

January 29, 1996

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

Today Pope John Paul II officially announced the date for the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre. It will take place on June 2 in St. Peter's Square. Three saints will be canonized that day. The others are: Egidio Maria di San Giuseppe (an Italian Franciscan) and Juan Grande Román (a Spanish brother of St. John of God).

When I wrote to you last April to say that the canonization process had reached its final phase, I asked that the provinces begin to make remote preparations. I am very grateful for all that has already been done. Almost all of our major Vincentian periodicals have prepared special issues on John Gabriel Perboyre. I have also been struck by how enthusiastically the members of our Vincentian Family throughout the world have responded to the announcement of the upcoming canonization. I have just returned from Taiwan where I had the opportunity to speak about Perboyre. The reaction of the people there, and on the mainland, is touching.

Last April I named a small committee to begin organizing the canonization. It has already met and has made a number of suggestions to the General Council. The committee's mandate includes: a) matters pertaining to the canonization itself (the liturgy, the music, etc.), b) other celebrations that will take place in Rome (there is usually a three-day program, including an audience with the Pope), c) press releases, d) providing information about possibilities of lodging for the many people who will be coming to Rome for the canonization. The members are: Frs. Roberto D'Amico, Giuseppe Guerra, William Sheldon, and André Sylvestre. Now that the date has been announced, we have expanded its membership and asked that it serve as a working committee that will be involved in the many details related to the proximate preparation for the canonization. The new members are: Frs. Mario Di Carlo, Carlo Braga, Luigi Mezzadri, and Srs. Manuela Latini and Nevia Delle Monache.

The date which the pope chose for the canonization coincides, unexpectedly, with that of the meeting of all of the Visitors of the Congregation in Salamanca, which we had announced more than two years ago. Some change in scheduling is, therefore, necessary, but I trust that any inconvenience the Visitors might have in readjusting will be more than counterbalanced by the opportunity to be present at the canonization! The Visitors' Meeting, therefore, will begin on the morning of

June 5, two days later than originally scheduled, but will still end on June 15 at supper. The Visitors will soon be receiving more detailed information about possible arrangements for their participation in the canonization and for the meeting in Salamanca.

Today, let me recall several of the objectives of this celebration, which I outlined in my letter of April 20, 1995:

1. I encourage you to use this occasion, in all the provinces, to call young people to the Vincentian missionary vocation of evangelization and formation. I ask each province to organize concrete pastoral projects, with this as their objective. In other words, I urge the popular mission teams, the seminary staffs, the parish priests, those working at vocational promotion, those teaching in our schools and universities, and those laboring in foreign missions to design programs, during the coming months, in which our missionary vocation is presented to the young.

2. I ask that every province organize an appropriate liturgical celebration, involving members of all the branches of the Vincentian Family, around the time of the canonization.

3. I ask too that, in all of the provinces, we make this an occasion to focus once more on our mission in China: recalling the sacrifices of those who labored there in the past, expressing gratitude for the fidelity of those who continue to live there and witness to Christ, and looking forward to a future work of evangelization in China, where the number of Christians is growing rapidly and where there are many candidates for the priesthood and community life.

There is a time for celebrating, especially within families. This is surely one of them. We rejoice that one of our brothers, who lived and died for the Lord, shares in Jesus' risen life. In canonizing John Gabriel Perboyre, the Church holds him up as a model. He is surely that for us since he fulfilled the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission in a heroic way, as he followed Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor. "This purpose," our Constitutions tell us, "is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:

1° make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (CR I, 3) in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (CR XII, 13);

2° work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned;

3° help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor" (C 1).

John Gabriel lived out each of these three aspects of Vincentian life fully: he was recognized as a genuinely holy man, even before his martyrdom; he spent long

years in the formation of the clergy; he gave his life evangelizing the poor on mainland China. In short, he witnessed heroically to what the Congregation of the Mission is all about.

I am reading Perboyre's letters right now and have been struck by how much he loved the Company. "I would give a thousand lives for it," he wrote to his uncle on September 13, 1835. I hope that we can make this celebration an occasion for renewed love for the Congregation and for the missionary vocation that St. Vincent has handed on to us.

My prayer on June 2 will be for the whole Company, that we might be heroic witnesses to the following of Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor and that we might live and die faithfully in that vocation.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General