

Congregazione dei Rogazionisti

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Nativity of the Lord

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Subject: Special Year of Saint Joseph

To The Most Rev. Superiors
of the Rogationist Circumscriptions
and the Rogationist Communities
THEIR RESPECTIVE RESIDENCES

Dearest Confreres,

On the solemn day of the Lord's Nativity, I wish to come to you with an exhortation in reference to the Special Year of Saint Joseph, proclaimed by Pope Francis on December 8, with an Apostolic Letter [*Patris Corde = A Father's Heart*], while we contemplate this great saint, next to Mary, in adoration of Jesus who is born to give us salvation.

The proclamation of this Jubilee Year is occasioned by the 150th anniversary of the decree *Quemadmodum Deus* by which Blessed Pius IX proclaimed Saint Joseph as the *Patron of the Catholic Church*. Pope Francis recalls his predecessors who exhorted the Church to take a special look at Saint Joseph as the *Patron of Workers* (Venerable Pius XII), the *Guardian of the Redeemer* (Saint John Paul II), and as the *Patron of a happy death* as invoked by the faithful.

The Pope has a special gaze on the least and ordinary people. He confides that in the crisis of the current pandemic, admiring the hidden and sometimes heroic service performed by many, he thought of inviting us to look at and resort to Saint Joseph, a man of Providence "that goes unnoticed, of daily, discreet, and hidden presence", while being involved in "an incomparable role in the history of salvation".

"The aim of this Apostolic Letter - the Pope writes - is to increase our love for this great Saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal" (n. 7).

The Letter is a beautiful synthesis of the role of Saint Joseph in the history of salvation, his virtues, his merits, and the devotion with which he is universally honored in the Church.

Pope Francis quotes a significant passage from his predecessor: "Saint Paul VI pointed out that Joseph concretely expressed his fatherhood 'by making his life a sacrificial service to the mystery of the incarnation and its redemptive purpose. He employed his legal authority over the Holy Family to devote himself completely to them in his life and work. He turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home.'" And immediately he comments: "Thanks to his role in salvation history, Saint Joseph has always been venerated as a father by the Christian people. This is shown by the countless churches dedicated to him worldwide, the numerous religious Institutes, Confraternities and ecclesial groups inspired by his spirituality and bearing his name." (n. 1).

Father Hannibal connects the names of the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal to the Heart of Jesus, but in the significant moments of their beginnings, he placed them under the protection of Saint Joseph, choosing either the day of his feast or that of his patronage for those events. Moreover, the first House of the *Poor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, later called Daughters of the Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus, was called the *Little Refuge of Saint Joseph*.

Dearest confreres, on December 8, 2020, in sharing with you on our website the good news of the institution of the Special Year of Saint Joseph, I commented: “We, sons and daughters of Father Hannibal, know the particular place that Patriarch Saint Joseph has always had in the heart of our holy Founder and in the life of the Pious Work. In Saint Joseph, Father Hannibal saw the Guardian of the Holy Family, and so he invoked him to be the Guardian of the Pious Work. He saw in him the lover of Jesus and Mary, from whom the same love had to be beseeched by us all. He considered him as the Saint of the interior life in which he cultivated the most sublime virtues of contemplation, humility, purity, the gift of his own life to God.” I seem to have pointed out the most important aspects of his figure. I think there could be other notes to add, for instance, that Saint Joseph, especially during the initial stages of the Pious Work, was the one who helped it in its difficulties and provided for its economic needs.

One could write a book about Saint Joseph’s connection with Father Hannibal and the Pious Work. Within the limits provided for in this circular letter, I think it appropriate to scroll with you some passages regarding this matter in the pages left to us by Fr. Tusino in *The Father’s Soul*, particularly in the chapter on “Our Dearest Angels and Saints”.

“During the war, the Father had added three *Glory Be’s* to the prayers before and after meals, for Saint Joseph, St. Michael, and St. Anthony of Padua respectively. One day, I thought that St. Michael should go before Saint Joseph in the recitation of the prayer. He told me: ‘I do not at all touch on the question who is greater between Saint Joseph and St. Michael: it’s an idle talk. I place Saint Joseph soon after the Most Blessed Virgin, because just as Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were always united on earth, so they must also be united in heaven. I believe that the glorious Archangel does not take offense by it.’ Saint Joseph immediately came after Jesus and Our Lady because he is the father of providence, the patron of the Church, the model of the interior life, and the protector of the Work.”¹

Let us recall how Father Hannibal expressed this choice, since the beginning of the Work. For example, the prayer for the Good Workers was addressed first to the Compassionate Heart of Jesus, then to Our Lady, and then to Saint Joseph. On the Feasts of July 1st, the second day was dedicated to Our Lady, and the third to Saint Joseph, almost always in the latter years.

Fr. Tusino reports a touching passage of a “Prayer to the glorious Patriarch Saint Joseph to implore the mighty Patronage on the Avignone Quarter” written by Father Hannibal in Messina on April 15, 1883, for the Feast of the Patronage of Saint Joseph:

“To you. we lift up our hands in supplication and say: Come, come and visit these places with your special protection; come, come and take this Quarter along with all who dwell in it under your powerful protection; come and shelter these slums along with those who inhabit them; come and enlighten with the divine light of grace and wisdom the darkened minds of so many unhappy people... Have mercy on all the little virgins who are at risk; have pity on so many feeble and abandoned poor elderly; we ask your compassion especially for so many poor children, who are missing and growing up in stench and abandon.”²

¹ *Anima del Padre*, p. 384.

² DI FRANCIA A., *Scritti, Preghiera agli Angeli e Santi*, vol. IV, pag. 39.

These were in beginnings of the Pious Work, marked with exceptional difficulties. To go forward, Father Hannibal's great faith, full of love, was necessary.

Fr. Tusino underlines the role that Father Hannibal assigned to Saint Joseph as a guardian of the two Congregations, as a teacher of the interior life, and as an intercessor to obtain holy vocations: "He continually prayed to the Saint for holy vocations. In fact, he wanted a lamp to Saint Joseph, precisely called the *Lamp of Vocations*, to be lit in the Houses. This was often mentioned in the Hymn to Saint Joseph according to the various titles given to him, together with those Jesus and to Mary, on the Feasts of July 1st. This had occurred almost every year from 1905 onward."³

There is even a particularly beautiful quote cited by P. Tusino:

"The Father sums up in these few lines the action of Saint Joseph in our Work: 'The holy Patriarch considered it [= the Work], from the beginning, as though it were entrusted to him by the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and by his divine spouse Mary. The little plant was entrusted to Saint Joseph, who lovingly protected it amidst the clouds and storms. (...) He made it grow as desired by Jesus and Mary. He strengthened its roots, stretched out its branches, brought its fruits to maturity; and finally, he said to the angel of Padua, 'Anthony, I appoint you as the dispenser of my providence over this Pious Work, which is worthy of the interests of the Heart of Jesus!'"⁴

Immediately after referring to the fact that Saint Joseph was initially the provider and then succeeded Saint Anthony, Fr. Tusino cites the thought of Father Hannibal: "We are intimately convinced that Saint Joseph won for us from Heaven St. Anthony of Padua's protection. Indeed, who could forbid us from thinking that Saint Joseph himself, as the universal patron of the Holy Church, has given the devotion to the bread of St. Anthony of Padua to all people in these recent times, to console every kind of people?"⁵

Dear Brothers, let us welcome this Special Year of Saint Joseph as a great grace of the Lord.

Let us make the spirit with which Pope Francis instituted it our own, that is, the rediscovery of poverty, simplicity, and service with a generous and detached spirit, within our community and in the apostolate we carry out. All this is in line with the spirituality of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, a great saint to whom Father Hannibal was particularly devoted, even though her recognition in the Church then was just in the beginning.

I urge you to draw close to the Rogationist literature with the love of children since we have the opportunity to access a large number of Father Hannibal's writings and research studies on them, to rediscover the relationship between the Pious Work and Saint Joseph. Fr. Tusino, in the opening part of his remarks on Father Hannibal's devotion to Saint Joseph, tells us that the Father received it from his family, in which the devotion was especially felt. There is no doubt, however, that Father Hannibal has handed over to us this particular devotion, which belongs to the whole Church, as a spiritual patrimony of the Congregation to be lived, deepened, guarded, and nourished.

Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish in a Founder what is a personal gift from what concerns the charism, which was granted to him to be given to the Church, also because both are gifts of the Spirit that are given to the person.

³ *Anima del Padre*, p. 387.

⁴ *Anima del Padre*, p. 388.

⁵ *Anima del Padre*, p. 388.

I try to find some reason for this charismatic link between Saint Joseph and the Pious Work.

We know clearly that the charism that our Founder handed over to us is the Rogate, which for him was a holy "fixation". The Rogate is aimed at obtaining the Good Workers, which Father Hannibal implored for the Church and the world, and which he also saw happening in Heaven, by proclaiming some holy Heavenly Rogationists.

The Good Workers are called and sent to bear witness to God's love for all men and women and to best carry out this mission, they must guarantee that they have entered this power of love: "Peter, do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21:15) Jesus asked Peter, before entrusting him with the mission of leading the Church.

The Good Workers are the Saints because in them the love of God and neighbor becomes the reason, the goal, and the commitment of one's life. And since Saint Joseph is in love with Jesus and Mary more than any other, he becomes a clear model of the Good Worker.

The Good Workers are called to welcome Jesus into their lives, to proclaim the good news of Jesus, to bring Jesus to souls and souls to Jesus and, if they are priests, to make him present in the Eucharist and to safeguard him. During his life, Saint Joseph was the loving guardian of Jesus.

The Good Workers are all those who, in the Church, are committed to evangelization, to its defense and to safeguarding the faith, to reach out to the spiritual and material needs of brothers and sisters in difficulty. The Church recognizes this role in Saint Joseph when, as we have recalled, she calls him Patron and Guardian.

Dear Brothers, during this Special Year of Saint Joseph, the reading and study of the texts in which Father Hannibal speaks of this Saint - in the numerous prayers addressed to him, or his writings on Saint Joseph - will help us understand the reasons for bequeathing him to us as a special Patron of the Congregation.

The Pope, to confirm Saint Joseph's special bond with the whole Church, points out to us: "Every prayer book contains prayers to Saint Joseph. Special prayers are offered to him each Wednesday and especially during the month of March, which is traditionally dedicated to him." (n. 1). So, it is for us.

The Apostolic Letter of the Pope is accompanied by a Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary declaring that, for this occasion, Plenary Indulgence is granted, under the usual conditions: 1. to those who will meditate for at least 30 minutes on the Lord's Prayer, or take part in a spiritual retreat of at least one day that includes a meditation on Saint Joseph; 2. to those who, following the example of Saint Joseph, will perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy; 3. to those who will recite the Rosary in families and among engaged couples; 4. to everyone who entrusts their daily activity to the protection of Saint Joseph, and every faithful who invokes the intercession of the Worker of Nazareth, so that those seeking work may find dignifying work; 5. to the faithful who will recite the Litanies at Saint Joseph (for the Latin tradition), or the *Akathistos* to Saint Joseph (for the Byzantine tradition), or any other prayer to Saint Joseph proper to the other liturgical traditions, for the Church persecuted *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and for the relief of all Christians suffering from all forms of persecution."

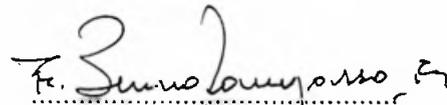
All this should be borne in mind, especially on March 19 and May 1; on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; on Saint Joseph's Sunday (according to Byzantine tradition); on the 19th of every month; and every Wednesday, the day dedicated to the memory of the Saint in the Latin tradition.

Dearly beloved, this bond of the Pious Work with Saint Joseph from the beginning was evidenced by the fact that his image or statue, with the lamp for vocations next to it, has always found a place among those of the Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Mother, the Archangel Saint Michael, and Saint Anthony of Padua. We keep this tradition and, above all, this relationship of veneration and love for Saint Joseph.

On our website, we have opened a special area that will welcome contributions, even from the Circumscriptions, Houses, or individual confreres, who will help us to live this Special Year of Saint Joseph with fervor.

I conclude with an exhortation by Saint Pope Paul VI: "The mission of Saint Joseph is our mission: to take care of Christ and to make him grow in us and around us" (Angelus, March 19, 1970). Our mission is precisely to take care of Christ and make him grow - he who has entrusted the Rogate to the Church and to us, the sons and daughters of Saint Hannibal.

With this wish, imploring the intercession of Saint Joseph and St. Hannibal Mary, I greet you with affection in the Lord.


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(Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, R.C.J.
Superior General