

Congregazione dei Rogazionisti
Curia Generalizia

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Solemnity of Saint Joseph

Prot. n. 91/17

On the Centenary of the Birth of the Servant of God Fr. Giuseppe Marrazzo

To the M.R. Superiors
of the Rogationist Circumscriptions
c.c. To the Rogationist Communities
THEIR HOUSES

Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and [the] last will be first" (Mk 10, 28-31).

Dearest Confreres,

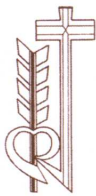
the words of Jesus to Peter seem to me the most suitable to commemorate together with you the beloved figure of Father Giuseppe Marrazzo on the 100th anniversary of his birth. He left everything, all that belonged to him and his whole self, to give himself totally to the Lord and to souls, to all the people he met in his life, especially those who suffer in body and still more in spirit, and in doing so he has found multiplied a hundred times the inner circle that he left.

He lived with the closeness of a very large family, who truly acknowledged him as a father, and cried for him as for a relative when he was no longer found in his place, before the Blessed Sacrament or in the chair where he welcomed and consoled them, dispensing the Mercy of the Father.

A full-time priest - In the message that I addressed to you last Christmas I have shared about this confession of Father Marrazzo: "I feel the need to pray. Looking at the laborers who work eight hours a day I think I should also be the worker of Jesus and pray eight hours or more." This in fact, helps us understand why he devoted much time to prayer.

People was used to see him remaining in the church to pray and wait for possible penitents who approached him even at late hours, and arriving punctually in the morning always there, long before the Church's doors are opened, yet those many hours spent with his Jesus were not enough for him.

How could we explain all this? It could only be understood in the logic of the Kingdom of God. We find an episode from the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark: "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then because so many people were coming and going that they did



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not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while'. So they went away by themselves in the boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he disembarked and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things" (6:30-34).

The life of a good worker of the Kingdom is considered full, less full or empty, not according to the situations he finds himself in the variety of circumstances, but exclusively by the fullness of his heart. If the heart is full of God, there the souls are also found, and so the time is not enough for God and the hours of the day are not even sufficient for souls.

In order to find an appropriate interpretation of the life of Father Marrazzo we must start from here. Then we will understand everything that was happening to him and the choices that he made day by day, moment by moment.

A look at his life - The first steps in the vocational journey of the young Giuseppe were not easy. He was thirteen years old when he entered the House of Oria, leaving behind a family atmosphere imbued with faith and bringing with him the experience of a childhood spent in the warmth of the home, of shepherding, of prayer and study. Recalling that day, October 20, 1930, he will confess:

"Accompanied by my mother I left our house around noon. Once in Oria mother entrusted me to Father Carmelo. I could not live away from my mother; I had decided to return home the coming Christmas, when she would come to visit me. My mother came, but I did not have enough courage to talk about it. Then gradually, I continued on my journey. Accompanied by the celestial Mother of Good Counsel, I arrived. The scene of Calvary is repeated, Jesus gave me to his Mother: 'Woman, behold your son'. 'Son, behold your Mother'"¹.

Four years later, the young Giuseppe passes to Trani for the period of Postulancy and then of the Novitiate, lived in an atmosphere of great faith and Marian fervor, which had a memorable expression in a Marian mini-congress held on December 6-8, 1936.

Our Lady is the guide of the young religious but his most important point of reference since that time is Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. During his year of practical training, done in the Mother House in Messina, he asks the Superiors in the renewal of permissions, to allow him to "dispose as best as I think of the time I have after the orphans are settled to rest – to stay a little more time in the chapel after the last prayers"².

Thus, he reached the eve of the perpetual profession. During the spiritual retreat preceding his final consecration to the Lord, in September 1940, he writes in his diary: "O Jesus, I am all yours, I belong to You, I want to do everything to please You. I ask You as a fruit of this retreat, a total abandonment of my whole self to You, and a boundless confidence in Your infinite mercy"³.

In the following years the cleric Giuseppe refines this abandonment of his whole self to the Lord. During the spiritual exercises of 1942, in preparation for the reception of minor Orders, he consecrated himself to the merciful love of Jesus, according to the spirit of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, and makes the

¹ Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 129; cfr. *PGR, Memorie*, LXV.

² Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 86.

³ Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 87.

resolution of praying to St. Therese, so that she would infuse in him her total abandonment in the arms of Jesus.

The encounter of the deacon Giuseppe with Jesus on the altar, on the awaited day of his priestly ordination, took place on May 9, 1943, in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto (ME), while the World War II was in progress. He is assigned to the Mother House, engaged in the Anthonian Secretariat, but because of the conflict he resides in Santa Lucia del Mela. In 1947, after a brief stay in Trani, he returns to Messina where he is in charged with the care of Anthonian Pageboys (*Paggetti Antoniani*) and of the Catholic Action (*Azioni Cattolica*), but he already begins to devote himself mainly to the ministry of reconciliation and spiritual direction.

The Apostolic Visitor of the Congregation, Fr. Angelico d'Alessandria, O.F.M., remained edified in seeing the zeal that Father Giuseppe puts in this ministry "prophesying" his future as a confessor. He will remember this "prophecy" in a "special prayer" written in Oria on October 11, 1952:

"Jesus, I ask You for a grace: to realize the words spoken to me by the Cappuchin Fr. Angelico about 5 years ago: "you will be an apostle of the confession". While asking You this grace, I hear you repeating and almost reproaching me internally: "You must think of becoming holy, all the rest I'll take care myself".

"Yes, beloved Jesus, my God, my Creator, my life, truth and way, You loved us so much and in need of being loved, you are right in making me feel this reproach. Dear Jesus, forgive me for not having truly loved You as You deserved, I'm here a little child presenting to you my renewed resolve to love You and to become a saint: to be humble, righteous, obedient, to remain always small, and in need of being led by the hand, give me Your sweetness, a welcoming spirit with everyone; enlighten the Superiors to allow me to consume all my life in this Temple of St. Anthony in Messina where I desire to die, either in the altar or in the confessional. (...)

"Grant that I may become so holy, dead to myself and that our shrine may become a scented garden of virtues and of saints. Let me meet a good Spiritual Father and that I may become the father of all, that all those who come to me may be taken by the love of Jesus, like iron by the magnet. Mother of Good Counsel, suggest to me the most appropriate counsels for this my ideal."⁴

In 1956 obedience assigns Father Giuseppe to the house of Padua, as spiritual father and vocation animator. He dedicated himself to the office entrusted to him, but prayed so that he could return to the ministry, which he feels as his ideal, as dispenser of Mercy. He asks this favor to his Heavenly "Mother" as well as to the holy confessor of Padua: "O St. Leopold of Castelnuovo, you who confessed for about 40 years in Padua, grant that Messina would become a second Padua for me.

Father Giuseppe obtains the requested grace. The following year he transferred again to Messina with the task as rector of the Shrine of St. Anthony and to promote the Pious Union of Prayer for Vocations. From 1957 to 1969 he is the watchman of the Blessed Sacrament, the Minister of the Father's mercy, the friend of the poor and the sick; he is the good shepherd who does not only have the odor of the sheep, but allows himself to be fully consumed by them. He does all this with patience, kindness, generosity in helping the poor. He is distinguished

⁴ Cfr. *Scritti*, IV, p. 1124.

by his humility, simplicity, evangelical joy that he expresses in song accompanied by his guitar. He gives everything to everyone, especially to the sick, with his time, with a smile or a caress, or with a simple candy accompanied by an affectionate exhortation “be holy!”.

The priestly motherhood - Father Giuseppe lives his priesthood as a good shepherd, but with the heart and the face of a father and even more of a “mother”. The figure of a mother is intensely present in his life, a source of suffering for its absence, as we have remembered speaking about his entrance to the seminary, the figure of a mother he found again in the Heavenly Mother.

Now in his ministry he rediscovers this motherhood in the new dimension of faith and grace. In June 1967, his zeal in his closeness to the sick led him to the bedside of a young Angelina Crisafulli, who is paralyzed caused by a bullet shot by her boyfriend after she refused to marry him. This meeting results to a great spiritual friendship. Father Giuseppe helps the young lady and asks her to offer her sufferings for his ministry.

He writes: “As a poor I stretch out my hand to you, as my sister, and I ask you to offer the Lord some of your precious sufferings for my own sanctification and for that of the souls that the Heavenly Father entrusts to me, among whom I have a sixty young men who are preparing for the priesthood”⁵. And again: “I think of you as suffering, yet so close to Jesus who lightens even your pain. Your example also serves to encourage me to learn how to suffer something together with Jesus, for our sanctification and for the salvation of souls”⁶. The young woman dies after eight months of Calvary but her edifying testimony and dear memory remains alive as a great spiritual resource in the life of Father Giuseppe.

In animating the Pious Union of Prayer for Vocations Father Giuseppe tried to choose with particular care and to call women of faith to join in this crusade of prayer and, in particular, to pray for the sanctification of priests. He, who let himself be constantly guided by the Heavenly Mother, Our Lady of Good Counsel, asks the members to assume this role towards him, and then to pray for his sanctification, and also to advise and support him in his priestly ministry, finally he exhorts them to consecrate themselves for this purpose in a mission of “priestly motherhood”.

In 1966 Mrs. Matilde Penna Sagone⁷ (mamma Tilde) joined the Pious Union. She lived fully this charism of the “priestly motherhood”, even before knowing Father Giuseppe. The Servant of God wrote to her on July 19, 1967: “My good daughter, you have a priestly soul. In constant contact with Jesus in the Eucharist you are filled with this priestly and Rogationist spirit, fruit of the beautiful gift of docility to the inspirations of the Lord. Let yourself be ‘consumed by Jesus’ – try to naturalize what is supernatural – your union with God, your conversation with him face to face, is so familiar, that you felt constantly united to Him as His most Holy Mother, in every thought, breath, beat of the heart. Consider yourself as the Priestess of your little church, the family and be a living monsternace so that anyone who approaches you can hear, see Jesus living in you. In any encounter with the creatures, always be concerned of being able to speak of God to those souls”⁸.

⁵ Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 16.

⁶ Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 22.

⁷ Cfr. *PGR*, *Memorie*, X.

⁸ Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 19.

We recalled the “special prayer” written by Father Giuseppe in 1952, in which among other things he asked: “Grant that I may become so holy, dead to myself and that our shrine may become a scented garden of virtues and of saints.”⁹ It seems that this transformation has begun in the Shrine. But the enemy thinks to spread the weeds even among the good grain. In such a great and so delicate reality jealousies and misunderstandings that lead to prejudice arise. In January of 1972 the Association was dissolved and Fr. Giuseppe was transferred to the Community of Zagarolo.

Father Giuseppe accepts the obedience with suffering and great peace, preserving his usual joviality. In the new assignment as vicar of the small parish “Our Lady of Trust” he multiplies his zeal, as already in Messina. He goes often to the nearby sanctuary of Genazzano, at the foot of Our Lady of Good Counsel for comfort and light. On September 22, 1972 he had the chance to meet Pope Paul VI on the occasion of an audience and took the opportunity to hand him a letter in which he presents the “priestly motherhood”.

At the end of 1974, Father Giuseppe returns to Messina as a Collaborator in the Shrine and Councilor of the House¹⁰, and in the following year as spiritual Father of the House, spiritual Adviser of the Daughters of Mary and of the Anthonian Pageboys (*Paggetti Antoniani*)¹¹. Only in 1979 he receives the task as Assistant of the *Zealatrix of the Rogate*¹², as they had been called the Pious Union, the group which was suspended on January 24, 1972¹³. Then from 1986 to 1989, he returns to the task as Rector of the Shrine¹⁴.

Rogationist Identity - The quick look on the rich personality of Father Giuseppe reveals two fundamental and characteristic elements, which on closer view turn out to be complementary: his closeness to Jesus in constant prayer and his compassion, that makes him bend mercifully towards the brothers and sisters, especially those in difficulty, to help them in their spiritual and material needs.

True son of St. Hannibal, Father Giuseppe lived fully together with Jesus the Rogate pericope: *Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. Seeing the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; Pay therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest!”* (Mt 9:35-38).

All those who have been close to him, either for a long or short time, testify to have seen him very often in prolonged prayer or dedicated himself full time to the ministry of the sacrament of reconciliation. His “distractions” were the moments he spent to comfort and cheer up especially the sick.

There are numerous testimonies to that effect. They attest in particular that he manifested his love of prayer for vocations, for which he did not only spread the obligation of prayer, but the love for the Rogate. Those who knew him well remember seeing him at church, from early morning, in prayer and worship. Hence, his exhortations to prayer for vocations were strengthened by his example

⁹ Cfr. *Scritti*, IV, p. 1124.

¹⁰ Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 12, p.00.

¹¹ Cfr. *Bollettino LIV*, 1, genn.-febb. 1976, p. 32.

¹² Cfr. *PGR, Memorie*, XXX, ad 103.

¹³ Cfr. *PGR*, Allegato 6.

¹⁴ Cfr. *PGR*, doc. 12.

of a prayerful life, his prolonged stay before the Lord, when he was not occupied by his mission of confessor or visit to the sick. Authentic follower of St. Hannibal, he found strength from prolonged prayer to spend himself totally to his intensive apostolate throughout the day, excluding the few hours he reserved for rest at night.

The bond between Father Giuseppe and the Shrine of St. Anthony is fully understood when we consider that it is the first Temple of the Evangelical Rogation of the Heart of Jesus. This is the place where St. Hannibal had sown the prayer for good workers, commanded by Jesus; this is where the spirituality of priestly motherhood was born.

After the death of Father Giuseppe, over four thousand signatures were gathered to ask that he would be buried in the Shrine. That desire was fulfilled on May 9, 2014: he now rests at the Basilica Shrine of St. Anthony and Temple of the Evangelical Rogation, exactly in the tomb where St. Hannibal's body was laid for over 60 years. In this same place he had left a note asking for the grace to return to the Shrine, which he defined as the antechamber of Paradise¹⁵, because for him it was really so.

On the path of holiness – At this point I wish to read the life of Father Giuseppe against the light of two articles of our Constitutions, which I quote below: “Art. 10 - Following Jesus - The following of Christ, as proposed in the Gospel, is our supreme rule of life¹⁶. Fascinated by the Divine Master, we left everything for Him (cf. Mt 4:18-22, 19, 21:27, Lk 5:11) and preferred Him to everything in order to participate fully in his paschal mystery¹⁷. In spiritual life, through a journey of increasing faithfulness, we are configured to Christ on the model of the Apostles, living in full communion of love and service in the Church”.

In a nutshell we can say that the journey of Father Giuseppe had been that of discipleship, “following Jesus” who came not for the righteous but for sinners. For him this means remaining for long hours before the Sacramental Jesus; for him this signifies spending himself in the pastoral ministry and in the service of the needy, in spirit and in body.

“Art. 9 – The primacy of the spiritual life - With the approval of the Congregation and the declaration of the holiness of the Founder, the Church recognizes, in the spiritual and apostolic charism of the Institute, a new way of holiness¹⁸ and the objective requirements to reach evangelical perfection. With this certainty in our heart we prioritize spiritual life in our way of living, convinced that the more our Communities are evangelical schools of Rogationist spirituality, the more our apostolic fruitfulness, generosity and love for the poor and even our vocation appeal will be vigorous and fruitful”¹⁹.

The Lord made use of the great faith and apostolic zeal of Father Giuseppe to make the Shrine of St. Anthony, Temple of the Evangelical Rogation, the

¹⁵ Cfr. *Scritti*, IV, p. 1183.

¹⁶ Cfr. CIC 662.

¹⁷ Cfr. VC 93.

¹⁸ Cfr. GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Messaggio al Superiore Generale dei Padri Rogazionisti*, 16 maggio 1997.

¹⁹ Cfr. VC 93.

center of faith and place of the Divine Mercy. We do not intend to belittle the valuable support of many other confreres, but only to emphasize the testimony of the shepherd who made the house of God his own home.

Let us listen to a testimony of one who had been with him for several years in the Shrine: "I have no doubt that the influx of the faithful in the Shrine and the frequency of confessions, which continue even today, are the result of the fifty years that Father Giuseppe Marrazzo has spent selflessly and intensely – also together with the untiring Brother Raffaele Nicola Quinto – in service at the Sanctuary. In my opinion, we can say that Father Giuseppe has been a founding pillar of the Shrine, because he came to the Shrine after just over 15 years since its opening to the public. He opened a road and indicated that the priesthood is without time limit, a ministry of "all services" to be spent without exceptions or excuses: as He himself had immolated all his life"²⁰.

In my letter last December, while I informed you about the satisfactory progress of the cause of canonization of Father Giuseppe Marrazzo, I recalled that a new Rogationist Saint would be a great gift for the Church and for the Congregation. For that reason, I exhorted you to ask this grace to the Lord and to make known the life and virtues of Father Giuseppe. We hope that soon we could print the *Positio* that will give us in detail the great virtues of this our Confrere, true Rogationist model and shepherd of souls.

Our charismatic identity in today's challenges - The XII General Chapter has entrusted to us the task for the next six years, to verify at the different levels of government, as well as on a personal level, regarding "our charismatic identity in today's challenges", looking at Jesus who upon "seeing the crowds, he had compassion for them and said: Rogate".

The model Jesus certainly overwhelms us, it is far from us above all for its unequalled greatness and it is also distant for the years and the different socio-cultural context. In Father Giuseppe we have a model that is close to our time, the model of a person who has not accomplished impressive gestures and works, but lived in simplicity and humility, yet with a big heart, full of the love of God and of souls. All this is possible also for each of us.

Let us listen to a reminder from the Chapter document on the fundamental importance of our witnessing: "The charism of the Rogate inspires and molds our life and gives particular meaning to what we are and what we do. Only in the light of an authentic witnessing of life that others can recognize and appreciate the importance of praying for vocations and, at the same time, would commit themselves to be good workers in the harvest of the Lord" (n. 23).

We welcome the emphasis that we receive in a very clear way from the Chapter regarding the complementarity of the two aspects of our charism, prayer for vocations and charity, so much so that we cannot live authentically and fully one aspect if at the same time we do not live the other.

"The experience of Saint Hannibal tells us that there is a vital circle between the prayer for vocations and service to the "little ones" and the "poor". There can be no authentic prayer for vocation without a true love for the poor, neither can there be a fruitful pastoral care for vocations without the care of the poor. Such is so for us Rogationists, that there can be no true love for the poor without prayer for vocations. This is the originality and the secret of the

²⁰ Cfr. *PGR*, Memoria I.

Rogationist charism, commonly expressed with only one word: Rogate” (n. 50). Father Giuseppe understood all this very well thus making it the burning torch of his daily journey.

The 100 years of Father Giuseppe Marrazzo - On May 5, 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Father Giuseppe Marrazzo, which took place in San Vito dei Normanni (BR - Italy) precisely in 1917.

It is right to thank the Lord for this gift, in the person of our dear Confrere, which he has given to humanity, to the Church and to our Congregation. He has been a salt and light²¹ wherever he worked. We cannot not hide this light, he will continue to be salt for those who still meet him.

The sense of belonging to our religious family is first of all manifested by our coherence of life but also through the esteem and affection that we have towards our Confreres, those who are alive as well as those who have already departed to the House of the Father.

Therefore, I exhort you to take this occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth to promote opportunities for reflection on the charismatic figure of Father Giuseppe Marrazzo, so that he could be known more primarily by our Family of the Rogate and also by the clergy, consecrated persons and lay people who are close to us.

Let us continue to pray so that, if it is according to the plan of the Lord, one day the Church may proclaim him a saint, but we are confident that in Him, we have right now a true intercessor for the life and apostolate of our Congregation.

With this hope, which I entrust to the intercession of our Divine Superiors, I greet you with affection in the Lord.



Bruno Rampazzo
1.7. (Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, R.C.J.)
Sup. Gen.

²¹ Cfr. Mt 5, 13.