

Rome, 19 March 2014
Solemnity of St. Joseph

Re.: 10th Anniversary of the Canonization of Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia

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

Dearest,

in this Season of Lent, as we embark into our journey towards Easter, once again we want to address to you this joint message in view of an event which is particularly important to all of us: the 10th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia, this coming May 16th.

At the school of Father Hannibal we learned the importance of making memory of the divine blessings, so as to recognize the presence of the Lord who accompanies our steps, to express our gratitude and to confirm our commitment of letting ourselves be guided by his paternal Providence.

Let us live this moment in coincidence with two events of grace for the Church and in particular for consecrated life: the teaching of Pope Francis who shows us the way with his evangelical witnessing and with his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and the Year of Consecrated Life, which will begin on November 30 and will end on February 2, 2016, Day of Consecrated Life.

As Family of the Rogate, we look at the apostolic zeal of Father Hannibal that led him untiringly along the paths of charity, as we welcome the hopeful appeal that Pope Francis addressed to us: «The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice» (EG 24).

Remembering the canonization with gratitude

The voice of John Paul II who proclaimed Hannibal Mary Di Francia a “Saint” on May 16, 2004 was anticipated by the large crowd of Messina, who, on the occasion of his funeral on 1 June 1927, repeatedly said: “The Saint is dead!”

Since then a journey has begun which involved Confreres and Sisters in the meticulous collection of evidence of the heroic virtues of our Father. On that day of May 16th John Paul II summarized our Founder’s path of holiness in the love of God and neighbor:

“*«If anyone loves me, he will obey my word»* (Jn 14:23). These words of the Gospel outlined the spiritual profile of Hannibal Mary Di Francia; that love for the Lord led him to dedicate his entire life to the spiritual good of his neighbor. In this perspective, he felt the particular urgency to carry out the evangelical command: *«Rogate ergo... Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest!»* (Mt 9:38).

“To the Rogationist Fathers and to the Daughters of Divine Zeal he left the task to commit themselves, with all their strengths, so that the prayer for vocations would be «unceasing and universal». Father Hannibal Mary Di Francia addressed this same invitation to the young people of our time, synthesizing it in his usual exhortation: «Fall in love with Jesus Christ».

“From this providential intuition a great movement of prayer for vocations has been started in the Church. I fervently hope that the example of Father Hannibal Mary Di Francia would guide and support such pastoral ministry also in our time”.

With the canonization of our Founder, while the Holy Father has indicated him to the whole Church as a man driven by the Spirit who has traced a new way of holiness, he has also entrusted to us, his spiritual sons and daughters, the commitment to propagate in the Church, the knowledge and devotion towards him, so as to favor the transmission of his message: the prayer to implore for good workers, the spiritual and material charity towards the little ones and the poor.

From this memorable event, we have had a new stimulus to grow altogether in our knowledge of the life and mission of Father Hannibal, to improve our formation as well as that of the young people who have chosen to share the charism of the Rogate in our Congregations and in our associations. Together we have tried, in our new missionary openings, in different areas of our apostolate, and through the new means of communication, to spread the knowledge and promote the devotion to our Saint, which the Lord has given to the Church.

Once again, we express our gratitude to the Church who, after giving us the liturgical texts on the veneration of Saint Hannibal through the approval of our “liturgical proper”, has also led us to the discovery of the best and secure expression of our charismatic and spiritual heritage.

In these recent years we have strived to promote greater knowledge of our holy Founder, hoping that he would be officially recognized by the Church as “Patron of Vocations”. We have received many favorable adhesions, however, we become aware that, while St. Hannibal attracts those who have the opportunity to know him more closely, but he is not yet known in the Church as deserving his holiness and his charism.

As his sons and daughters, it is our task to continue, with care and enthusiasm, in promoting his knowledge and his veneration anywhere we express our apostolate and wherever we can reach with the new means of social communication.

We are aware that this endeavor for the promotion of his charismatic figure is not intended for our self-satisfaction but constitutes a privileged way of spreading the charism of the Rogate, which was handed over to Father Hannibal and to us in order to share it to the whole Church.

Living the present with passion

As we commemorate this anniversary we cannot but pose ourselves a few questions: What is the relevance of our Founder’s canonization to us, his spiritual sons and daughters? What are its impacts in the life and mission of his Institutes?

The Saints are lamps that the Church places on the lampstand so that they give light unto all who are in the house. The common house wherein we live today needs more than ever these rays of hope. They are our intercessors before God, our advocates, our brothers, but they want also to be our models, to lead us on the road that they have pursued before us, so that together with them we can reach the goal, the place that the Lord has prepared for each one of us.

In the collect of the Mass of Saint Hannibal we pray: “O God, hope of the humble, refuge of the poor and father of the orphans, you chose St. Hannibal Mary, priest, as an outstanding apostle of prayer for vocations; through his intercession, send worthy ministers of the gospel into your harvest, and grant that, moved by the same spirit of charity, we may grow in love of God and neighbor”.

In turning to God, we are invited to look to the humble and the poor, to whom God looks with love as a father. It is what Father Hannibal did. In his encounter with the poor he felt the great urgency to implore from the Lord of the harvest worthy laborers of the Gospel. He did so, thus growing more and more each day in his love for the Lord and zeal for the salvation of his brothers.

Father Hannibal, therefore, invites us to be faithful to our vocation and consecration, to accept his prophetic witness and make it our own, to cultivate a passion for the Rogate in its dimensions, such as friendship, fraternal life, the beauty of living the evangelical counsels.

He reminds us of the deep sense of our baptismal membership to the Church and the need to live out our identity as the journeying People of God, of the Church that goes forth on a mission to the streets of the world, to meet the brothers and sisters who are suffering from marginalization, who have lost the sense of life and hope. These considerations are all the more relevant and meaningful for the Daughters of Divine Zeal who, according to the indications of the XII General Chapter, are committed in this year 2014 “to revive the apostolic life”.

In this context, on the part of the Rogationists, we have committed ourselves to re-appropriate the Rule of Life, which is an expression of the consecration, guarantee of charismatic identity, support of fraternal communion and project of the mission.

The serene face of our Founder, shown to the whole Church in the tapestry in front of the Basilica of St. Peter on the day of the canonization, invites us to a personal conversion, which is necessary to effect a renewal in our pastoral commitment, in coherence with the testimony of a style of life that is faithful to the evangelical counsels. Moreover, it reminds us to be anchored in personal and community prayer, joyful in fraternity, determined in our option for the poor who are in the peripheries, to have a great sense of belonging and missionary availability.

Embracing the future with hope

Moving on in our reflection towards being concrete, of which we had a clear example in Father Hannibal, we ask ourselves: What must we do? What is demanded of us today by the sanctity of the Founder? How can we be faithful in the present and prepare the future generations?

In light of the holiness of the Founder, more than narrating the story that we, his sons and daughters, have written in the past, we are called to write a new story, one that is beautiful and full of hope for the Church and for humanity.

We cannot ignore the present difficulties that we are experiencing, as we are reminded by *Vita Consecrata*: “During these years of renewal, the consecrated life, like other ways of life in the Church, has gone through a difficult and trying period. It has

been a period full of hopes, new experiments and proposals aimed at giving fresh vigor to the profession of the evangelical counsels. But it has also been a time of tension and struggle, in which well-meaning endeavors have not always met with positive results. The difficulties however must not lead to discouragement. Rather, we need to commit ourselves with fresh enthusiasm, for the Church needs the spiritual and apostolic contribution of a renewed and revitalized consecrated life”(n. 13).

Dear brothers and sisters, with the crisis faced by the society and the Church today, we are called to discover an opportunity, a Kairos, in order to grow in depth and in holiness in our journey of evangelical perfection.

The holiness of Father Hannibal, which we commemorate on this occasion, calls us to set out on a journey of sanctity, as a community, as groups and as individuals. We want to embark on a journey of profound renewal, to live personally as well as to accompany, support and influence all those around us. We want to rediscover together a time of spiritual discernment and of authentic fraternal life. We want to seek together for daily forgiveness and reconciliation.

Let us face the challenges and difficulties, sustained by the nearness of the Lord and of our Immaculate Mother, knowing how to address them as men and women of hope, who trust not in our own strength but solely in the Lord.

Pope Francis, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, has so clearly reminded us that, despite the present problem on vocations, which are a gift that should be asked through prayer, yet they flourish in the context of a committed, fervent and joyful Christian life:

“Many places are experiencing a dearth of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. This is often due to a lack of contagious apostolic fervor in communities which results in a cooling of enthusiasm and attractiveness. Wherever there is life, fervor and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise. Even in parishes where priests are not particularly committed or joyful, the fraternal life and fervor of the community can awaken in the young a desire to consecrate themselves completely to God and to the preaching of the Gospel. This is particularly true if such a living community prays insistently for vocations and courageously proposes to its young people the path of special consecration” (n. 107).

Let us, therefore, look to the future with hope, but at the same time we have to invest in the formation and in-depth knowledge of the charism, in simpler and more responsive apostolic works, that are less burdened by structures and more easily expressed by a concrete witnessing.

In order to be effective especially in our time, our apostolate needs to have particular consideration to the new evangelization and the inculturation of the charism. We are called to work together in harmony and collaboration, as the Family of the Rogate: Rogationists, Daughters of Divine Zeal, Missionaries of the Rogate, Lay Associations, and those who are close to us in various ways.

Above all, we need to revive the deeper meaning of our mission, which finds its resonance in the Lenten message of Pope Francis with the theme “He became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich”. The Holy Father explains these biblical words: “First of all, it shows us how God works. He does not reveal himself cloaked in worldly power and wealth but rather in weakness and poverty: “*though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor ...*”. Christ, the eternal Son of God, one with the Father in power and glory, chose to be poor; he came amongst us and drew near to each of us; he set aside his glory and emptied himself so that he could be like us in all things (cf. *Phil 2:7; Heb 4:15*). God’s becoming man is a great mystery! But the reason for all

this is his love, a love which is grace, generosity, a desire to draw near, a love which does not hesitate to offer itself in sacrifice for the beloved. Charity, love, is sharing with the one we love in all things. Love makes us similar, it creates equality, it breaks down walls and eliminates distances. God did this with us.”

This is precisely the story of holiness that Father Hannibal wrote in the Church: a gift of love to God and neighbor, lived in the rediscovery of the richness that lies hidden in the smallness and poverty.

Dear brothers and sisters, with this spirit, let us live this important event of the 10th Anniversary of the Canonization of Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia.

At the general level, we will celebrate some important events to commemorate this anniversary:

1. On the occasion of the 1st International Congress on the pedagogy of Hannibal Mary Di Francia, to be held in Rome, we will remember the canonization of Father Founder during the concluding Mass on May 4, 2014.

2. The Holy Mass on May 11, 2014 at the Parish Church in Circonvallazione Appia, in view of the 75th death anniversary of Venerable Mother M. Nazarena Majone and in memory of the transfer of her body from Rome to Messina.

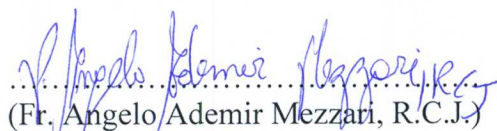
3. In the Shrine and Basilica of Saint Anthony in Messina, the anniversary of the canonization will be prepared by a special Triduum, starting from May 13th and will be concluded with the solemn celebration of the feast, on May 16, 2014.

4. On the feastday of St. Hannibal on June 1, 2014, a Holy Mass presided by His Eminence Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, will be celebrated in the parish church of Sts. Anthony and Hannibal in Rome at 7 o'clock P.M.

We heartily exhort you to promote several possible initiatives, at the level of Circumscriptions and Communities, involving the local Churches, that would draw us closer to the knowledge and filial love of our Holy Founder.

In this way our commemoration will not just be a simple celebration but a moment of growth and revival in the life and apostolate of our Family of the Rogate.

With this fervent hope, we greet you with affection in the Lord.


(Fr. Angelo Ademir Mezzari, R.C.J.)

Superior General




M. Teolinda Salemi, F.D.Z.)

Superior General

