

**Congregazione dei Rogazionisti**

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*Greetings of a Holy Christmas  
and a peaceful 2013  
Year of Faith*

*«When the angels went away from them  
to heaven, the shepherds said to one  
another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem  
to see this thing that has taken place,  
which the Lord has made known to us."  
So they went in haste and found Mary  
and Joseph, and the infant lying in the  
manger. When they saw this, they made  
known the message that had been told  
them about this child. All who heard it  
were amazed by what had been told  
them by the shepherds.  
And Mary kept all these things,  
reflecting on them in her heart».*  
(Lc 2:15-19)

To the Rogationists  
To the Family of the Rogate

Dearests,

once again, I am returning to you in this holy season of Advent, recalling the invitation we received from the Pope to set out "on a journey" in this Year of Faith.

The shepherds who "went with haste" to Bethlehem, where they found Mary, Joseph and the infant, are an example for us.

Luke's account, despite of its simplicity, is enchanting. The shepherds, while guarding their flock, are surrounded by a great light. They are taken by fright while listening to an angel who reassure them and announce to them the news that will bring great joy to all the peoples: "In the city of David a savior is born, Christ the Lord." In confirmation of this announcement they receive a sign: they will find "a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger".

The shepherds do not doubt at all of what has been revealed to them. They do not ask why the son of David, the savior, would be a newly born little child, placed in a manger. Immediately they set out on a journey and, in Bethlehem, they verify the sign that has been announced to them: they find “Mary, Joseph and the baby lying in a manger”.

Now, for them there is no longer the light of the vision of angels, but a simple lantern that barely illuminates the stable, the festive song of the angels now gives way to the quiet contemplation.

The faces of Mary and Joseph, in adoration of the Child Jesus, reveal the great light of their faith.

The shepherds, enchanted by this new vision, relate their experience and what has been said to them about the child, meeting the astonishment of those who heard them.

Luke, finally, concludes the episode, turning our gaze to Mary, who “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart”.

The liturgical texts that the Church offers us in this time of Advent help us to enter into the great mystery of the Word who became man and dwelt among us.

“At his first coming in the lowliness of our human nature he brought to fulfillment the ancient promise and opened to us the way to eternal salvation. He will come again in the splendor of glory, and will call us to possess the promised kingdom which we now dare to hope in watchful waiting” (Preface).

Every day we experience the humility and poverty of our human condition. We confront our contradictions, with the desires and moments of fatigue, the successes and failures, the difficulties and fears for the future.

We have to be aware that our personal history, the history of our Congregation, is part of the history of salvation, which was born from an “ancient promise” and is fulfilled with the birth of the Lord Jesus, with his death and resurrection.

Ours is the task to welcome this announcement, with the humility and simplicity of the shepherds of Bethlehem.

The “Pastor” of the universal Church, Benedict XVI, at this beginning of Advent has appropriately confirmed our faith in the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus through a reading of the Infancy Gospels done with the love of the believer and the wisdom of the scholar, to assure us that through our adherence to the Lord we did not follow a “cleverly devised” myth but we have known his “power” by the “eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet 1:16).

The daily commitments and worries, at times the distractions that can come from excessive openness to many different communications, are likely to make it difficult for us to perceive the peace of the stable in Bethlehem.

We need, then, for a space of silence to contemplate and adore the mystery of the Incarnation of the Lord, in order to “meditate” in our hearts and to witness in our lives.

The Year of Faith, above all, wants to make us aware that we are people of “little faith”, who live in an environment that is hostile to the faith. From this awareness, this year of grace wants to accompany us in a renewed encounter with the Lord who saves us, in a profound conversion that starts from our minds and our hearts



and transforms our attitudes and daily choices to make us become credible witnesses of the salvation that was given to us.

For several years now, we are reminded of the need for a “new evangelization”. Finally, it is clear to all of us that this implies personal renewal and conversion, which could be the beginning of a new leaven of holiness, that would be a salutary influence in the context in which we operate.

The coming new year, besides, brings us an important event for our Congregation: the 50th anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, "Rogationist" Day par excellence.

The first Day, willed by Pope Paul VI in 1964, has been intended to raise the awareness of the whole Church concerning the problem of vocations, which finds its primary and fundamental answer in prayer. At the same time this event that convokes the whole Church into a cenacle of prayer for vocations, which continues over time and extends into the larger space, has become the beginning of a greater commitment of the whole Church in the pastoral care of vocations that is founded on prayer.

We know that about one hundred years before this date, the young Hannibal Di Francia felt particularly drawn to this prayer, which became, according to him “out of zeal or fixation”, the ideal of his life. Father Hannibal, especially with the “Sacred Alliance” and the “Pious Union of Evangelical Rogation”, became a tireless propagator of the Rogate, who from afar had prepared for the birth of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations in the Church.

All this has convinced us, together with the Daughters of Divine Zeal, to promote in the Church the recognition of St. Hannibal’s role, in the hope that he could be proclaimed Patron of Vocations.

We have had and continue to receive many adhesions to this campaign, at times particularly encouraging, from the part of Cardinals and Bishops, Superiors General of Religious Institutes, and other ordained ministers, religious and numerous lay people.

We do not know if it will be possible to obtain such a proclamation from the Holy Father; in any case this initiative will contribute to make Father Hannibal be better known in the Church. In fact, we want everyone first of all to know the close connection between the commitment of St. Hannibal and the institution of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations in the context of the Second Vatican Council. Moreover, the Year of Faith should be for us a great opportunity to assume with more commitment the second dimension of the charism, that is, the diffusion and propagation of the Rogate.

On the other hand, it is important that from our part, while we strive to promote our holy Founder as an apostle of prayer for vocations throughout the Church, and therefore as Patron of Vocations, let us keep alive this prayer first of all in our own personal spiritual life as well as in our communities.

This reflection on the prayer for vocations brings us to a another event which falls next year, the 125th anniversary of the first Great “Supplica to the Eternal Divine Father in the Most Holy Name of Jesus”.

Father Hannibal, an eminently Eucharistic soul, took great care to put in our religious life constant references to the Eucharist. Thus, while last July 1<sup>st</sup>, we closed the Year of the Eucharist, in the 125th anniversary of the first coming of Jesus in the Eucharist to the Pious Work in order to remain therein, on the coming January 31<sup>st</sup> we



will be united together with the Daughters of Divine Zeal at the foot of the Blessed Sacrament, to present to him our *Supplica*.

These two events are linked in time and intimately united to each another. In fact, with the feast of July 1<sup>st</sup> our Founder wanted to instill among us the deep conviction that Jesus in the Sacrament is the true founder, superior, friend and brother, the center and the life of the Work. The *Supplica* of January 31<sup>st</sup> is a direct consequence of all this. All of us, members of the Family of the Rogate, let us present ourselves at the feet of Jesus in Sacrament, to recognize in him the role that he wanted to assume in the Pious Work. Therefore let us open our hearts to Him with faith and confidence, praising and thanking, adoring and asking forgiveness for our unfaithfulness, submitting also to him with filial trust all our needs.

It would be better if these important events in our history and our life, could be done together with our Sisters Daughters of Divine Zeal, the Rogationist (Lay) Missionaries and the Laity of the Family of the Rogate, because they help us relive our charismatic identity and experience fraternity.

Our “Rogationist” identity grows in us under the shadow of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, from which the divine command flowed, as related in the pages of the Gospel of the Rogate. We must remember, however, that the charism and spirituality are given to us by the Church in our Rule of Life.

In the recent years we have had the grace to reflect together on our Rule of Life and to update our Constitutions and Norms, which were consequently approved by the General Chapter and the Apostolic See. We know that we made this journey not so much as to be able to say that we have the updated texts, but above all to re-appropriate our Rule of Life.

During my visit to the Circumscriptions, meeting the individual communities, I invited them to welcome the new Rule and to approach it with the dispositions that we have had as novices.

I therefore, exhort you to keep on hand daily the Constitutions and Norms, to read them personally and ask ourselves about our own faithfulness to the provisions that might seem of minor importance and so making them the subject of community sharing and evaluation.

Next year we will journey together halfway of this six-year mandate.

As the Institute moves forward I am reminded of the first canonical visit that I am making in the Circumscriptions. My feelings are those of a pilgrim who gladly takes notice of the testimony of so many Confreres and lay people who are carrying out their ministry with admirable zeal. I stay in the communities with the closeness of a brother, who is available if help is needed for discernment, to animate and to encourage. My passage, among realities of different cultures, is aimed at strengthening our unity of religious family, our mutual support, collaboration and fraternal sharing.

Our shared responsibility at the central level, the Circumscriptions and individual Communities is to safeguard the charismatic and spiritual heritage that has been handed down to us. Therefore, in the different levels of authority let us express a shared commitment of service to the common cause, the Rogate.

We are going through a historical moment that is characterized by a profound socio-cultural and, more recently, by a widespread and troubling economic crisis.

All this undermines some of our securities and also creates not a few inconveniences in our Communities.



After all, we have to look forward with confidence. If the Work is of the Lord, as we are convinced of, He will be the one to guide us, provided that we live in faithfulness.

If we look at the times of our Father Founder, we realize that in different contexts, nonetheless, there were major changes and considerable difficulties which he confronted with full confidence in the divine Providence.

The future of our Congregation does not depend on current economic trends, but on the Spirit who has inspired the charism of the Rogate for our time, and which has been handed in to us through St. Hannibal. If on our part we treasure this charism and keep it alive, rediscovering the freshness of its origins, the Lord's blessings will be with us copiously. So, my invitation is that we look forward with confidence, hope and commitment.

We are trying to pursue the decentralization of the Congregation by accompanying the journey of the Circumscriptions and, as regards the General Curia, the completion of such decentralization required by the General Chapter of 2010, was accomplished by looking for new forms of administration, such as has been done for the "Cristo Re" Printing press, which became an economic burden that was no longer sustainable, for the Rogate International Centre, and the study that we are doing at the moment for the Center for Spirituality Rogate in Morlupo.

We are working so that, according to the orientation of the General Chapter, the Circumscriptions would develop the promotion of the Rogate and possibly equip themselves with a suitable Center.

Undoubtedly our apostolate must consider at the same time the spread of prayer for vocations and the service of charity towards the little ones and the poor. Besides, we know for sure that we accomplish our first apostolate through the witness of our consecrated life.


Looking at our apostolate, however, leads us to consider our limited forces available for the promotion of vocations and for the formation. We cannot ignore the fact that these two areas, which oftentimes present as urgencies in the lives of the Circumscriptions, must be addressed with the necessary priority, because the life and future of the Congregation depend on them.

Therefore, it is necessary to make the right discernment and if needed to do the readjustment of the works.

We know that the present difficulties do not prevent us from looking also towards some missionary openings, as what is being done by the Centre-North Italian Province in Iraq and by the Indian Quasi-Province in Sri Lanka. It is important to cultivate the missionary dimension, either because it belongs to the identity of the consecrated life and as a response to the invitation which the Church addresses to us for evangelization. The mission, then, opens the horizons of the Congregation to hope.

As the Gospel passage which opened my Christmas message reminds us, following the example of Mary, we must keep in our hearts the gift we received, meditating it with love and, moreover, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, we must announce it, or better, witness and evangelize it.

This is my most fervent wish, for me and for each of you, that on this Christmas I want to lay at the foot of the Child Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, entrusting it to the intercession of our Founder, St. Hannibal Mary. While I implore upon each one of us the blessing of Mary, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, I greet you with affection in the Lord.

  
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(Fr. Angelo A. Mezzari, R.C.J.)  
Superior General