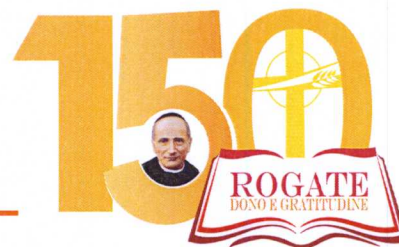


Curia generalizia
dei Rogazionisti
Via Tuscolana, 167
00182 Roma
Tel. 06/7020751 – Fax 06/7022917

www.rcj.org – segrgen@rcj.org

Curia generalizia
delle Figlie del Divino Zelo
Circonvallazione Appia, 144
00179 Roma
Tel. 06/7810239 – Fax 06/7847201



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Solemnity of St. Hannibal Mary

On the 150th Anniversary of the Inspiration of the Rogate
ROGATE GIFT AND GRATITUDE

To the Rogationists
To the Daughters of Divine Zeal
To the Family of the Rogate

Dearly beloved,

On this day particularly dear to all of us, we come together with great joy to communicate to you the choice made by the General Governments to make due memory of the 150th year of the Inspiration of the Rogate.

We rightly place our origins, daughters and sons of Father Hannibal, at the time of our Founder's entrance in the Avignone district in the spring of 1878. Furthermore, Father Hannibal explained that we must find our origins on July 1, 1886, when the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus deigned to come to live permanently in our midst, as the Founder, Superior, Father and Companion of our pilgrimage,

We know that from the very beginning of the mission in the Avignone District, Father Hannibal brought with him the inspiration of the Rogate which he had since his adolescence and which he identified as his mission since his youth.

In 1880, he already placed in the hearts and on the lips of the little ones and the poor the beautiful prayer which begins with the words "Compassionate Heart of Jesus", which very clearly expresses his theological vision on the charismatic inspiration of the Rogate.

The *Positio super virtutibus* helps us to pinpoint the local and temporal context in which the young Hannibal had that inspiration, which progressively became clearer, and enlightened and moved all of his existence.

We read that he had the pious habit of visiting daily the Blessed Sacrament exposed for the *Quarantore* [Forty-hour adoration] in the various churches of Messina. One day, finding himself in the Church of St. John of Malta¹, he "had this predominant thought in mind, that in order to bring about the greater good to the Holy Church, to

¹ The grandiose temple of St. John of Malta once stood where the Prefecture is located today. The current Church corresponds to the apse of the old one which was demolished by the earthquake of 1908. Cf. Picture 1, in *Storia, Arte e Tradizione nelle chiese di Messina*, Messina, 1983.

Rogate ergo Dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam (Mt 9,35-38; Lc 10,2)

save many souls, to extend the kingdom of God on earth, there could be no other means more certain than the increase of elect ministers of God (...) Thus, an excellent and fruitful prayer to be preferred would be to immediately ask the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus that he deigns to send holy men and chosen priests on earth (...). This idea seemed very clear and indisputable to him. Later, he was surprised and amazed in reading in the Holy Gospel those divine words: 'The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send workers to his harvest.' This intuition-inspiration is 'placed at the beginning of his spiritual life' when the vocation to the priesthood had not yet matured in him."²

On this inspiration of the Rogate, we find a testimony of Father Hannibal in which he explains that it had penetrated him progressively; that it was born at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; and it had become more and more rooted in his natural context, in the impact with the "tired exhausted sheep without a shepherd" of the Avignone District.

In a letter of 1923 addressed to Pope Pius XI, while he asks for the blessing on the Pious Work, he traces his path in a very concise way. He explains that he started two Institutes just for the Rogate, to pray daily for good workers and then to spread this prayer.

"Kneeling at the foot of Your august throne, the undersigned Canon Hannibal Maria Di Francia from Messina states and implores the following: From my adolescence, I have been concerned about the great importance of the Prayer to obtain from the Divine Mercy Priests according to the Heart of God for the salvation of souls.

"Later, I read in the Holy Gospels that divine Command: *Rogate ergo Dominum Messis ut mittat Operarios in messem suam*. I was surprised. When I became a priest, I dedicated myself to works of charity as much as I could possibly do, and began fostering that divine Word *ex professo*."

At other times, speaking of himself in the third person, Father Hannibal bears witness to this inspiration.

"At the beginning of his desire to give himself to God, and when he did not know anything about those words of the Holy Gospel, a young man had this predominant thought in mind, that is, in order to carry out the greatest good in the Holy Church, to save many souls, and to extend the Kingdom of God on earth, there could be no means more certain than the increase of elect ministers of God, of holy, apostolic men, according to the Heart of Jesus. Thus, an excellent and fruitful prayer to be preferred would be to immediately ask the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus that he deigns to send holy men and chosen priests on earth."³

Another reference of Father Hannibal to this important experience of his life is found in the introduction to the *Precious Adhesions* of 1919. On that occasion, he tries to define this inspiration, calling it "evangelical revelation, divine idea". He reaffirms that it is the foundation of the Pious Work and underlines the link between the Rogate and the poor.

"There was, therefore, a certain man who paid attention to this divine command, even before he had read it in the Gospel; and he began his career of life with this attention. (...)

² *Positio, Informatio*, Vol. 1, p. 48.

³ *Scritti*, Vol. V, *Regolamenti*, p. 703.

“It was very beautiful that the *Evangelical Rogation* to obtain good workers of the Church now resounds in the tender voices of the children, of the poor, and from that poor place arises to Heaven, to the throne of Him who looks down upon the heavens and the earth, and hears the desire of the poor [*humilia respicit in Coelo et in terra* (Ps. 113:6), *et exaudit desiderium pauperum!* (...) Ps. 10:17)].

“We call it Gospel revelation, a divine idea, - nor it would be humility to lessen it - which preceded and accompanied the poor Priest-initiator in the difficult undertaking. We considered and continue to consider this idea as the foundation on which the Pious Work is built, as the key that opened the Treasury of the Divine Mercies, as a secret of the most desired Divine Graces. All this in reference to the Pious Work. Then, in reference to the Holy Catholic Church, the society, and the whole world, this is the great means of all blessings and of all salvation in time and in eternity.”⁴

So we have this sacred heritage to keep and revive!

In the 150th Anniversary of the Inspiration of the Rogate⁵, it is important for us, as a Family of the Rogate, to fulfill three things together: first, to praise and thank the Lord for this great gift bestowed upon us, the Church and the world; second, to look at the zeal which Father Hannibal lavishly had during his whole life in living and spreading the Rogate; third, to discern what kind of testimony we should have today as members of the Family of the Rogate.

Praise and thank the Lord.

The Inspiration of the Rogate, as we have seen, took place in the meeting, or rather in the frequent encounter of the young Hannibal with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

It could not be otherwise, if we reflect that at the time of the institution of the Eucharist there was also that of the ministerial priesthood. “Remember,” Father Hannibal prayed, “that these two sacraments were born from your beautiful Heart to a twin birth of Infinite Love: the Eucharist and the Priesthood.”⁶

Moreover, Father Hannibal tells us that, in as much the Pious Work “had to elevate the divine command of the Rogate into an Institution”, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament wanted to be its “true founder”. “All the loving, fecund, dutiful and continuous center of this Pious Institute of Jesus' interests is Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. From now on and forever, it must be known and considered that the true, effective, and immediate founder of this Pious Institute is Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Of this Pious Work we may say: *Novum fecit Dominus*; God did something new. In the works that God forms, he usually puts a founder rich in his graces and gifts; but in this Pious Work, which had to elevate into an institution the divine command of the zeal of his heart, which for so many centuries has been neglected, it can be said that

⁴ *Prezioze Adesioni*, 1919, p. 7.

⁵ *Positio, Cronologia*, Vol. II: 1868. At the age of 17, he obtained permission from his confessor to receive the Eucharist daily. In the same period, in the church of St. John of Malta in Messina, praying before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the form of Quarantore, he intuitively felt the necessity to pray for vocations. It was what can be called “Intelligence of the Rogate”. Some time later, he discovers in the Gospel (Mt 9,38 and Lk 10,2) the command of Jesus: “Rogate ergo Dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam”. Vitale, pp. 14-15, 43-44, 155; cf. PA, p. 8; Tusino, *Anima del Padre*, p. 111; Tusino, *Non Disse Mai No*, pp. 53-54; APR, 14-595, 24-1229, 61-4345.

⁶ *Scritti*, Vol. II, *Pregiere al Signore*, p. 295.

our Lord himself, without the intermediation of a founder, has jealously shown from the Tabernacle that he himself is its true founder, in the true sense of the word.”⁷

For these reasons, the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Inspiration of the Rogate will be for us a prayerful memory. It will start on July 1st, the day that we, as Family of the Rogate, will dedicate to the Eucharistic adoration. As a particular moment of fraternal communion, we will gather in communities in Eucharistic adoration following the format prepared specifically for this event, and which is attached herewith. Furthermore, the Eucharistic adoration should characterize the particular initiatives that will subsequently be carried out in the various Circumscriptions to commemorate this event.

To make memory of the Apostle of the Rogate.

We are aware that our Founder is a great saint, a witness of a great message for the Church and the world of today, precisely the message of the Rogate that is marvelously combined with that of charity.

We are mindful that Father Hannibal is little known around us and perhaps we ourselves have not deepened, as we should and could, the richness of his message and his holiness.

As Father Hannibal taught us, the Rogate calls us to pray for the good workers and to spread this prayer as much as possible, as well as to make of ourselves into good workers.

Thus, in remembering the Inspiration of the Rogate, we take the opportunity to present the figure of the Apostle of the Rogate, because the announcement of the Rogate takes place fully in the testimony of Father Hannibal, through his teaching and his life.

In what way and with what means are we to present our holy Founder and the Inspiration of the Rogate? Today, the most popular medium is the video, for which it was providential that the Province of St. Luke chose to produce the film *For Love of the Poor*, which we can propagate. But today, in the multimedia context in which we live, means are certainly not lacking. We must not forget to do so in our day to day apostolate, seizing the occasion from anniversaries that refer to the life of Father Hannibal, especially during the celebration of the Founder's Day and his feast; spreading the knowledge of his person in our publications; creating exhibits or organizing conferences.

Discerning our testimony.

“A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for ‘this is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 Thess 4:3). Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.”⁸

As we reflect on the mission of Father Hannibal, as a distinguished Apostle of Prayer for Vocations and Father of the Orphans and the Poor, we are exhorted by Pope Francis to view our mission on earth as a path of holiness.

Each of us receives from the Lord a mission, in our own condition of life, be it priestly, consecrated, consecrated in the world or lay.

⁷ Scritti, Vol. VI, *Regolamenti*, p. 396.

⁸ *Gaudete et Exultate*, n. 19

Since we are inserted in different forms of belonging in the Family of the Rogate, we must try to model ourselves on the path of holiness of Father Hannibal. But each of us, as the Pope reminds us very clearly, has a personal vocation to holiness and mission in the particular context given by Providence.

Ours is a journey of personal holiness which, nonetheless, develops in fraternity, as brothers and sisters in the People of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, we invite you to welcome together this opportunity of commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Inspiration of the Rogate, which offers us as an opportunity for deepening the great charism that the Holy Spirit bestowed on Father Hannibal, and on each one of us as well, in order to continue giving it to the Church.

We live this anniversary with fervor, participating in the various initiatives that will be organized in the Circumscriptions, possibly together, among the different components of the Family of the Rogate.

The City of Messina and the Church of St. John of Malta, where that inspiration is believed to have taken place, are landmarks of this event. Therefore, particular initiatives will be promoted there, starting from July 1st, in the commemorative year that opens on that day, but will nevertheless remain open beyond any deadline, for initiatives that should be developed later.

We invite you to inform the respective General Governments of the initiatives that you will carry out in the Circumscriptions and in the Communities to commemorate this event, in order to bring them to the knowledge of all for common edification.

For our part, we will inform you promptly when international initiatives are organized.

We agreed to have as a slogan of this commemoration the words *ROGATE GIFT AND GRATITUDE*: a gift to continuously give, and a constant thanksgiving to the Lord for the gift received. Equally, it will be good to use the logo that has been prepared for this occasion.

We formulate the most fervent wish that this commemoration of the Inspiration of the Rogate may revive in each of us the zeal of the Rogate, which marked the life of our holy Founder and his first collaborators: Venerable Mother Nazarena Majone, Fr. Francesco Vitale and Fr. Pantaleone Palma. Imploring the blessing of the Divine Superiors, we greet you with affection in the Lord.

Madre M. Teolinda Salemi

(Mo. M. Teolinda Salemi, FDZ)

Superior General



Fr. Bruno Rampazzo

(Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, RCJ)

Superior General