

April 20, 1995

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

On April 6, while I was visiting the Province of Chile, I received news that Pope John Paul II had just promulgated a decree approving a miracle attributed to the intercession of John Gabriel Perboyre. This was the final step on the road toward his formally being declared a saint. With the entire Vincentian family, I rejoice in this event. I thank God especially for those missionaries, men and women, who have lived and died in China. In these days I have been thinking especially of our brothers and sisters who continue to witness to the gospels heroically there, in the face of suffering. I have delayed in writing to all of you since I hoped to be able to give you the date for the canonization. The date has not yet been announced, however, by the Holy See, though I suspect that the ceremony will take place toward the end of this year.

I will write to you again when I have further information about the canonization. For the moment, however, I think it important that we begin to make remote preparations for this very significant event. Today we discussed the matter in our General Council and came to the following conclusions.

1. We would like to use this occasion, in all the provinces, to call young people to the Vincentian missionary vocation of evangelization and formation. I would ask each of the provinces to organize concrete pastoral projects, with this as their objective (for example, through popular missions, through our parishes, our schools and universities, in our foreign missions).

2. I would ask that in every province there be an appropriate liturgical celebration, involving all the members of the various 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.

4. We will be naming a small committee to organize the canonization. The committee will be responsible for: a) matters pertaining to the canonization itself (the liturgy, the music, etc.), b) other celebrations that might take place in Rome during those days (usually a small program is organized with other liturgical celebrations and

conferences on the person being canonized), c) press releases, d) providing information about possibilities of lodging for the many people who will be coming to Rome for the canonization.

5. I am asking the editors of our major Vincentian periodicals to prepare a special issue on John Gabriel Perboyre (I recognize, in doing so, that the time is short). It would be very helpful if this issue could be ready by the end of October or the beginning of November.

The saints make holiness real for us. They give it flesh. I want to encourage all of the members of our Vincentian family to meditate often on the life of this wonderful man during the months ahead. When we recall Perboyre, most of us think spontaneously of his heroic death. But he was also heroic in his life, both in France where he labored in formation work for 12 years and in China where he experienced abandonment and suffering.

Today I pray with all of you that John Gabriel Perboyre, our brother, will spur us on to live our missionary vocation more generously. I hope too that he will be an inspiration to young people to follow Christ's call to "Go! Go into the whole world and preach the good news to every creature" (Mk 16:15).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General