space He created and in which He wishes to be a regular visitor. Divine wisdom is the source of the truth in man. The eternal *Logos* took human form in Jesus Christ and is similar to us in everything, apart from sin. If *David with the Head of Goliath* has been a challenge, then Christ.... is a giver of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit of Truth who does not leave room for the grief of sin and thus does not allow evil to take control over a person.

Questions:

1. What is my vital need today – do I succumb to a consumer mentality or some kind of pragmatism?
2. My relationship with Christ – how can I describe it; how can I recognize its influence on shaping my personality?
3. The condition of your conscience – is it a place where you experience meeting and having dialogue with the person of the Holy Spirit?
4. How do you examine your conscience: what do you do with an identified sin, weakness – how do you work on yourself?

⁸ Cf., *ibid* in one of the commentaries to the text by Alicja Maciążek.

⁹ St. Stanisław Papczyński, *The Mystical Temple of God*, in: St. Stanislaus Papczyński, Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 625.

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Life is not a euphemism
on the hope of fatherhood and parenthood for the infertile

The Word of the Lord: Lk 23:26-32

As they were leading him away, they seized on a man, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus. Large numbers of people followed him, and women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, „Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For look, the days are surely coming when people will say, „Blessed are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne children, the breasts that have never suckled!” Then they will begin to say to the mountains, „Fall on us!”; to the hills, „Cover us!” For if this is what is done to green wood, what will be done when the wood is dry?’ Now they were also leading out two others, criminals, to be executed with him.

SOURCES

Yves Semen, Conjugal spirituality according to John Paul II,
Święty Wojciech, Poznań 2011

According to the teachings of John Paul II, the words with which the Creator announces the creation of man in the first story of Genesis and which are the final stage of bringing into existence all that preceded him (*Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, Gen 1:26*) mean that “the Creator seems to halt before calling him into existence, as if he were pondering within himself to make a decision” (General Audience, 12 September 1979, 3) and makes creating man the most solemn moment

in the whole work of creation. The plural suggests that the three Divine Persons are engaged in the act of creation and that the woman and the man are to be in the image of the trinitarian communion of these Divine Persons. It means that the vocation to communion of the woman and the man was in God's plan from the very beginning which makes marriage *the most primal sacrament*. Indeed, man, being the crown of the created world which God brings into existence to reveal His glory, is called to be the most perfect expression of God's essence, to transmit the absolute communion of the Divine Persons into a visible dimension and to reveal the secret that the whole created world is God's gift and the true reason for creation is Love. "Man appears in the visible world as the highest expression of the divine gift, because he bears within him the interior dimension of the gift – says John Paul II [...] Thus, in this dimension, a primordial sacrament is constituted, understood as a sign that transmits effectively in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial. This is the mystery of truth and love, the mystery of divine life, in which man really participates." (General Audience, 20 February 1980, 3-4). This is the most noble vocation of a woman and a man joined together in holy matrimony *from the beginning*.

REFLECTIONS

The Gospel is not a euphemism...

Infertile married couples represent a serious pastoral challenge. It is worth emphasising that the term *infertile* in itself is overwhelming. It has to do with vulnerability which is reluctant to face up to any suffering. Infertility causes discomfort – incomprehensible indisposition, illness, pain. Saying openly that there is the possibility of having no children is avoided mainly in order to avoid confrontation with pain. Instead, we say that there are people who have difficulties with conceiving a child. Is this delicate euphemism justified? I have doubts. On the one hand, we are trying to be gentle, but on the other hand, pain seems to escape from the existential experience of the married couple while it is this pain which after all made them seek help and answers to their questions.

The term *infertile couple* should not be avoided. It precisely describes the situation and, from the Christian perspective, indicates a closeness to the suffering Christ. His cross, although an instrument of anguish, has become also a reality of happiness. Happiness does not mean lack of suffer-

ing. The term has a potential for change, opens a much wider perspective, raises awareness of the future in heaven where “there will be no more tears” (cf. Rev 21:1-8). It conveys the truth about the situation of a married couple and God who is with them and for them.

Charismatic roots...

For the Congregation, the beginning of the 21st century was the powerful pillar of light shed on the core of our charism and mission we have to fulfil in the community of the Church. It is thanks to the rediscovery of our Founder, Father Stanislaus Papczyński whose holiness of life was confirmed by the Church, first with his beatification in Licheń Stary in 2007, and then with the canonization in Rome in 2016. These were important events because the Church gave us confidence that by following Christ the way which Father Founder offered to us, we can come to God and to the glory of the saints in heaven. It was a time of intense reading into the essence of the charism, a special trait of the spirituality with which the Holy Spirit inspired him and bestowed upon him and through him the Marian Congregation. The fruit of these investigations were the rules of our Congregation in the form of the Constitutions and Directory from 2018 which in the first several paragraphs provide the most significant and beautiful message describing the essence and the way of implementation of our life’s calling. We read that “The mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary is the essence of the charism of the Congregation and has been, from the very beginning, a particular sign, strength, and joy of the Marian vocation. From this mystery flow the identity and mission of the Congregation” (C 2).

One of the stations on the way of climbing this Marian peak – nomen omen **K2** (The second highest mountain peak; Constitutions is spelled with a K in Polish – ed.) – where we set our camp to gather strength to go higher is *ministry to infertile couples*. Although the beginnings resembled the attitude of the Biblical Simon of Cyrene who did not quite know what this way meant, who the man carrying the cross was and who or what the crowd of onlookers were but nevertheless he constituted the first fruit of the mission which developed through identifying the signs accompanying the beatification and canonization of Father Stanislaus. One of the signs was the miracle of bringing back to life a child who died under the mother’s heart. A perception, like *Simon*, of the need to help some couples to carry the cross of infertility became the way of accompanying them on their path of faith. If resurrection is possible, why should conceiving a new

life not be possible? If God showed His omnipotence in the life of Mary, preserving Her from original sin, if through the intercession of Father Stanislaus, He brought a child back to life, why shouldn't He show His mercy to poor couples wishing to conceive a child? It was the beginning of a adventure, like *Simon*, in line with our Marian Community's discernment that initiatives supporting and demonstrating the dignity of human life from conception to natural death are an essential part of the Marian apostolate.

The path...

Above, we mentioned the climb, the path, the accompaniment. Ministry encompasses them all. Starting from an existential experience, we discover and develop several important elements. Facing infertility, one first experiences shock, pain, anger at God who promised and did not give, low self-esteem because there is no child while others have children – relatives, acquaintances, friends, an awareness of time running out with every year, month and day, embarrassing questions and even the reproachful stares of people – what's wrong with you? Disappointment with yourself and other people, discouragement, a lack of trust in God, a weakening faith, a marital crisis. We look for solutions. We learn their life, language and their understanding of the world. They understand human speech better, show the topography of their here and now more precisely. They avoid lofty statements, *switching* too fast to biblical tones; they rather prefer direct communication.

The first step in the ministry is a return to a positivistic building from the foundations. Recently, it was quite aptly described by Katarzyna Nosowska, a Polish singer and writer: "I respect myself as a dot. I believe that the whole world will benefit if I shine as a dot. I know how difficult it is to look inside yourself. How difficult it is to be for yourself a caring guardian who supports and encourages, but also scolds and disciplines. To stand face to face with your own despair, fear, powerlessness, shame, anger, aggression – it hurts. ... But what if there are more than just five senses? What if an offer coming from outside is about dragging us out from ourselves to the streets in order to prevent victory in the only righteous war for our souls? I want to be a small dot. I want to polish it until it shines."¹ In such an approach, it is important to recognise who we are as people – a man and a woman

¹ Katarzyna Nosowska, *A ja żem jej powiedziała*, WIELKA LITERA Sp. z o.o., Warszawa 2018, p. 86-87.

– a couple, but also a consecrated person. We have a whole anthropology here, the sphere of sex, sexuality, psyche, intellect and spirituality. Exposing each of these areas, we realise that, despite the richness of God's creation, we are still contingent, finite, with no permanent place on earth, we get ill, we grow old, we die, we have no children, We recognise that the process of getting to know yourself is dynamic and people gathered in the ministry want to live and welcome life; This is the first, the second...and the fifth. They want to bear witness to selfless and fruitful love – they discover that life is a gift open to and for the other one.

Here is the room for a renewed catechesis on marriage. This sacrament is a kind of exorcism against not only the selfishness of both spouses but also against selfish expectations of their environment – the grandmother, the mother, aunts and uncles and baffled acquaintances. A good catechesis about the sacrament of matrimony lets them discover fulfilled love. They are a gift to each other. Their mutual commitment is not lacking anything. Their love is complete. They learn it from Christ who teaches to live the Eucharist and love which is faithful, selfless and full of hope for the future, full of Resurrection. This catechesis, despite their sacrament of marriage, turns out to be a process. It has to carry loneliness, sometimes even years of loneliness; putting up with a spouse, his or her time of maturing to become a gift, to have faith, to open to someone who biologically will not be conceived under the heart of a couple but will be welcomed by the heart augmented by Love which is God. This is also a catechesis about the grandeur of marital love against the selfishness of the world which usurps the right to decide about life – its beginning and end. This is a catechesis about a humble and difficult bearing witness to God from whom everything comes. Husband and wife are a sign of the fragility of man and greatness of God. They stand against the conviction that the technological, digital world is a panacea for the pain of the human soul. They learn it in closeness to a priest celebrating the Paschal Mystery *in persona Christi*.

A catechesis on the essence and dignity of marriage is accompanied by a catechesis about the world. There are couples in the ministry who regained or learned mature faith. Some of them enjoy the gift of fertility, but others don't. They recognised their place and vocation as childless but widely open to others, supporting various charity projects, participating in different voluntary work, devoting their time as experts: teachers, physicians, lawyers, engineers, technicians, etc. They all understand that the scenario of everyday life is created on an ongoing basis – there is suspense in it, dialogues and monologues, sudden plot twists. They learn not to be pas-

sive viewers but active actors without whom there wouldn't be any movie scene. There is room for them to testify to the originality of their life and vocation; that it is special to be a woman turned towards a man and to be a man turned towards a woman; that faith and God has indeed a lot to offer, not only finite temporality but also eternal future; that biology does not exhaust the term *life*. They become witness to the power and wisdom of God – they don't chase fads – they look for light in the Gospel.

That's life...

Therein lies the prospects for ministry. The number of infertile married couples in our country is estimated at twenty percent of the total number of couples. This shows the scale of the needs and the challenge. In some of our parishes, infertile persons are acknowledged. There are Eucharists celebrated for them often with those having a desire for or expecting a child also invited. Unfortunately, it is a mistake. Pastors, creating space for everybody (fertile and infertile), assume that a parish is a community of people *carrying each other's burdens*. The assumption, however right, does not take into account that the dynamics of the expecting couples' feelings is different from the emotions of those who failed again. This is one of the reasons for the pain of the infertile participants in such liturgies, not to mention the sight of other people's children running around.

Another problem in assisting such persons is malpractice in a confessional. A lack of experience and knowledge about their struggles, such as painful confrontations with their immediate environment pressing for *having* children or coping with access to the treatment and its costs. Sometimes, confessors do not show sufficient tenderness. It happens that they suggest that difficulties in conceiving a child result from a sinful past. They are capable of filling a bag labelled *reasons* with: curses, infatuations, contraception, abortion, career, etc. It's not only hurtful, but altogether unacceptable.

An equally questionable practice is rushing to offer supposedly *proven* methods of *triggering* fertility: the intercession of the saints, saying novenas or *the only effective* prayers, making a pilgrimage, using special objects of worship or other ascetic practices. While they are an expression of faith and tools for strengthening a spiritual path, for those filled with pain because of infertility, they may become another argument that God does not listen, does not help and is distant. Things go various ways but we know well that every mature prayer, regardless of the significance of the intention, implicitly includes: *Thy will be done*. Many of these couples need to

be brought closer, step by step, to such maturity, also to avoid a magical approach to Christianity.

Prospects...

I have mentioned that there are pastoral centres (e.g. The Shrine of St. Stanislaus Papczyński in Marianki, the Parish of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in Lublin, the Parish of Our Lady of Mercy in Stegny, Warsaw or the Parish of Our Lady the Queen of Poland in Marymont, Warsaw) where Eucharists are offered, with the participation of infertile couples, celebrated for their intentions, or other prayer meetings dedicated to them are held. There are also pastoral centres, such as the one in Stegny, Warsaw, providing not only an opportunity for praying for one another, but also a refuge where one can come with their own doubts, questions and hopes, experience that he or she is not alone, doomed to loneliness, a useless link in a series of social relations. There are also days of recollection for such couples or even recollection sessions that have been offered already for some time (The Retreat House of Fr. Kazimierz Wyszynski in Sulejówek). These are certainly good and useful proposals. From them, there emerged other forms of additional meetings for infertile couples, such as home biblical meetings in small groups consisting of up to six couples. During these home liturgies, the couples first listen to the Word of the Lord, then contemplate it and share their faith aroused by the Holy Spirit. In the end, they share a supper prepared together. Watching and participating in the events in which God Himself awakens spiritual desires and gives grace to fulfil them in a particular small home Church is fascinating

These good activities can be expanded. Including this pastoral area in lectures on pastoral theology would be by all means desirable. The issue of infertility could be included in occasional homilies, preparations for sacraments, retreats and pastoral work in parishes. Pastoral work is not just time-honoured traditional forms, however valuable and important and yet often not standing the test of time. Years ago, Pope Benedict XVI wrote about it in a prophetic way in his Apostolic Letter announcing the Year of Faith. He said that we needed courage, against all conformist attitudes, to be open to changes coming from faith and leading to faith because it is no longer “a self-evident presupposition for life in society. ... it is often openly denied” (PF 2). Ministry is a real battle with ever new challenges. One of them is infertility. To understand it well, to ask the right questions and give the right answers, a much bigger effort is needed: spiritual, intellectual, but also organisational.

A fascinating adventure opens up before the Marians to proclaim the Gospel of life in a situation in which conceiving a new life is humanly impossible. Many people seek the Gospel, the Word giving rise to faith and giving life. Those people through faith want to regain hope and engage in love. They are also maturing to acknowledge that life is not just biology. Through the intercession of St. Father Stanislaus Papczyński, let's pray for courage to proclaim Christ's Gospel.

God the Father,
who in Your immeasurable Providence
gave us in St. Stanislaus Papczyński
a powerful advocate at Your throne,
through his intercession
grant married couples who desire a child
this grace we ask You for;
protect the conceived life to natural and happy delivery
and grant us the grace that we, following his example, may always do Your
most holy will.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

Questions:

1. How do you find yourself in the proposal of ministry to infertile couples?
2. Do you have courage to look for places where faith is a presupposition of social life?
3. Which areas of ministry and fraternal life call for building from the foundations?
4. Give an example of your own experience similar to the one of Simon of Cyrene?

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“Old” initiative, new man!

*on the experience of mercy – from the Immaculate
Conception to the present condition of the Marian Fathers*

The Word of the Lord: Lam 3, 21-25

This is what I shall keep in mind
and so regain some hope:
Surely Yahweh’s mercies are not over,
his deeds of faithful love not exhausted;
every morning they are renewed;
great is his faithfulness!
,Yahweh is all I have,’ I say to myself,
,and so I shall put my hope in him.’
Yahweh is good to those who trust him,
to all who search for him.

SOURCES

St. Stanisław Papczyński, *The Mystical Temple of God*

in: St. Stanislaus Papczynski, Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński,
PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage,
Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 577-578

I reveal God in man: begone, begone, you profane ones! “For in the image of God has man been made” (Gen 9:6). Let the sun, the moon, the fixed and mobile stars, the sky with its beauty, the earth with its greatness and the sea with its depth all yield to human nature. “For in the image of God has man been made.” Precious metals, very valuable gems, scarlet corals,

snow-white crystals, gold colored ambers, the luster of silver, the brilliance of gold, the splendor of pearls, the gleam of diamonds, let them all yield to human nature: "For in the image of God has man been made." Yet also let the fishes of the sea, the fowl in the air, the animals that move and run over the earth, and whatever is beneath God and not endowed with reason, be inferior to human nature. "For in the image of God has man been made."

But you, earthen deity, learn with me, and recognize; what are you? The image of God.

**Brother Roger of Taizé, À la joie je t'invite,
Fragments inédits 1940-1963,**

translated from the Polish edition:

*Wybierzmy radość. Nieznane notatki z lat 1940–1963,
(Let's choose joy. Unknown notes from the years 1940-1963)*

Wydawnictwo Jedność, Kielce 2021, p. 24

You follow me – says Christ. We will follow His footsteps together. Entrust yourself to Him. I don't want to lecture you – how could I? – but I want us to live together the same life.

Do not hesitate. Get rid of everything and enjoy. (...) Don't worry about the day ahead. Don't try to guess what may happen tomorrow and never question what is already decided because you know what responsibility rests with the one who laid his hand on the plough and looks back (Lk 9:62). Come, let's fill the air with shared joy. United for death and life, we become one to praise and sing, day and night, The One who has been, is, and will always be.

**Adam Zagajewski, Spróbuj opiewać okaleczony świat
(Try to Praise the Mutilated World)**

Wiersze wybrane, Wydawnictwo a5, Kraków 2010, p. 250,

translated by Clare Cavanagh

You've seen the refugees going nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.

REFLECTIONS

Each one of us, as a free, intelligent, thinking man, comes to the point of our own history when once again you have to ask yourself the question about the purpose, sense and value of your life and vocation. It is not a coincidence that the very first paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life”¹. First for all, we are called to participate in the happiness of God Himself. And secondly, it can be said openly that we have been called to a creative participation in God’s life since He not only created us different from one another but He also granted us, the crown of His creation, a wide range of talents.

A problem arises already in the beginning of our fulfilling of this calling to participate in the life of God Himself. On the one hand, taking on the spiritual life in earnest and drawing strength from prayer and the sacraments, we have the will to respond to the Word of the Lord. However, on the other hand, living with the realities of our religious life and being, for example, aware that there are fewer and fewer of those of us who still have something to say and can really take responsibility for the actual work of the Congregation, we forget about the eternal perspective going beyond the present time and we certainly don’t go back to the beginnings. And it is with the beginning of the life of every man, and thus also of every Marian, that we are chosen by God. God loves life and generously gives life never making mistakes in His decisions. That is why the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the sign of the Divine Mercy, becomes an important reference point for us and other people of faith not only today.

God’s initiative

Mary, in Her Immaculate Conception, indicates the precedence of God’s initiative who is incredibly generous in His gifts magnanimously bestowed on man, even if they have already proven many times to be the weakest link in the relation with Him, breaking the original harmony of the bond. But even in this paradox of human unfaithfulness, God’s Love and its extraordinary mercifulness is revealed. It is selfless, it does not require meeting any special conditions, it does not carry any exclusivity clause with the explana-

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P2.HTM

tion that it is reserved only for perfect, clean-cut faith-devotees who, having reached absolute perfection, who don't have to worry about a free pass to the elite club of the redeemed. In this way, the Divine gift of the Immaculate Conception powerfully reveals the truth that God has eternally loved each and every man and He constantly confirms His irrevocable decision.

What's more, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception as a sign of Divine Mercy consistently leads to a *new creation*, becomes an icon of the new man. What does this mean in practice? Namely, that in the Immaculate Conception, Mary experiences in reality the work of the Holy Spirit who makes Her a *new creation*, and today a Marian who imitates Mary and is delivered from sin by the power of grace also becomes a new man (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 7:6; 8:1-16; Gal 5:16-25) in whom the original image and likeness of God is renewed (see Col 3:10; Gen 1:27).

No wonder that the prophet of the Immaculate Conception, St. Stanislaus Papczyński becomes today a special intercessor of the people searching for their true origins and sources whom he helps discover anew that you cannot read the history of man without God just as with any sphere of our life, you cannot avoid sinking into an unproductive activism without God's grace. Relying on the richness of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, let's not get into new versions of the old heresy of Pelagianism but filled with joy at the grace being bestowed, let's sing gratefully the hymn of praise together with Mary – *the Almighty has done great things for me* (Lk. 1:49).

In the image and likeness ...

Indeed, God is doing great things in and for us but are we really becoming a new creation? And even if we are, is it really in His image and likeness or in our, still limited image according to a crippled and narrow-minded faith? There is an interesting story from the phenomenal ministry of Fr. Józef Tischner who used to say: "Love in itself is beyond comprehension but thanks to love, we can comprehend everything." taken from one of his dialogue homilies where his interlocutors were pre-schoolers. In the 70s, Fr. Tischner celebrated famous Eucharists for pre-schoolers and their parents in the Church of St. Mark in Kraków. During one of the masses, he asked the children whom God created the most beautiful, who is exceptional, created in the image of God Himself. There were various answers: the sun, the stars, the woods, the mountains or, closer to them, teddy bears or other favourite toys. When the priest, still not receiving the right answer, tried to suggest to them whom God created as really special and won-

derful, a small girl came out to the middle of the church and with a loud and resolute voice said: “Father, it’s probably me...”

I mention it because the Day of Recollection in a home community is a moment given to us and expected from us in order to go back to our identity, the right image of God and thus to the true image of ourselves. Of course, the purpose is not more or less conscious resignation from working on yourself (since I have already been created in the image of God, what else is there to work on?) but rather choosing the right starting point to a genuine involvement without unnecessary coyness (I’m not going to pretend I’m a saint but I am not going to deny that I would, nevertheless, like to be one) but also without an alleged inferiority complex (what can we, the Marians, a small congregation without preachers like the Dominicans or without retreat centers like those that Jesuits have, give to the Church?) God who does not withdraw His calling to us, the Marians – each one of us and the whole Congregation – is full of Mercy and ensures us: “Sooner would heaven and earth turn into nothingness than would My mercy not embrace a trusting soul.”² The question is: do we still trust Him? Do we trust Him at all? Are we, like in the beginning of our vocation at the time of the novitiate and the first vows, when we were in love with God and burning with a desire to give all our strength and talents in service for the Congregation, ready to go, with the same, or rather more mature eagerness where, like the Blessed Renovator used to say, it’s the hardest and where nobody wants to go anymore? Or maybe our readiness has been reduced to meeting the package of basic obligations, not necessarily those most adequate to the spiritual or pastoral needs of the community? But when confronted with the proposals of the superiors, do we already have a ready set of supposedly serious arguments protecting us from a new task, responsibility, a piece of hard work and not necessarily a quick result which could at least emotionally gratify the effort *pro Christo et Ecclesia*?

A sense of history in the light of faith

Do I believe in God and do I believe God which means do I trust that He really, tangibly leads my life story, the history of salvation in this particular community? The Day of Recollection is also a good moment to go back to the situations and facts in which we experienced God’s love, His Mercy, when we, as we sometimes say, grabbed hold of God. Do I remember the

² St. s. M. Faustyna Kowalska, *Diary*, 1777, PROMIC – Marian Press Stockbridge, MA 01263, p. 388

moment when I fell in love with God, when He pulled me towards Himself, when I was discovering my Marian vocation? It is worth going back to those moments to let yourself be surprised also in the future by the Divine Mercy.

We not only need this history lesson and to learn from it (history tends to repeat itself?). In the biblical context, we can see, for example, that it is not a coincidence that the two books of Chronicles, which originally were one book, in the Hebrew text are called *Dibre Hajjamim*, or *the events of the days*. What events and what days? Is it only about Solomon's ascending the throne of the united kingdom or maybe it is also about the times when a snigger of the devil, trying to call the right to kill the right to live, seems to be heard in many streets of modern Europe and the world? Or the times when an informative bulimia is accompanied by an anorexia of dreams and a thief caught red-handed screams that it is not his hand? The example of The Book of Chronicles reveals that the author, probably the Prophet Ezra, shows God's anger towards the unfaithful people but, on the other hand, at the same time, strongly emphasizes His Mercy. Thus, already in the Old Testament, the history of human unfaithfulness is an invitation to hope and praising God because He shows Mercy and gives another chance. Having experienced mercy, I can confidently make a more genuine attempt, not only in ministry, to *praise the mutilated world*.

Conclusion. If the then Jews struggling with hardships relied on God in the first place, the lineage of David would again ascend Zion and the Kingdom of God would spread throughout the world. If we, struggling today with the burden of war, the pandemic, loneliness, or mental confusion among mutually contradictory opinions, show obedience to the Word of the Lord, then on the Good Friday of our life, we will not defect from the cross but, remaining with faith at the cross, we will experience resurrection!

It is this paschal mystery that is "the culmination of the revelation and actual mercy, which is able to justify man" – wrote John Paul II in his encyclical on the Divine Mercy in 1980. Why? Because if God promises something, He keeps His Word. That is why the Word of God, which holds a creative power, gets fulfilled and we may live without fear and not confide ourselves to – as our Father Founder said – "apprehend the mere presence of God; we must also show in our actions and exterior deeds that we truly bear within us the living and unsullied image of God"³.

³ St. Stanisław Papczyński, *The Mystical Temple of God*, in: St. Stanislaus Papczynski, *Select-ed Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński*, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stock-bridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 580

Questions:

1. In what events and circumstances of my life do I realise anew that I am called to participate in the happy life of God Himself? Do I respond to this invitation as a Marian? How creatively do I do so?
2. What does the fact that I am *in the image and likeness of God* mean to me? Does it justify my idleness and lack of engagement besides a package of basic religious or priestly duties? Does it amaze me and open me towards the novelty inherent in life according to the evangelical counsels and signs of our times?
3. According to the guidelines from *The Mystical Temple of God* by Father Founder - in what way and in what works can *–the living and unsullied image of God* carried by me be seen in my vocation?

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October 2023

God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world
on suffering and death

The Word of the Lord: Ecc 3:1-13

There is a season for everything,
a time for every occupation under heaven:
A time for giving birth, a time for dying;
a time for planting, a time for uprooting what has been planted.
A time for killing, a time for healing;
a time for knocking down, a time for building.
A time for tears, a time for laughter;
a time for mourning, a time for dancing.
A time for throwing stones away, a time for gathering them;
a time for embracing, a time to refrain from embracing.
A time for searching, a time for losing;
a time for keeping, a time for discarding.
A time for tearing, a time for sewing;
a time for keeping silent, a time for speaking.
A time for loving, a time for hating;
a time for war, a time for peace.
What do people gain from the efforts they make?
I contemplate the task that God gives humanity to labour at.
All that he does is apt for its time;
but although he has given us an awareness of the passage of time,
we can grasp neither the beginning nor the end of what God does.
I know there is no happiness for a human being
except in pleasure and enjoyment through life.
And when we eat and drink
and find happiness in all our achievements,
this is a gift from God.

SOURCES

St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Crucified Orator*,

in: St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński*, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 739-740

We frequently notice that men — upon departing this world — entrust to their closest ones what they held dearest during their life. Thus did Turnus, King of the Rutuli, otherwise a very brave hero, defeated in a duel with Aeneas the Trojan, on his knees, humbly raising his hands, with a gaze of supplication pleaded with his victor:

If any concern for a parent's grief
Can touch you
(you too had such a father, in Anchises)
I beg you to pity Daunus's old age.

On the other hand, our Redeemer dying upon the Cross, did not speak to any man or angel, but to His Heavenly Father, entrusting to Him His spirit: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!” Saint Athanasius, meditating upon these words, stated: “Christ, saying these words from the cross: ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,’ places all people before the Father and entrusts them to Him, so that through Him and with Him, they might be brought to life. For we are members, and the members are one body, which is the Church. Therefore, He entrusted all to God in Himself.”

Cyril agrees with Athanasius, saying that the eternal Son “entrusted His spirit into the hands of the Father so that, beginning with Him and through Him, with a firm faith, we might have the certain hope of the same thing, that after death we will find ourselves in the hands of God.” Euthymius also adds: “The Lord God did this for us, that henceforth the souls of the just will not descend into hell, but rather will ascend to God.” Therefore, we ought not to remain idle, but while Jesus Christ entrusts us to His eternal Father, we simultaneously must entrust ourselves to the eternal Son of the eternal Father, so that we might be protected in His hands from falling and turning from Him and henceforth quietly lead our lives.

George Matulaitis – Matulewicz, *Journal*,
Stockbridge, 2003, p.88

“With God on our side, who can be against us?” (Rm 8:31). “Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled and worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked.” As Scripture promised: “For your sake, we are being massacred daily, and reckoned as sheep for the slaughter. These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us. For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Jesus Our Lord” (Rm 8:35-39).

May these words encourage us to persevere and may they comfort and support us in time of persecution. Let us grasp from these words where our strength lies: in complete surrender to Christ we unite and blend with Him.

Let us take hold of and embrace the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and no power will harm us, no power will hinder us or block our path. “With God on our side, who can be against us?” (Rm 8:31) “There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13).

REFLECTIONS

A time of plague reveals the vulnerability of the human condition. Illness, pain, dying – signs of passing away. The close ones have suddenly been encapsulated in something which still resembles them but their faces became pale, flat and frozen – expressionless. This thing, once full of life, becomes like a mask in the Greek theatre with memories coming out from underneath. The spectators watching this play suddenly become the actors, participants of the action full of pain – they are watching death.

The Algerian city of Oran is the scene for which Albert Camus wrote *The Plague*. It was published in the 50s of the last century. The city has been struggling to survive for about a year. Here, the illness is the definition of evil and death. The characters adopt different approaches to the plague. Some, like Doctor Bernard Rieux, fight for the life of their patients. He serves them driven by the human impulse of compassion, solidarity and the desire to ease pain. There is also someone like Father Paneloux who

regards the plague as a righteous punishment for the sins of the people of Oran.

The religious fanatic changes, however, into a compassionate brother. The beginning of his transformation takes place at the bed of a suffering child. Camus tries to show how endangerment influences people's attitudes. With time, the plague is starting to affect everything. In the city, closed because of the plague, fear, despair and rebellion are the predominant emotions and dramatic attempts are being undertaken to fight evil. Finally, the plague is overcome. But the citizens of Oran have become different people: they faced death and became stronger in fighting evil.¹

History teaches that we cope with death in various ways. It happens that when confronted with death, some lose their faith and reject God, even despite earlier declarations and solemn speeches – sermons, lectures and reflections on *God and suffering*. An interesting example is the experience of the British writer, philosopher and philologist, Clive Staples Lewis. We know him best for his literary fiction, poems and non-fiction writing. Let us mention for example: *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, *Surprised with Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. In an autobiographical film about C.S. Lewis from 1993, *Shadowlands*, with Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger as the main characters, we meet Lewis (Anthony Hopkins) as a confirmed bachelor discovering friendship and then entering into a relationship with Joy Gresham (Debra Winger), an American writer of Jewish descent, converted to Christianity who four years after their wedding dies from cancer. Richard Attenborough, the director, exquisitely depicts the main character's struggles with pain which inescapably leads to the death of the beloved wife. After the diagnosis of bone cancer, the couple spend time together in a picturesque location remembered from Lewis's childhood, the *shadowlands* of the title. During their walk, we can hear one of their most important and beautiful dialogues. Sheltering from the rain under the roof of a field hut, they talk about their inevitable parting getting closer and closer due to Joy's disease. Lewis just wants to stay there in the hut, *he is not waiting for anything new to happen, he is not looking around the next corner and over the next hill*; he is sated with marital love. But Joy, a realist, brings him down to earth spoiling his way of understanding happiness, at the same time, opening a new perspective for him, somewhat more distant but surely much deeper,

¹ Cf. Albert Camus, *The Plague*, Penguin Books Ltd (UK), 2002.

fuller, although not easy to accept. She says: "It's not going to last. ... I'm going to die and I want to be with you then, too. The only way I can do that is if I'm able to talk to you about it now." "I'll manage somehow." "I think it can be better than just managing (pain, suffering, death). What I'm trying to say is the pain then is part of the happiness now. That's the deal".²

I think that this certainty of future happiness, which this temporal life is just a small part of, is a voucher of hope, the reason why it remains unshakeable. This has been shown by God in Jesus Christ Risen and living forever. The blessed and the saints are witnesses to a past lived with the constant thought of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Christ comes from this future to lead us towards it. The Passover of Christ the Lord, passing from death to life, is the event bringing us hope that suffering and death do not have the last word. Moreover, Jesus, in His Passover, shows us the life which evil is not able to destroy. Resurrection is the triumph of the work of God, One in the Holy Trinity. This reveals that God did not create death but its appearance is the result of the envy of the devil – the spirit of iniquity. Hence the joy of our Marian vocation which harmonises with the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and whose best interpretation is the Eucharist – the new creation. The remembrance of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ is the event in which God immersed the Mother of Christ, the Immaculate Virgin of Nazareth. With the power of the future merits of Christ, she is free from the stain of original sin and death has no access to her body. Her body and soul is taken to heaven. *Deus, qui per immaculatam Virginis Conceptionem dignum Filio tuo habitaculum praeparasti, quesumus; ut qui ex morte ejusdem Filii tui praevista, eam ab omni labe praeservasti, nos quoque mundos ejus intercessionem ad te pervenire concedas. Per eundem Dominum.* (O God, who, by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. We ask this through our Lord...)

The Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, as the work of the Trinity, is a revelation of the goodness, love and beauty of God. Spreading devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, we guide the listeners towards Christ's Passover in which the promise and hope of life for the mortal is inherent.

² Cf. Richard Attenborough, *Shadowlands*, 1985

The Passover addresses the fear which comes from the experience of the haphazard nature of creation. Pastoral conversion will rely on the renewal of the kerygma which is gaining importance in the face of secularised and dechristianised communities. Let us recall its core elements; for some, it's just a reminder, but for others – we can't rule it out – a novelty! Let's remember that:

God loves us. This is the foundation of everything. Everything exists because God is Love which wants to be shared. Love brings everything into being. God created the universe and then made man in His own image – a man and a woman, capable to receive and give love. God's Love is the only reason for the existence of anything.

Falling into sin. Man is made by God as a free creation who in his freedom can say *no* to God. And he did – he fell into sin, he detached himself from Love. The plague of sin spread all over the world. Sin destroyed the original peace, joy, happiness and life. That is why we feel that God does not love us, that He turned away from us or that He doesn't exist. Sin separated us from Him, brought suffering and death upon us.

Jesus Christ as the revelation of the madness of God's love. In the sacrifice of the Son, God in His love decides to pay the price for sin Himself and redeems man from death – a scandalous combination of justice and mercy. In Jesus Christ, we recover the Divine sonship

Accepting salvation. Jesus broke the shackles of death but the acceptance of the redemption is up to us. We are still free persons. We are faced with a decision to make: do you accept salvation; do you confess in your heart that it is only Christ who is your Lord and Saviour? Today, we could say that it is a kind of activation of an app. You have it downloaded but its activation is still before you... – is it!?

The Holy Spirit. Inviting Christ to your life obliges you to fight sin and everything that leads to it. Already in the Sacrament of Baptism, there is this question: *Do you reject the glamor of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?* Since we are weak, Jesus gives us The Helper, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit who helps us in our struggle and leads us to the complete truth, to Jesus.

Community. Our earthly journey to heaven is to be made together, in the Church. Starting with the community of the Twelve, through a community of prayer – *where two or three meet in my name or if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all until you are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of the underworld can never overpower it*, Christ gave the signal that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.

The Gospel, with its kerygmatic message, is a fascinating answer for people tormented by suffering and the prospect of death. This message needs to be renewed. It always means a concern to make the ministry of the herald of the Gospel less secular, to be a consecrated person, more focused on obedience to the Revelation; it means greater discipline, a greater strictness of morals, clearer and stronger teaching. The kerygmatic renewal is about bringing the Church closer to the original message of Christ the Lord that the Holy Spirit leads people to Christ and that there is no other Christ than the One presented by the Church who understands the faith in Him expressed in the form of dogma as the truth that obliges the conscience.³

Father Founder, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, shared this kerygmatic message with us pointing to the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. In the November liturgy, we particularly contemplate the triumph of the Church remembering the saints who ascended to the glory of heaven and those who still remain in purification in purgatory as well as those who are still pilgrims on earth. An integral part of a pilgrimage is a struggle. The hope for eternal life is forged in the midst of the earthly reality; alongside happy moments, there are also those marked with pain and tears. There are questions about suffering – why God does not prevent it, maybe He wants us to suffer? We need to talk about pain as a part of the happiness which comes from eternity and is Christ's life, free from death forever. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis's words, we can say that *He wants us to be able to love and be loved. He wants us to grow up. He makes us the gift of suffering. Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world. A man of hope is like a block of stone...out of which the sculptor carves the form of a man. The blows of His chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect.*⁴

The painting, which I would like to propose for meditation, is the work of Cecco del Caravaggio whose real name is Francesco Buoneri or Boneri. Art historians think he may be a servant of Michelangelo Merisi, also called Caravaggio, or his artistic assistant, model, or maybe even an apprentice, most probably the only one. The suggested painting is, the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*. Fortunately, in the context of our meditation, he is the patron saint of the times of plague – he used to be invoked to protect people against the pestilence. He was especially popular in Venice. As always, in the paintings of Caravaggio and his imitators, we are looking at a strong

³ Cf. Paweł Lisicki, *Luter. Ciemna strona rewolucji*, Fronda, Warsaw 2017, p. 23.

⁴ Cf. Richard Attenborough, *Shadowlands*, 1985.



expression of light and shadow. There are many characters in the scene of the painting. Apart from the main character, St. Sebastian, we can see his executioners. They are situated very close to the suffering martyr. The tension of the scene is so great that one can have the impression as if it was seeping outside the painting. Thus the viewer is in close proximity to the characters, their cruelty and the pain of the tormented young man. What is happening in the painting becomes our world. We are a part of the painting, an extension of this brilliant canvas.

Saint Sebastian is shown as a model of Christ. If it wasn't for the arrows stuck in his body we could associate the illuminated body of Sebastian with the scene of the flagellation or the mocking of Jesus. The concept of presenting the saints at the time was showing them as faithful imitators of God's Son – *imitatio Christi*. They were told to take on their cross like Christ, to undertake the passion like Him and to experience the pain of salvation.

Sebastian's body is very stiffened and as if shining. This strong glow is a symbol of the mystic presence of God. The martyr's face can be hardly seen. It is hidden by hands tied above his head, it remains in the shadow.

Cecco hides the saint's face to bring out even more strongly the terror and the dynamics of what is happening in the painting with Sebastian's body and on the faces of his tormentors. They are very active, touching arrows stuck in the tortured body and looking as if taking sadistic pleasure from escalating pain.

Contemplating this scene, there are some emotions, thoughts, maybe even sensations, physical reactions that arise within us. Maybe we will want to escape from our own little pleasures of inflicting pain on others...? Who knows, maybe we will want to lie to our conscience which will suddenly wake up from its lethargy? The killed ones will not say a word and therefore they will not lie. It is only us who will say a lot of words trying to outtalk, or even falsify the inconvenient truth; to lie as a style of life in which bending the truth becomes as natural as breathing.

However, lying is in some sense telling the truth because it never happens without a reason. Reasons for hiding the truth vary: fear is one of them, a sign of weakness, a way of avoiding pain. Fear finds us in places which seemed safe for us. It is fear which constantly sets us in motion; we run away from ourselves, from others. It is fear which makes us dismiss death at all costs. We do not want to stop for death. Movement means life even though once we had *memento mori* (remember death) on our lips and in our hearts. But death stops for us and does not let us forget about its uncompromising nature, a definite end of our earthly pilgrimage. Can we recognise the beginning of the new world in it...?

Questions:

1. What does *memento mori* mean for you?
2. What is your pain and where is God?
3. What is your proclamation of hope in the face of suffering and death like?

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November 2023

The Suffering of a Marian in Community *on the stages of empathy*

The Word of the Lord; 1 Peter 2:21b-23a

Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow in his steps. He had done nothing wrong, and had spoken no deceit. He was insulted and did not retaliate with insults.

SOURCES

Blessed George Matulaitis – Matulewicz, *Journal*,
Stockbridge, 2003, p. s. 123–124

For a long, long time I have not written anything down in this little notebook. But during this period, I have had to endure a great deal. Let it all be for the glory of God. May all these hurts, trials, sufferings, and heartaches be banked as penance for the sins of my past life.

When I became a religious, I did not expect people to hinder me so much in following the footsteps of Christ. If only I did follow them more perfectly, but alas, I still have a long way to go [...] But, after all, Lord, look at what Your saints have had to suffer, Your true servants and followers.

REFLECTIONS

Suffering: stages, types.

Suffering, also for a religious man, is *a mystery*. It is being experienced in a spiritual and human way in varying proportions according to a degree of faith. It can also be accompanied by different stages, e.g.:

- ◆ To consent to it and to accept it in communion with the Passion of Christ and His cross; living in hope that just as the cross has become the price of our eternity (The Liturgy of the Hours, Polish Hymn from Evening Prayer of the 23rd Friday of the Ordinary Time) so the encounter with Christ will be accomplished in glory;
- ◆ to offer suffering for my Religious Family or, more precisely: for the deceased brothers, for an increase of vocations, for the sanctification of the confreres, for rebuilding the relationship of God's love between feuding brothers, for those of us who choose a more comfortable style of life instead of searching for people separated from the Church, for confreres in need of help in overcoming an addiction to nicotine, alcohol, pornography and others, or for oneself, following the example of Father Renovator who wrote in his journal: "May all these hurts, trials, sufferings, and heartaches be banked as penance for the sins of my past life." (18.11.1912);
- ◆ to refuse to accept suffering due to, e.g. a fear of death overshadowing the joy of meeting God after death, the same God about which we have delivered so many sermons and lectures about His love for man ;
- ◆ to have a resentment against God, and even walking away from a relationship with Him.

A religious man suffers either because of personal physical or spiritual pain, or because of the lack of good relationships with persons from the family or the parish. However, suffering which results from difficulties in the relationships with the confreres from the religious house or other structures of the Congregation seems especially hard. The more so, that after consecration, the Marians become a new family to the confrere forever.

References

When suffering, a confrere may adopt and combine together various practical positive ways of coping with pain. Below are three of the many possible references:

◆ **personally**

In reference to, e.g. suffering because of difficult relationships in the Congregation, it is useful to remind yourself of good moments from your religious life so you don't get depressed with thoughts about the difficult interactions with the confreres. Saint Gregory the Great gives helpful advice recalling the figure of Job who, amidst numerous calamities, reminisces

about the sweetness of the blessings he received in the past and says: “If we have received good from the hand of the Lord, why should we not also endure evil?”¹.

♦ **with a confrere**

It seems good to find among the confreres someone trustworthy and virtuous who will accompany you on the path of suffering. Graciously, such a person should be the first to offer to help seeing a confrere suffer. However, if it doesn't happen, you may ask a chosen confrere yourself for company with an intention which is free of selfish and self-centered motivation, e.g. “I don't want to interfere with anybody's work” which, in fact, may smack of pride for fear of e.g. rejection.

Such a request may emphasise the characteristic feature of the charismatic mission of every congregation in the Church. Every community is established in order to imitate Jesus' relationship with the apostles and to live in more perfect unity. More transcendently speaking, it should reflect the relations of the Persons of the Holy Trinity being in a constant Communion of Love.

Entering into such a relationship with a confrere by a suffering religious uncovers an attitude of: the humbleness of the sufferer, opening his heart to a confrere, sharing his own pain and spiritual reflections. For a religious, such a style of going through pain with a confrere may be difficult because of cultural stereotypes of “tough” men who can cope themselves. In this situation, Christ Himself may be an example as many times, He revealed the state of His suffering heart to the apostles, e.g. in the Garden: “My soul is sorrowful (...) stay awake with me.” (Mt 26:38).

Such an attitude can also be a chance for the helping religious to test his own love towards Christ suffering in his brother – how mature his love is and if it is practiced out of love for Jesus, or is it rather helping out of obligation with a hidden aversion. It is no mystery that genuine care for a sick person requires much effort from a caregiver – however, the Kingdom of God will be given to everybody according to their fulfilment of Christ's call: I was “sick and you visited me” (Mt 25:36). Every visit, even if it's just walking a dozen or so steps from one cell to another, becomes a realisation of this rule of love which “covers over many a sin” (cf. 1 Pt 4:8) and a moment of personal sanctification for a helping confrere.

¹ The Moral Reflections on Job by Pope St Gregory the Great, after: The Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings, Week 8, Monday

◆ **with deceased confreres**

Another way of gaining strength in suffering is remembering deceased Marian confreres and their witness of life marked with pain. These are, primarily, the publicly announced saints and blessed patrons of our Congregation. Let us recall difficult moments of their lives:

- St. Stanislaus in the time of, the so called, Lvov cross (pestilence and homelessness), or the rejection by the confreres because of the imprisonment in Prievidza;;
- Blessed George and his suffering from bone tuberculosis or the lack of understanding from both the Polish and Lithuanian people in his episcopal ministry;
- Blessed Anthony and George who suffered along with their parishioners in Rosica;
- The Marian Venerables.

It is also possible to recall by name the deceased confreres who we personally regard as saints, with whom we used to live in the same house, who welcomed us to the Congregation, guided us through the successive stages of formation, who were our confessors or spiritual directors . They also may be asked for help.

It seems to be useful to ask for the help of the saints that we venerate in our own piety shaped perhaps even from our childhood. For example, the significance of pain and its beneficial influence on the development of the spiritual life of a sick person was testified to by Blessed Mother Elżbieta Róża Czacka, the founder of The Society for the Care of the Blind in Laski near Warsaw who lost her sight when she was 22. She said: “*my greatest happiness is that I went blind. Who would I be without this disability?*” “She understood that suffering may be a privileged place of meeting God and reaching the truth which is difficult to perceive by people who are physically healthy and preoccupied with their every-day problems.”²

Asking the deceased for help when suffering is also another aspect of the charismatic mission of the Marians – helping the souls of the dead. St. Father Stanislaus said in *the Mystical Temple of God* that “we shall have in Heaven as many Patrons and helpers as many souls we have brought there,

² Diocesan Bishops’ Council, *Połączyła ich świętość. List z okazji beatyfikacji Kard. Stefana Wyszyńskiego i M. Elżbiety Róży Czackiej (Joined by sanctity, The Letter for beatification of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and M. Elżbieta Czacka)*, Częstochowa 25.08.2021, cf. https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/listy/salvifici.html (access 28.04.2022).

thanks to our help”³. If we believe in the communion of saints (cf. *Constitution and Directory* [...], Rome 2018, C 8, 85) and the Church purifying herself, and the request is addressed to the confreres from my Marian family, this request will also bring them closer to their sanctification. Because we know that when the souls of the dead pray for us and implore graces for us, sufferers, they also are granted the grace of reduced punishment for unrepented sins during their earthly life

As a result, the paradox is that although the living confrere who suffers needs help and the deceased also need help, in the logic of God’s love, they both receive help.

What’s more, these acts can tighten the bonds of the sick person with the religious community, especially if they have weakened in the course of the difficulties of life in the Congregation.

Conclusion

When seeking intercessors, the most valuable prayer is the one addressed to Mary Immaculate to whom a sick confrere has entrusted his life in a special veneration of Her privilege of the Immaculate Conception. This *mystery* was a caring, pure and safe place for Jesus and it is also such a place for everybody who is implanted in Jesus’s life through baptism and more so through religious consecration. She, as a caring Mother, reaches out to everybody in need, and especially to Her spiritual sons who sometimes maybe forget to be continuously grateful for this gift.

Questions:

1. What attitude should I adopt in my sickness?
2. How would I like to help a suffering confrere from my Congregation?
3. What example could I give of a confrere who gave his time for a confrere in pain?

³ St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Mystical Temple of God*, in: Selected Writings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, PROMIC, Warsaw, Poland, Marian Heritage, Stockbridge, MA, USA, 2022, p. 655

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December 2023

***Skin in the Game – the culture
of transferring risk to others
on lost responsibility***

The Word of the Lord 2 Tim 1:6-12

That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess through the laying on of my hands. God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control. So you are never to be ashamed of witnessing to our Lord, or ashamed of me for being his prisoner; but share in my hardships for the sake of the gospel, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy – not because of anything we ourselves had done but for his own purpose and by his own grace. This grace had already been granted to us, in Christ Jesus, before the beginning of time, but it has been revealed only by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus. He has abolished death, and he has brought to light immortality and life through the gospel, in whose service I have been made herald, apostle and teacher. That is why I am experiencing my present sufferings; but I am not ashamed, because I know in whom I have put my trust, and I have no doubt at all that he is able to safeguard until that Day what I have entrusted to him.

SOURCES

**Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers
of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary**

I, N. N., for the glory of the Triune God and to honor the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, to assist the dead, and to spread the Kingdom of God, in the presence of the entire community,

through your hands, Reverend Father, vow to almighty God in the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, according to its Constitutions, the three vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience forever. May God accomplish this in me with the help of this holy Gospel and the intercession of Mary Immaculate, Saint Stanislaus our Founder, and all the Saints. (C 192).

REFLECTIONS

The process of the relativization of reality pushes each community towards its decomposition into still smaller sets, up to loose, inert particles which Michel Houellebecq, a French writer, essayist, poet and even songwriter, described in his book, *The Elementary Particles*, published in France in 1998. In one of the reviews, available after several very simple clicks on a smartphone screen, which helps recalling the essence of the novel, we find a precise description of the problem: "Michel and Bruno are half-brothers. They were abandoned by their parents in their childhood and they were wandering between their grandparents' house and a boarding school. They are now adults, but their childhood drama is still haunting them. They cannot build normal relationships. They are shy, antisocial and, when faced with a crisis, they bury their heads in the sand. One brother becomes a microbiologist. He closes himself in a lab obsessively striving to create a perfect creature, i.e. genderless. The other one slowly loses himself in pornography. He dreams about sexual perversities. But he cannot realise them although the liberated 70s are in full swing."¹ Houellebecq's novel aptly describes the attitudes of modern people towards the world. They have various obsessions which lead them straight to madness and it doesn't really matter if an object of the obsession that leads to insanity is pornography or microbiology, or some other fascination.

We come from the society described by Houellebecq and we are also sent to it. Of course, not everybody becomes insane. Those who don't are those who have constant access to the source of the truth – the Word of the Lord who through the Mystery of the Incarnation in Jesus lets us discover the essence of humanity and the vocation to live in fullness. Being taught and shaped by the power of Jesus' gift, the Holy Spirit, they meet the still

¹ Por. <https://www.taniaksiazka.pl/ksiazka/czastki-elemanetarne-michael-houellebecq> (access 29.04.2022).

growing needs of people living in the world carrying the threat of madness, or at least seriously disrupting the real nature of man and creation. LGBTQ with many additions after “Q” seems to be a *signum* of this process. Many single men from big cities, or even from small towns, single girls (women) chasing an individual career, boys resembling never maturing drones addicted to screens and gadgets, become to some degree representatives of the atomized society. From within the alternative electronic underworld, they bring out human bodies stripped off their dignity, avatars marked by an orgy of emotions hiding individuals aspiring to a quasi-intellectual discourse in a mini version, i.e. in less than two hundred characters, with the help of *selfies*, *screenshots*, *gifs*, etc. and all that to discuss the most burning issues where absolutely everybody can show off some insight, rarely genuine knowledge, without taking any responsibility for the judgments passed. Immersing yourself in Internet life can also contribute to adopting a responsible or an irresponsible demeanour, also by religious persons. Therefore, what should we pay attention to in pastoral discernment in order to teach the people entrusted to us **responsibility**, the virtue exposed today in many ways to effective destruction?

It must be noted that our culture delights in transferring risks to others in order to avoid responsibility. Such an attitude creates people unable to take a risk. This problem has been very well examined by Rafał Ziemkiewicz recalling a scene from *Return from the Stars*, a novel by Stanisław Lem, in which the author writes about people “subjected to a chemical “betrization”, a procedure neutralizing all aggressive impulses. As a result, wars, crime and many other problems troubling the human race for ages have disappeared but at the same time, there was no more curiosity, no willingness to conquer, to make discoveries, to set challenges, to take risks in pursuit of higher values.”²

So how would we describe the phenomenon of risk which involves making decisions which cannot be detached from responsibility? It is the acceptance of the possibility of pain, experiencing discomfort, suffering, or even death. A man of depraved prosperity avoids not only suffering but also tears. Avoiding challenges is about the desire to have no troubles, no regrets and no tears. There shouldn't be anything putting your life at stake. And we all know that risk often causes trouble and pain. They need to be denied, otherwise we would have to show perseverance, fortitude, creative

² Rafał Ziemkiewicz, *Strollowana rewolucja (The trolled revolution)*, fabryka słów, Lublin-Warszawa 2021, p. 211.

effort, risk losing face or even life. How unbelievable must sound the haggling of religious confreres to hard-working, ordinary people, so called lay people, about e.g. another, second shift in a confessional on Sunday, or about the necessity of saying another, merely a second mass because someone got sick or is absent for some other reason. There is no end to complaints on account of overwork. Could it be too much pain or death? In a generation to which we are sent as responsible ministers, there are people who when going to have an interview to get a job or being accepted to a seminary, take their mother or father with them to feel more secure. Their parents are aware of the instability of their pudgy children, incapable of independent struggles or decisions. So it's no surprise that after being accepted for the job that they've dreamed about, or their resourceful parents fought for, they are appalled when they are told to stay overtime, or, heaven forbid, work on a weekend, and even more so when they are held accountable for their wrong decisions. Their frustration will demand therapeutic support and showing them unwavering understanding.

These are the characteristics of the generation which has gotten accustomed to run away from problems instead of solving them. So for those not coping with the world, new sophisticated *alternatives* have been developed in order to ease or altogether avoid existential pain. If you suffer, give up your identity and come up with a new one. If you don't agree with a given role or a task to complete, find something else, become someone else, a different gender, a non-binary person or whoever you want. Keep demanding, stamping your foot so that others show you compassion or even respect in your new identity. Comfort and safety have imperceptibly become an inherent right for this generation. That is why they are less and less willing to take risk and to assume responsibility for it.

The systems, which were conducive to such attitudes, still tempt with the constant safety with its various shades – there is no deprivation, everything comes easily, others do the thinking for me and care for me, there is peace and quiet. Members of this society lack a feeling of strong responsibility for their community, family or even themselves. The meaning of the phrase *Every man is the artisan of his own fortune* has been totally dismissed. The lack of asceticism on an individual level or, even more, on a social level causes that it is no longer an individual, lay or religious, who is an artisan of the future, but an institution, including a congregation, seen in a secular manner, like a company supposed to secure the future of its members. It is an institution which should put an effort, work hard and ensure the greatest possible comfort to the individuals – *elementary parti-*

cles – who are meant just to enjoy life. In exchange for relative obedience, a congregation- institution is supposed to take over an obligation to care for a passive, mediocre, but always loyal individual.

In the times of our Father Stanislaus Papczyński, most probably some kind of a feudal agreement which best reflects this mentality was still in use. This agreement was in the form of a rather original commitment made by peasants to their lord (not to be confused with the text of a renewal of profession!!!): “I (name/family name), lacking the means of sustenance and clothing, place myself in your care and promise throughout the course of my life to serve you and be obedient to you as a free man with no power to remove myself from your custody and care until the end of my days.” Our Father Founder had an entirely different opinion about these feudal dependencies as the testimony of his life would suggest. His life was full of efforts and sacrifices in the name of goals far beyond his capabilities which he chose to face from early on because he recognised God’s will in them. Father Stanislaus shaped his personality in a deep sense of duty and responsibility towards others; especially towards God and the Church

The attitude of Father Papczyński, as well as many other Fathers of our Congregation, to name just a few – Kazimierz Wyszyński, Józef Szwer-nicki, Wincenty Sękowski, Franciszek Buczys, Blessed George Matulaitis, Blessed Andrzej Leszczewic and Jerzy Kaszyra, missionaries from Harbin, Siberia, and today’s ones in the newly established jurisdictions, can be successfully contrasted with the progressing secularization, a significant manifestation of which, is extreme safety and prosperity. These two phenomena promote a decline in responsibility, especially when the sinful nature is not taken up by asceticism, which teaches us renunciation, discipline, empathy for those who are less fortunate, or outright badly off, and constructive involvement in their lives. Another sign of this erosive process is breaking a correlation between rights and obligations. We expect that our needs will be met but we become more and more oblivious to situations evidently requiring sacrifice. On my part, others have to do with what I have been forced to perform, anyway, by an institution under some increasingly incomprehensible power. Meanwhile, it is the willingness to sacrifice that glues a community together. Unfortunately, we don’t inherit it in our genes and that is why we need to work it out in an ascetic effort with eyes fixed on the promise of a reward. We have left our homes, brothers, sisters, parents... to receive much more here and, in the future, to inherit eternal life to which our saintly fathers bear witness. Christ is their reward. It was possible because over the centuries and in various ways, they accepted

and trusted the words spoken to them when making perpetual profession which presently reads: “On behalf of the Church and our fraternal community, I accept your vows and I promise you life eternal from almighty God, if you persevere in your vows”³.

Questions:

1. How do I find myself in the face of the difficulties I encounter?
2. What am I responsible for; what would I like to be responsible for?
3. When and why have I shed a tear – what is the pain I deal with?
4. What ascetic practices do I undertake?

³ *Rites of the Religious Profession in the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, Rome 2015, p. 40.

