

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE ROGATIONIST FATHERS**

16 MAY 1997

*To the Very Reverend Father Pietro Cifuni  
Superior General of the Rogationist Fathers of the Heart of Jesus*

1. The festive occasion of the *first centenary of the foundation of the Congregation of Rogationist Fathers of the Heart of Jesus* (16 May 1897) offers me the welcome opportunity to address to you and to all the sons of Bl. Annibale Maria Di Francia, the Daughters of Divine Zeal and all who share the same ideal, a word of congratulation and good wishes and especially of thanks to God for the gift he has wished to give his Church, enriching her with the "Rogationist" religious charism. The prospect of the approaching third Christian millennium is an additional reason for a celebration that will inspire a renewed commitment to the generous and distinguished service of proclaiming and witnessing to Christ's Gospel in the various countries where they have spread.

2. "*Novum fecit Dominus*" (*Scritti*, vol. I, p. 96; cf. Is 43:19; Rv 21:5). These words of Sacred Scripture, which the father founder was fond of repeating, filled with grateful wonder at the work achieved by the Lord through his humble ministry, re-echo today in the souls of his sons and daughters, leading them to relive that sudden luminous insight that enflamed his heart, making him certain that he had "discovered the secret of all good works and of the salvation of all souls" (*Antologia Rogazionista*, p. 382).

*"Rogate ergo Dominum messis, ut mittat operarios in messem suam"* (Mt 9:38): here is the joyful discovery of Bl. Annibale Maria Di Francia. As he meditated on these words of Jesus, he understood the apostolic anxiety of his divine Heart at the sight of the crowds "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36), and he made it his own, basing his whole life and apostolate on it. Your founder was already dedicating himself with all his strength, as he himself says, to the spiritual and temporal relief of the most neglected, but he wondered to himself: "Who are these few orphans who are saved, these few poor who are evangelized, in comparison with the millions who are lost and who lie abandoned without a shepherd?" (*Antologia Rogazionista*, p. 382). This is the "vast and immense way forward", as he describes it, which was pointed out to him through those words of the Lord.

In making them his own, he made his own the Heart of Christ: his compassion for the scattered children of God who must be led back to the unity of a single family (cf. Jn 11:52). With Christ he entrusted himself to the Father, transforming into a prayer inspired by the Spirit the

invocation of salvation for the countless ranks of men and women who had still not received the glad tidings of the coming of God's kingdom.

3. Thus the tiny shoot of an institution started to sprout, as from a small seed; today it is flourishing and bears abundant fruit. It is both a school of holiness, in the demanding following of Christ the Lord by way of the evangelical counsels, and a precious and providential instrument of charity and evangelization.

In the footsteps of Bl. Annibale Maria Di Francia, the Rogationists have inherited the vocation of imitating Christ, the heart of the world: a heart filled with understanding and brimming with love for the brothers and sisters waiting for the Word of salvation and the Bread of Life; a heart that, with trusting perseverance, never tires of praying the Father to "send labourers into his harvest".

In fidelity to the specific charism of their foundation, they are called to respond, first of all, to the *call to holiness on the path of the evangelical counsels*.

As I recalled in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, in the midst of our contemporaries it is an eloquent "confession and a sign of the Trinity", because it is nourished with an increasingly sincere and forceful love "for Christ, which leads to closeness with him; love for the Holy Spirit, who opens our hearts to his inspiration; love for the Father, the first origin and supreme goal of the consecrated life" (n. 21).

The very prayer of the "*Rogate*", source of an original form of apostolic life, is not merely a *prayer addressed to God*, but a *prayer lived in God*: for it is conceived in union with the merciful heart of Christ, motivated by the "sighs" of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:26) and addressed to the Father, the source of all good.

4. Bl. Annibale Maria Di Francia, docile to the divine Master's teachings and inwardly guided by the impulse of the Spirit, highlighted the conditions and characteristics of that *prayer* which make it an *ecclesial work "par excellence"*, yielding abundant fruit for the Church and for the world.

The first condition is to put *the Blessed Eucharist at the centre* of personal and community life, in order to learn from it how to pray and love according to the Heart of Christ, indeed, to unite the offering of his own life with the offering Christ makes of his, continuing to intercede with the Father on our behalf (cf. Heb 7:25; 9:24). After the founder's example, may every member of the Rogationist family be a profoundly Eucharistic soul!

The second condition is the *unanimity of hearts* that makes prayer acceptable to God: "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:19-20). "I say", said the blessed founder, "that the commandment given by our Lord Jesus Christ:

'Love one another as I have loved you', which is what distinguishes true Christians, is the principal commandment of this institute, as is that of loving God above all things with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's strength" (*Antologia Rogazionista*, p. 511).

The third condition on which the founder insisted is *intimate association with the suffering of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus* through the practice of meditation and the generous acceptance, day after day, of exterior and interior suffering, one's own and that of others, especially that endured by Holy Church, the Bride of Christ.

Finally, Bl. Annibale Maria stressed the need to *conform one's life to that of Mary most holy*, who in her Immaculate Heart bore "engraved in golden letters all the words spoken by Jesus Christ our Lord", and who therefore could not but bear within herself "those words that issued from the divine zeal of the Heart of Jesus: '*Rogate ergo Dominum messis...*'" (*Scritti*, vol. 54, p. 165).

5. It is not surprising that *an intense and generous apostolic activity* should have sprung from the profound doctrine and experience of the "*Rogate*" prayer, both in the dissemination of this spirit of prayer, in the promotion of vocations and in the formation of children and young people, especially the poor and abandoned, and finally, in evangelization and in the human advancement of the neediest social classes.

In fact, service to the young and the poor, in the spirit of your father founder, is not only the necessary test of the sincerity of your prayer, but stems from deep penetration into the sentiments of the Heart of Christ who blessed the Father because he hid the secrets of the kingdom from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes (cf. Mt 11:25).

On the other hand, the invitation of Jesus, "Come and see" (Jn 1:39), is "the golden rule of pastoral work" even today, because it "aims at presenting the attraction of the person of the Lord Jesus and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel" (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 64). Furthermore, this is why Bl. Annibale Maria insisted tirelessly on persevering union with God and on union among his brothers: unity, in fact, "is a symbol of the coming of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; 17:21) and is a source of great apostolic power" (Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, n. 15).

6. Very Reverend Father and dear spiritual sons of Bl. Annibale Maria Di Francia, your vocation is in the "*Rogate*" spirit; your mission consists in spreading it! May the richness and timeliness of the charism of which you are the heirs and trustees spur you more each day to make its gifts of grace bear fruit for your religious family, for your path of evangelical perfection, for your distinguished and generous service to the whole Church.

The modern means that human sciences and contemporary technology make available and that you rightly try to use in your apostolic work will only be effective if they are sustained and

guided by the original charismatic inspiration of the blessed founder, **who saw in the "Rogate" the means God himself had provided to bring about that "new and divine" holiness with which the Holy Spirit wishes to enrich Christians at the dawn of the third millennium, in order to "make Christ the heart of the world".**

It is not without providential coincidence that 16 May 1897, the date on which 100 years ago the first three young men formed by Bl. Annibale entered the novitiate, was precisely the Fourth Sunday of Easter, "Good Shepherd Sunday". On that same Sunday the Servant of God Paul VI, my venerable Predecessor, established the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. On the occasion of your founder's beatification (7 October 1990), I also wanted to hold up Annibale Maria Di Francia to the Church as the "authentic precursor and zealous teacher of the modern pastoral ministry of vocations" (*Insegnamenti*, XIII, 2 [1990], 830).

Today and increasingly, "the problem of vocations is a real challenge which directly concerns the various institutes but also involves the whole Church", so that "we must also pray unceasingly to the Lord of the harvest, that he will send workers to his Church in order to meet the needs of the new evangelization" (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 64). It must never be forgotten that "a Church which evangelizes is a Church that prays to have evangelizers" (*Address to the Council of European Episcopal Conferences*, 11 October 1985, n. 15; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 21 October 1985, p. 3).

This institute, in a spirit of full communion with the whole Church and of fidelity to the charism of its blessed founder, has the urgent task of praying for and of encouraging prayer for vocations. May every spiritual child of Bl. Annibale Maria Di Francia deepen his knowledge of the gift he has received and enliven it, becoming an increasingly worthy labourer of the Gospel and a shepherd after the Heart of Christ.

I commend to Mary the ministry this congregation is called to carry out in the Church and, as I implore an abundance of divine grace on you, Very Reverend Father, on your brothers and sisters and on all your co-workers, I sincerely impart the favour of my Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of special affection.

*From the Vatican, 16 May 1997.*

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