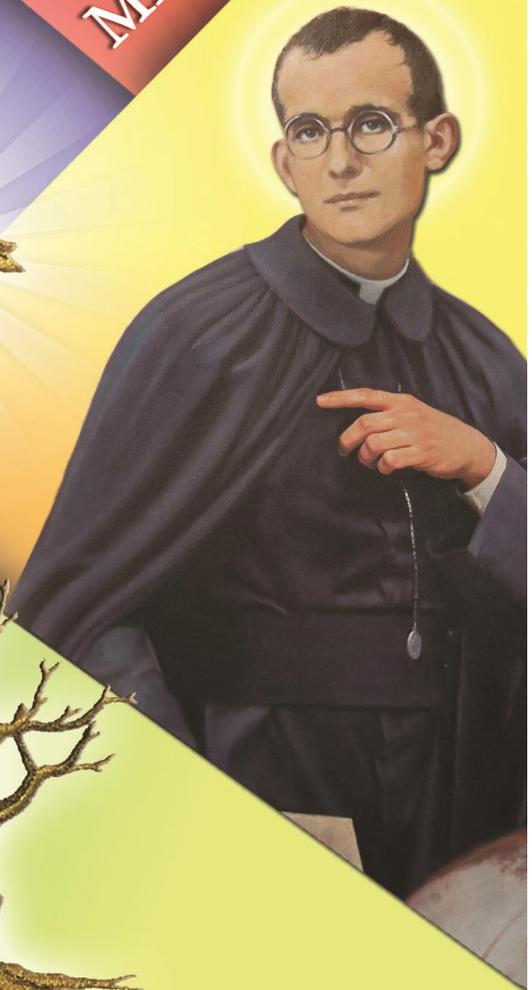
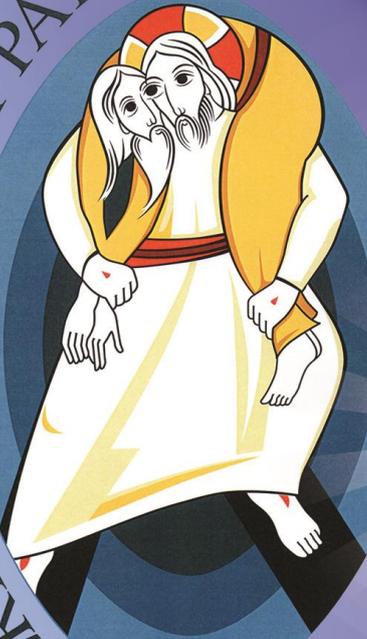


Societas Vocationum Divinarum



IUBILAEUM MISERICORDIAE

MISERICORDES SICUT PATER



Avvento - Advent - Adviento - Avent - Advento
2015

Rome, 29th November
First Sunday of Advent

Object: Waiting for the hour of mercy (Fr Justin, Works – vol. 15, p. 247)

My dear confreres,

Jesus, Mary, Joseph!

May God Holy Spirit unite always more with the Son to the Father!

I am writing to you with a heart filled with joy and hope, almost in a hurry, to invite each and every one of us to live together this holy year of mercy, which will begin on the 8th December, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and will end on the 20th November 2016, Solemnity of Jesus Christ, Lord and King of the Universe.

It is a holy year for the whole Church; I am sure that not only Catholics, but also many men and women of good will, will be touched by the infinite mercy of god, Creator and Redeemer of the universe. At times, I have the feeling, maybe with a bit of presumption, that it will be a unique occasion for our Congregation that will always recognise that it was born from the merciful heart of the Holy Trinity and that will still let itself be flooded by this river of life, joy, serenity and peace. Something tells me that the best way to live this year of mercy is to do it as Vocationist.

My conviction finds its raison d'être in these words of Pope Francis in the bull of indiction of the holy year: *We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the*

very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.¹

I like reading, in this definition of the Pope, with many shades and dynamics, the richness of the faces with which mercy manifests itself, and many times, we just reduce it only to the dimension of forgiveness. Going back to the Greek word σπλάγχνα, we can see that is about the dwelling place of feelings, and among these, the guts, the uterus, the heart. Then, horizons open wide and we realise that our life, all our life is a merciful act of God. An act of mercy is not only forgiving but is to give life, to give back life, promote life, search for the lost life as the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, of the good Samaritan, of the sinner in Simon's house, etc. remind us.

That is why I believe it will be for us Vocationists the proper time to go back on the way of the Gospel. The Gospel that is a declaration, affirmation and manifestation of God's love for man, for every man, for humanity! By returning to the Gospel, all of us can enjoy that life of abundance that the Lord has come to bring us. (Jn 10: 10).

I believe that all of us surely will have the chance, if not of walking through one of the Holy Doors of the Papal Basilicas, surely to walk through the so called "Door of Mercy", which will be opened in all cathedrals, co-cathedrals or churches of special importance or other sanctuaries, chosen by the local ordinaries, *fully confident that the strength of the Risen Lord, who constantly supports us on our*

¹ Pope Francis, *Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy – Misericordiae Vultus*, 2

*pilgrim way, will sustain us.*² I was overjoyed when I came to know that both St Mary's Parish in Walsall, in the Archdiocese of Birmingham (England), and St Winefride's Shrine in Wrexham Diocese (Wales), both entrusted to us, have been chosen by their local ordinaries as Jubilee Churches where the Door of Mercy will be opened. Along with this, I ardently desire that in all our communities around the world, windows will be opened in advance so that the breath of the Holy Spirit may enter; this will make us welcome God's mercy in our hearts and, in turn, it will be sign of brotherhood, rebirth, communion and celebration for the communities themselves.

My dear confreres, let us open ourselves to this gift that the Merciful Father will generously send from above to each one of us in proportion of our will, our predisposition, of our openness, of our agreement. Let us not give for granted that we do not need ourselves of progressing in faith, hope and charity. In the school of Christian virtues, let us not forget that we never become masters without remaining eternal disciples. As we have overlooked the many values that nourish and strengthen consecrated life, we find in not few religious and priests lacking the basic Christian principles. Here is the proper time of start walking again!

The trait of God's mercy in our Founder

Our founder, aware that mercy is not only an attribute of God, but it is His own nature, has invoked it, embraced it, and to it he has totally abandoned and entrusted himself. There has not been just one attitude in the life of our Blessed Father that was not an expression of divine mercy! I really appreciated the definition that the auxiliary bishop of Rome, Mgr. Guerino Di Tora has given ABOUT our founder: "[...] witness of merciful call , exactly because

² Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 4

he was prompt in serving the vocation to life, to faith and to holiness for all.”³

Seeing in the neighbour, the living image and likeness of the Trinity, he could not enter in a relationship with everyone if not in true spirit of charity. He reached the source, so that, as a river, spread life wherever he passed. Mgr. Enrico Nicodemo, Archbishop of Bari, stated about him that *the same piety that got him closer to God’s holiness, it is the same that got him closer to human weakness, which he knew to look at always with mercy.*⁴

Fr Justin has constantly called his sons and daughters to resort to the divine mercy as a healing medicine, powerful source of reconciliation and repentance and as a powerful mean to avoid the prejudice that is the reaction of the one who is impatient with someone else’s conversion. He even welcomed as a sign of mercy the apostolic visitators that reduced him, as it indeed happened, to be a *shadow superior*. Let us read what he wrote in one of the most critical moments of the life of the Congregation: *Let us intensify prayers and good works for the Congregation, and even more the personal religious observance on the Holy Apostolic Visitations as well, of which we had particular grace of the mercy of the Most Holy Trinity. I have moved to Camporotondo under obedience to the Most Rev. Visitor* (Works - vol.14, p. 434). What an example of serene, trusting and obedient abandonment to divine mercy!

He always insisted in the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, not only as sure means of salvation or profit of the indulgence to enter into heaven. It is also the natural consequence

³ Greco P., *Misericordiosi come il Padre; carità, grazia e misericordia nell’insegnamento del Beato Giustino Russolillo*, Duminuco Editore, Sapri (SA) 2015, p. 4.

⁴*Canonizationis Servi Dei Iustini Mariae Russolillo*, Positio Super Vita et Virtutibus, Vol. I, p. CXXIX.

of who knows the Gospel and wants to adopt it as rule of life; because for Fr Justin, heaven is not only the place where one enters as saved, but it is a continuous following of spiritual progresses and God's surprises.

In Pope Francis I find always more current the thought of our Founder, when he recalls the teaching of Vatican II on universal sanctification, the constant invitation to progress and advance always more, the awareness that heaven is not a closed box for those who reached it, but it is a progressive manifestation of new surprises of God. This is how the Pope comments the verse of Psalm 136: *To repeat continually 'for his mercy endures forever,' as the psalm does, seems to break through the dimensions of space and time, inserting everything into the eternal mystery of love. It is as if to say that not only in history, but for all eternity man will always be under the merciful gaze of the Father.*⁵

Let us prepare ourselves then to live this moment of grace intensely! In order to live it ourselves first, I propose for me and you to make some resolutions to be observed seriously, with the aim to be loved in order to love, not to fall into temptation of proposing to people what we ourselves did not want to welcome or what we did not do ourselves first.

1. Let's begin among us

Fr Justin used to introduce at the beginning of an annual spiritual retreat (called feast of the divine union) to the Vocationist Sisters, from the 28th July to the 5th August 1940, some the dispositions or attitudes in order to make spiritual retreat very successful. Among these dispositions there was the

⁵ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 7.

forgiveness, even, of *the plenary indulgence for all those who made us suffer.*⁶

How can we not propose again, after 75 years, for this joyous occasion of the holy year, this predisposition valid for every day of our lives? The reason is the same and the founder himself is the one who clarifies it for us: *We have to lay everything of the pure mercy of God! We know that it is all mercy of God, but it is also true that the Lord has established a correspondence between his forgiveness and ours; and this is so that we might find, in our forgiveness, a sign and an argument of assurance of God's forgiveness. If, instead, we had nothing to forgive to others we might very cruelly doubt that maybe the Lord has not forgiven us!*⁷

The founder then continues: *It is necessary therefore the practice of forgiving whoever made us suffer: superiors, equals and inferiors; interns and externs: about our personal reputation, interests and finances...in everything! For every offense... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. For all those who might have cheated, betrayed, criticised us a nice bunch; may they be true things of false, or even simply our imagination that made us equally suffer. Only the exercise of forgiveness attracts on us a great complacency from God.*⁸

When it comes to the parable of the wicked servant, precisely in Mt 18: 35, our Founder is very much in tune with Pope Francis when he makes comments on its ending. This parable contains a profound teaching for all of us. Jesus affirms that mercy is not

⁶ Giustino M. Russolillo, *Io sono la vite, voi i tralci*, p. 15.

⁷Op. cit. p. 16.

⁸ Ibid

only an action of the Father; it becomes a criterion for discerning who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle's exhortation: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year.⁹

I feel deeply ashamed acknowledge that in our Congregation there are some long-standing enemies, indifference and opposition feelings between peoples, and that some people do not even greet each other, etc. In addition, to think that these same confreres are, for God's grace, Ministers of forgiveness, therefore counsellors of reconciliation when it comes to others.

I can understand that one confrere is keener on one rather than another, that they may share way of doing things, of thinking, etc. but reject, despise and undermine, slander others that do not belong to our click or for any other reason, this is diabolic and mortifies and disqualifies their consecration; their priesthood is of scandal for the Congregation, for the Church.

I have said Ministers of forgiveness but they may even be reduced to mere ministers, as Pope Francis reminded us, while

⁹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 9.

in Cuba, quoting St Ambrose: “*Where there is mercy, the Spirit of Jesus is there; where there is rigor, his ministers alone are there.*”¹⁰

Dear brothers, I implore you, in the name of the divine mercy, to establish among us a more brotherly, more evangelical atmosphere! Let’s stop, let’s stop, as we are already late, let’s stop of speaking ill of our confreres, of handing from generation to generation faults of the past and continuing to condemn or label others. You feel in the right to do so just because God, in his mercy, has not yet let out your secret faults.

Let us stop being two-faced according to the situation and to be like chameleons, canonising or condemning the same person aiming to save ourselves or to get consensus. Let us stop scattering the seed of division, throwing shade on our Mother Congregation, let’s put a hold on our tongues which are causing so much evil. Let us take leave from gossip that maybe occupy our tongue more than any other thing. How can we, with same mouth, the same tongue, announce the Gospel and talk about god and then use the same mouth and the same tongue to cause so much pain to my brother? Do we really believe in who we are and in what we do? Are we religious to find shelter and priests for business?

Let’s take seriously Pope Francis’ admonition if we want to be credible witnesses of God’s mercy: *How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a*

¹⁰ Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Le parole di Papa Francesco, da Cuba a Filadelfia, una missione d’amore, p. 30

*positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment, our presumption to know everything about him.*¹¹

I want to bring to your knowledge what Pope Francis said to the clergy and religious of the Diocese of Naples during his visit on the 21st March. “[...] *To me, the sign that that there is no fraternity, whether in the presbyterate or in religious communities is when there is gossip. And allow me to use this expression: the terrorism of gossip, because one who gossips is a terrorist dropping a bomb, destroying from the outside — not even like a Kamikaze, but destroying others instead. Gossip destroys and is the sign that there is no fraternity. When someone meets a priest who has different views... because there are always differences, it’s normal, it’s Christian — these differences should be clarified with the courage to say it face to face. If I have something to say to the Bishop, I go to the Bishop and I can even say to him: ‘But, you are unpleasant’, and the Bishop must have the courage not to seek revenge. This is brotherhood! Or when you have something against someone else and instead of going to him you go to another person. There are problems both in religious life and in presbyterial life, which must be addressed, but only between two people. If this cannot be done — because sometimes it can’t be — tell it to someone who can act as an intermediary. But you must not speak against the other, because gossip is a form of terrorism that disrupts diocesan fraternity, priestly fraternity, religious communities.*”¹²

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 14.

¹² Pope Francis, Meeting with the Clergy, Men and Women Religious and Permanent Deacons gathered in the Cathedral, Naples, 21st March 2015

I cannot hide how my personal embarrassment when I am preaching to people, because my thought goes back to the religious community which I belong to. It is like a thermometer for me by which, I can test, not necessarily the truth within the homily, but surely the consistency or inconsistency of words and behaviour, between what is said and done, between what I propose and how much I propose myself. The intellect could be even filled with theological, exegetical information or by the Bible itself, but when the heart is hardened, even by performing miracles, we take the risk of hearing the same words Jesus has for those who thought of having assured himself a place with him just because he carried in his CV prophecies made in his name, many demons cast out and also many miracles performed: I never knew you; depart from me. (Mt 7:23)

When will we realise that, starting from ourselves, we have to promote the culture of the encounter, of forgiveness, of dialogue and of fest? When will we free ourselves from these wounds that continue to bleed and hurt because of the lack of forgiveness? When will we be free? When will we set our way of life as consecrated people as form of life according to the Gospel? Here is the proper time! Let us be touched by God's forgiveness that heals and renews. Let us try to open ourselves to every confreres by offering forgiveness all those who made us suffer: *superiors, equals and inferiors; interns and externs: about our personal reputation, interests and finances in everything!*¹³ Here is the proper time!

2. Celebration of mercy and of forgiveness in all our vocationist reality.

¹³ Giustino M. Russolillo, *Io sono la vite, voi i tralci*, p. 16.

Intensify, but truly, the practice of piety for the congregation, and continue them until we will start together the solemn thanksgiving of divine mercy (Works, vol. 16, p. 495).

The natural and spontaneous way to make God's mercy visible for us is to sing it, celebrate it. When Mary, Zachariah and Elizabeth, at the beginning of Luke's gospel, break out in songs, hymns and poems it means that the personal encounter with the merciful God can only be sung, celebrated. It is the best way to tell about it.

Without denying the reality of sin, internal inclinations to evil, we can take always, along with our Blessed Founder, as a starting point that "much greater", also in reference to the divine mercy. We can find in this reality, numerous reasons for thanksgiving and lauds that, by being celebrated in community, will make us reproduce among us the same feeling of the Blessed Trinity and by being so, more than attracting merciful acts to others, we will present ourselves as merciful as the Father is merciful toward his sons.

Here it is the conviction of our Founder that should be ours as well: *Blessed are you that make me sense and understand, feel and experience that the influence and the action of your sanctifying grace is even greater. I believe and hope, o Lord, that the attractions of your beauty and sweetness, of your happiness and glory, are even greater than the seduction of the world. I believe and hope, Lord, that the arts and means of your ministers, angels and priests, of the Mother Church and of Mary are grater that the snares of the enemy. I believe and hope, o Lord, that the virtues and gifts you give in the soul, your illuminations and internal inspirations are greater than the inclinations of evil. (Works – vol.2, p. 229).*

It is with these feelings that I heartily invite all superiors of our communities to make our chapels, the hearts of our houses, the place where will go up to the Trinity, liturgies of thanksgiving, of praise, of adoration, of exaltation for all the good worked in our Vocationist Family. I firmly believe that we have more to be thankful for than to ask. The bible verse “eternal is his mercy” would be enough to fill all places, all the daily time, all the instants of our existence, of spirit of oration and of atmosphere of mercy especially for us.

Besides solemn Eucharistic celebrations, the prayers outlined in our constitutions, the devotional acts, I ask **that every day of the holy year of mercy the prayer, found at the end of this letter and prepared for this single occasion, be prayed.** It needs to be prayed in community at the end of the intercession or invocations of Morning or Evening Prayers.

I invite you to observe the rising rather early (normal for a religious) to assure a worthy moment of community prayer but, at the same time, I suggests that an old vocationist tradition may be restored. It is a rather nice and significant tradition done in spirit of penance, and is the one of **the rising during the night at least once a month**, exactly how our blessed Founder outlined it in the rules and Constitutions: “*The whole community should have together a sacred vigil in the central midnight of every month, that is from the fifteenth to the sixteenth day, with the singing of the Litanies of Our Lady and Eucharistic blessing not solemnly. It should not last longer than an hour, generally half hour is enough.*”¹⁴ Let us strengthen the Eucharistic adoration for vocations, the prayer

¹⁴ Don Giustino, Opere Vol. 24 Costituzioni, n° 169 e cfr. Opere Vol. 22 n° 1510, Vol. 23 n° 6.

of the Te Deum and let us **pray often the Litany of Divine Mercy**, also after the offertory.

One of the books of Sacred Scriptures that expresses more God's mercy is the book of Jonah and, is not a coincidence; it is this characteristic of God that troubles the prophet. At the same time, this book shows the greatness of the mercy of God, it also shows how much it imposes a radical change of mentality. The repentance of the people of Nineveh makes us think that the mercy of God asks us to give up certain criteria of discernment to take on other new ones. *What is true is not painless*. The fact that the Lord gives us time, ways, spaces to change ourselves is a manifestation of mercy that is "widened" in us, in proportion that the heart is "open" to changing.

A real change calls for renunciations, cuts, penance, mortifications and above all asking for forgiveness. The Pope states that *"The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope."*¹⁵ Yes, dear brothers! The time for forgiveness has come for us as well and it will be an opportunity we cannot miss if we do not want to get lost.

Regarding this, following the example of St John Paul II, I ask that in the whole Congregation a **Vocationist Day of Pardon** is to be celebrated. It is an occasion in which, with sincerity of heart, we want to acknowledge and ask publicly forgiveness for all our faults, past and present, that impede the Congregation to be transparency of God's mercy. With this action, we want to

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 10.

unlock, for what depends on us, that lock that seems to be blocking the door towards higher flights and pay the debt of incorrespondence. We need to ask forgiveness to the Lord for all past and present sins of the Vocationists as a strong sign of the Jubilee Year that is, in its nature, moment of conversion.

I ask that, in this year of mercy, the Congregation, strong of the sanctity that receives from its Lord, may kneel down in front of God and may implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of its children. All have sinned and nobody can call himself just in front of God (cf. 1Kg 8:46)... we have been invited to take charge, in front of God and men offended by our behaviour, of the mistakes we have done. We will do it without asking anything back, strong only of “God’s love [that] has been poured into our hearts” (Rom 5:5) (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 11; cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 33).

“We cannot cross the Holy door without purification, in repentance for errors, infidelities, inconsistencies and slowness to act” (TMA 33). The liturgy of asking for forgiveness to God for the sins committed by the Vocationists during the last years, therefore, is not only legitimate, but it is the most adequate form to express the repentance and to obtain purification.

This liturgy, remembering the sins committed, make real the request for forgiveness and open the way to a commitment taken, in front of both God and men: it opens a way to conversion, of change compared to the past.

In order to make sure that it is an occasion for everyone, I ask of Provincials, Delegates and Regional Superiors to include the event in one of the moments of assembly, gatherings or meetings. Please, communicate the chosen date to the General Secretary in order for it to be added into the general

programme, so that all brothers may know where and when the Vocationist Day of Pardon is celebrated in the world and unite them in prayer.

Together with the local celebration, I will celebrate on behalf of the whole congregation the Day of Pardon on the 17th June 2016, during the extraordinary general assembly we have called here in Italy.

I want that this event may be like our own pilgrimage to the source of the vocationist mercy, this is why will start it from the “Pagliarella”, scenery of manifestation of mercy of the Trinity toward our beloved founder and towards his and our Religious Family. It was there, near the Pagliarella that Fr Justin defined us “sons of the cross”, this is why we have thought of preparing a big cross that will be carried by the sons and daughters of the Blessed to the Vocationary where he celebration will end.

I ask to the dear Fr Costantino Liberti, Novice Master and Secretary of the Vocationist Italian Province but also MC in the feasts of Congregation, to prepare for Italy, but surely it could be used in other parts of the world where we are present, a format of a penitential celebration (every country will adapt it to its reality) to be used on the Vocationist Day of Pardon.

The insistence that the Day of Pardon may be celebrated is only to make sure that the love of Christ, manifested especially in forgiveness, may be our way of life, to allow that where the Vocationists are, because we are Church and *wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a*

*word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.*¹⁶

We are also looking into the possibility of having a pilgrimage to Poland, in the places of St Faustina and St John Paul II, apostles of the Divine Mercy. You cannot imagine how happy would I be to live with many of you this moment of family, reason why we will make everything possible to us to communicate with advance notice dates and means of the trip.

3. Special attention to those in need

In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care. Let us not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism! Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12.

*that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!*¹⁷

I want to reiterate once again my belief that those who are first of all in need are the elected of the divine vocations. Our Congregation within the Church, the Society of Divine Vocations embraces as its own particular mission, the searching out and formation of Priestly and Religious vocations, especially among the underprivileged, through its characteristic work, the Vocationary. (Constitutions, 5) I am sure that the year of mercy will make us more sensible to what is proper to us. When the heart will truly be flooded by mercy for vocations and we will live as true Vocationists, as Fr Justin desired we might be, renunciation to what is superfluous in order to assure what is essential to everyone will come natural and those who do not wish to live in this way will feel out of place. The dream of giving everything to the communities so that nothing essential or necessary would be missing to any religious and giving the rest to the “centre” so that no mission may not be sustained is slowly becoming a reality but we are still a long way off. I hope that the mercy of God will work towards this conversion!

While from peripheries of our Congregation hands are held towards the centre, I renew my heartfelt invitation to the many confreres that, given the places they occupy, have more chances to make people aware of , to turn their hearts towards our peripheries, open your hearts and the doors of your parishes to our missionaries and formators that continue to trust especially the divine providence, through missionary appeals, pro-Vocationary days, adoptions, etc. Promote some extra activity to benefit one or any other mission!

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 15

Preferential options for the poor, territorial or existential peripheries, the least, etc. for Fr Justin did not constitute expressions of a trend but it was a lived theology, it was his way to love, it was the natural form to respond to his vocation, it was fertile ground for the practice of corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Let's think, not only to the great heart of this Father that welcomes all young men that were struggling to pay for the seminary but also to betrayed vocations or in serious difficulty of whom few or no one took care.

In this time of indifference, disposal, selfishness, autoreferentiality, what is the place our elderly and sick confreres occupy within our communities? Independently from medical insurance, I suppose that in Italy there are no problems, do they feel loved, wanted, taken into consideration?

Yes! It is the elected of the divine vocations to whom our corporal and spiritual works of mercy are directed to and I believe I am not betraying our charism when I say that. Moreover, I find reassurance in Fr Justin when he says that the rule wants that we exercise the corporal work of mercy for clergy as well (elderly, poor and sick) (Works – vol.13, p. 335).

Surely the charism is not a bottle of distilled water and we should avoid hiding ourselves behind what is proper to our charism and our proper mission, that is of impediment to seeing the real necessity, but on the other side we also have to try to avoid to look at the necessities without the particular insight of one's own charism, ending up in uniforming and flattening diversity.¹⁸

¹⁸ Papa Francesco, *Illuminare il futuro; una conversazione raccontata da Antonio Spadaro*. Ancora, 2015, pp.46-47.

We welcome then this flood of saints and of holy works wanted by our Founder but that it may be truly fruit of the mature listening, of discernment, of accompaniment, of closeness to the Congregation, of the *sensus congregationis*, of mutual communion, free and joyous dependence.

I push the confreres to actually respond to the need of our time! Where there is a vocation that needs to be promoted or saved, of course the Vocationist has to be involved, but where there is a life to be saved we should not ask which Congregation he belongs to. Momentarily we have stopped the sale of our house of Anagni waiting for courageous vocationists that would take it, welcome vocations and bring it back to life, as it has happened to Perdifumo, a building which people would have given up on but thanks to the commitment of Fr Johnny Kaitharath is blossoming again. Also, we have made available to Fr Antonio Coluccia the house of Anagni as an extension of his work to benefit the least. I hope we soon will find a way not see it crumbling down while there is a multitude populating seas, deserts and cities looking for a place where to take up their lives.

If we cannot do much, we can do little, but something needs to be done. Here it is why I invite parish priests, superiors, everyone, in a way or in another, to intensify **the charity towards those in need, honouring St Joseph, as our Blessed used to, every Wednesday**, even if in different ways, answering the need of our time. In every community, every Wednesday, we used to have a procession with the image of St Joseph and then at the entrance one used to find a statue or an image of Mary and Joseph, and now...? Please, **let us start again on Wednesday the prayer and the litany of St Joseph. I ask that in our kitchens and in our refectories (the place where we have meal) there may be an image or a statue of St Joseph.** I was glad to see that

in some community in Italy or abroad that in the place where the meals are consumed, there are statues or images of St Joseph with a candle next to it that remains lit for the duration of the meal. My predecessor, Fr Caputo, asked that the healthy tradition of adding a prayer to St Joseph at the end of the blessing of the meals with the prayer “St Joseph provide for us”. Is it still done....? Otherwise, let us start it again.

4. Practice of the Lectio Divina

We want to live this Jubilee Year in light of the Lord’s words: Merciful like the Father. The Evangelist reminds us of the teaching of Jesus who says, “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). It is a programme of life as demanding as it is rich with joy and peace. Jesus’s command is directed to anyone willing to listen to his voice (cf. Lk 6:27). In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us. In this way, it will be possible to contemplate God’s mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle.¹⁹

The Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, result of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church, celebrated from the 5th to the 26th October 2008, expresses thus the great bond between consecrated life and the Word of God and also the importance of the Lectio Divina: *With regard to the consecrated life, the Synod first recalled that it “is born from hearing the word of God and embracing the Gospel as its rule of life”. A life devoted to following Christ in his chastity, poverty and obedience thus becomes “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word”. The*

¹⁹Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 13.

Holy Spirit, in whom the Bible was written, is the same Spirit who illumines “the word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it”, thus opening up new pathways of Christian living marked by the radicalism of the Gospel. Here I would mention that the great monastic tradition has always considered meditation on sacred Scripture to be an essential part of its specific spirituality, particularly in the form of lectio divina. Today too, both old and new expressions of special consecration are called to be genuine schools of the spiritual life, where the Scriptures can be read according to the Holy Spirit in the Church, for the benefit of the entire People of God. The Synod therefore recommended that communities of consecrated life always make provision for solid instruction in the faith-filled reading of the Bible.²⁰

How can we think of a Vocationist, *man of the Book*, without a profound intimacy with the word of God, the great love letter of the Most High to humanity (Works – vol. I, 290)? How can we think of a Vocationist without attending *the school of the Word*? How can we think of expressions such as *direct words of Jesus, spiritual illumination, mental prayer, understanding and application of the word, flood of peace and sweetness, the soul all pacified and vivified, reflect on it the whole of the following day, announce it with passion, listen to it with passion*, used by Fr Justin, always referring to the word of God, without thinking of him as someone who was assiduous in practising the Lectio Divina?

Let us undertake with determination and perseverance this daily audience with Jesus-Gospel following the practice of the

²⁰Benedetto XVI, *Esortazione Apostolica Verbum Domini*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2010, p. 164, n. 83.

Founder that pushes us to conviviality with the Word for obvious reasons: *From Sacred Scripture, the soul will obtain the weapon of victory over temptations, the ray of light for every shadow or doubt, consolation for every pain, and strength for every weakness. With this in mind, the memory should become an unyielding coffer of divine words.* (Works – vol. 1, 287)

Given for granted that every vocationist religious practices every day the vocationist mental prayer (Meditation, Examinations of Conscience and meditated readings), I propose to all houses of formation, where this is not a practice yet, **a weekly communitarian meeting to pray with the Word according to the method of the Lectio Divina**, especially with passages from the Old and New Testament on mercy . I am sure that this practice that has guided many Christians in the adventure of holiness, will arise in our communities to live according to the Gospel. To my confreres who are priests I dare to ask to get closer to the Word of God, more that exegetes, that are of helpful especially when preparing homilies, but not to overlook the daily meditation on the Word, I repeat meditation and not reading of a book or to feel at peace with their conscience because they have prayed the office of readings. I repeat, meditate, and meet the Word by preferably following the Justinian method of the three ways but without excluding the use of others with which we may be more comfortable.

It should ever happen again that people speak from the word according to this or that scholar, but from the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It should never happen again to talk about the Word without having listened to the Word and, even worse, of proposing the Word without the daily effort of practising the word. Fr Justin asks us the all the all the studies we do in the schools on

dogmatic texts should be done also on all the others, in meditation, in order to receive from them its treasures. (Op. I, 289)

5. In company of Our Lady of Divine Vocations , Mother of Mercy

My thoughts now turn to the Mother of Mercy. May the sweetness of her countenance watch over us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God's tenderness. No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of His love.²¹

The year of mercy for us matches, and this is a sign of the mercy of God, with the 90th year of the mystic experience of the Blessed Founder, 10th May 1926 when, under the "Pagliarella", the Holy trinity entrusted him Our Lady as immediate Superior of the Vocationist Congregations. Let's listen to him as he says: *Has been infused to me the assurance that the Most Holy trinity has put Our Lady in charge of the office of immediate superior of the Society Of Divine Vocations and therefore of all charges, duties, studies, works, spheres, of everything in everything. She is the authority of the Society Of Divine Vocations. Gloria et gratias Deo et Mariae – Glory and thanksgiving to God and Mary. Therefore the established practice of the room of the superior with a permanent soul to guard and venerate it perpetually. (Op. 10, p. 118)*

²¹Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 24.

Return to the sources is also redeem the multiplicity of experience and dynamism of initiatives that have marked the beginning of our Congregation. I do not consider of secondary importance an event for which the founder even celebrated the anniversary!

I am tempted to ask superiors to reproduce in their houses, where possible, a pagliarella, not only to make memory of that event but mostly to remember the origins. I have even asked Fr Armando Palmieri, councillor for Parishes and Vocationaries and Parish Priest of San Gabriele in Rome, the permission to beg among the pious women devoted to Mary of his Parish for the construction of a simple pagliarella, in the garden of the Curia, reproducing Villa Simpatia. Yes, I want to do it no matter what!

I have realised then that the desires of the Fr Generals usually remain pious desires, even though they may be requests for the growth, the charism, spirituality, acts, and the life of the Congregation itself. I find comfort in the episode of Moses when venting with God because of the people who did not want to listen, God lets him know that it is the same God that the people reject and not Moses.

Therefore I give up to my request for another one made ninety years ago by the same Founder, that still goes unheard, I believe, by the vast majority of our communities: the established practice of **room of the superior** with a soul permanently as his guard of honour and perpetual veneration. (Op. 10, p. 118)

As I am almost at the end of my letter, I leave then, to your conscience but especially to your heart, this gift you can do to the Founder, the Congregation but especially to you and your community! Of course, you can do it; you need to want it! This

space (the room of Our Lady) is not only a physical place or a way to retrieve a tradition of our spirituality, but is truly a place of encounter with the Virgin, our Mother Superior, with the opportunity to come together for a common act of daily devotion.

There are communities that preserve a room for the superior general, a sign of respect and certainly of welcome, but in the end are usually closed. I will be happy, and I think, all my successors will be too, that in case no other place is found, these rooms were dedicated to Our Lady. She herself think of his children, and we would be happy to be accommodated in any room of our communities.

Conclusion

How I wish that the coming years are filled with mercy in order to meet with each person to bring the goodness and tenderness of God! In all, believers and lukewarm, may reach the balm of mercy as a sign of the Kingdom of God already present among us²².

How I wish, too, dear brother, that from this Holy Year of divine mercy, we can come out more strengthened in mutual love, in mutual forgiveness, in personal and communitarian holiness. I believe it!

I want to propose this prayer to be prayed together, at the end of the intercessions or invocations of Morning or Evening Prayers, every day, for the duration of the Holy Year of Mercy:

²² Op. cit. n. 5.

VOCATIONIST PRAYER FOR THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

Most Holy Trinity! In your infinite mercy, you have wanted this little and humble Society of the Divine Vocations, inspiring Blessed Justin Mary of the Trinity for this goal.

We acknowledge, O Father, Through the Holy Spirit of Love, that every member of the Vocationist Family is a sign of predilection of your Son's merciful heart. We are grateful for so many proofs of your love, which you have shown us from birth until today and that will surely accompany us for eternity.

We also want to acknowledge that this family has not always been faithful to its consecration and its charism. It has wasted so many gifts and talents it has received for the accomplishment of the Divine Union. We are not committing ourselves enough to reach a holier lifestyle, which is necessary to arouse in the world, a flood of saints and holy works!

We want to come back to you with a contrite and humbled heart! We want to go back to the original spirit that inspired, Blessed Justin Mary of the Trinity. We mainly want mainly to go back to the Gospel, the only sure way that will give us back the joy of living the essential, in the joyous following of the consecration, in a spirit of belonging and identity.

We want to welcome this time of mercy as a proper moment to forgive and be forgiven. We wish to correspond to your boundless love and to present ourselves to you as a more united and brotherly family, in order to become more credible witnesses of consecrated people at the service of vocations, hope, peace and holiness!

Through the intercession of Our Lady of Divine Vocations, Mother of Mercy, we ask you, once again, for the strength to consume our lives as ministers of vocations serving the elected of the divine vocations. At the same time, we commit ourselves to be missionaries of your merciful face, following in the footsteps of Blessed Justin Mary of the Trinity who we trust and hope of seeing soon canonised here on earth! Amen!

Happy Advent everyone!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr Antonio Rafael do Nascimento, sdc". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Fr Antonio Rafael do Nascimento, sdc



Segreteria Generale

Roma