

International Meeting of the Miraculous Medal Association

Paris, 15-20 November 2009

by Enrique Rivas Vila, C.M.
Subdirector General of the AMM

From November 15-20 the International Meeting of the Miraculous Medal Association was held in Paris. This marked the solemn closing of the Jubilee Year to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the pontifical appropriation of the Association.

On November 20, 2009 the one-hundredth anniversary of the pontifical approbation of the Miraculous Medal Association was concluded with the Eucharist that was celebrated in the Chapel of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin to Saint Catherine Labouré. Father Gregory Gay, C.M., superior general and director general of the Miraculous Medal Association, presided at the Eucharist. Thirty other priests, the majority of them National Directors of the Association, concelebrated the Eucharist. All the participants at the international meeting, as well as many Daughters of Charity and numerous faithful who regularly worship at the Chapel participated in the Eucharist. This was made possible since the time of this celebration had been previously announced (this was not the normal time for the celebration of the Eucharist).

At the moment of giving honor and glory to God, that is, at the time of proclaiming the doxology at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, everyone joined together in a gesture of gratitude in Christ, for Christ and through Christ for the many graces received during this Holy Year which was now drawing to a conclusion. We also expressed our gratitude for the impact that this Holy Year has had on the national groups and the members of the Association. There, at the place from which everything began, at the altar where we always come together, there together with Mary whose presence is still felt in that chapel, we expressed the joy and gratitude of the entire Association, the gratitude of each and every member

throughout the world. We did this with an awareness that the Association is a gift that comes from the Lord and Mary.

Previously we had celebrated the International Meeting in the form of an Assembly even though we did not give this name to our coming together because this type of meeting does not exist in our present statutes. We trust that the next time we come together we will do so as an authentic assembly (the result of revising our Statutes which was accomplished during this meeting).

In fact the primary task of this International Meeting was to present new Statutes to the Miraculous Medal Association during this celebration of the Holy Year, or perhaps it is better to state that we wanted to adapt and revise the present statutes so that we might respond in a better way to the concerns of the Church and the world in which we live.

We realized that we had to be faithful to two realities and then from that perspective elaborate a text. Thus we had to be faithful first of all to the fact that the Association, desired by the Blessed Virgin, was commanded to continue to proclaim the message that she had left us. This was our primary concern: to respond to Mary, to give thanks to her for her initiative and to attempt to question ourselves about the ways in which the Association responds to the present day situation.

Second, we realized that we also had to be faithful to that which we were commemorating this year, namely, fidelity to the Church as expressed in the Statutes that were given to us by Saint Pius X in 1909 and that were revised and approved by the Holy See in 1998. This was perhaps one of the most enlightening reflections of the entire meeting. In his Statutes, Saint Pius X defined us as *an association of faithful*. The same definition is repeated in the Statutes of 1998. In other words, in accord with canon 298 we are an association composed of clergy and laity which responds very well to the characteristics of its members since according to Saint Pius X, in order to be a member of said Association it is sufficient to have received the blessed medal and to carry it with oneself repeating frequently the words inscribed on the medal. In this sense our Association is something unique within the Church and especially within our Vincentian Family. Who has not received this medal, worn it and frequently recited the invocation *O Mary...?* We can say that all of us, missionaries, Daughters of Charity and lay members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family are truly members of the Miraculous Medal Association. It is clear, however, that among this great number of members there are some among the laity, the missionaries, Daughters of Charity, women and men of different religious institutes who have committed themselves for a limited or



Participants in the Meeting.

indefinite time to carry out the different tasks of the Association and therefore said members are called *committed members* in the proposed Statutes. The Association is more than a lay association and therefore its structures ought to respond to its proper juridical nature. This was the great challenge or task which was undertaken during this past year and led to the presentation of the Statutes which were composed from the suggestions of the various National Associations and the General Council of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Now the text which was studied during the meeting is in its final stages of review and will soon be sent to the Holy See for approval.

At the meeting in Paris the following persons were present for all the sessions: the superior general and the delegates from twenty-six nations (a total of sixty people). The delegates came from Australia, India, Thailand, the Philippines, Chile, Peru, Cameroon, the United States, Mexico as well as other American, African and European

nations. Twenty-one of these delegates were priests, fourteen were Daughters of Charity, two from other religious Congregation and twenty-six were lay women or men. At the opening session, after the greeting by the Superior General, the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Èvelyne Franc warmly greeted us and expressed the love which the Daughters have for the Association of the Miraculous Medal. All the sessions were held in the Assembly Hall of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity where we were attended with great care. The majority of the group spoke Spanish but there was also a good representation from the English, French, Polish and Portuguese speaking nations. Thus these languages were used throughout the meeting and the Sisters from the Motherhouse provided us with simultaneous translation. Yasmine Cajuste, the International President of the Vincentian Marian Youth, made a presentation to the delegates (her theme: The place of the Vincentian Marian Youth within the Miraculous Medal Association) and also helped in the translation.

During our meeting we traveled one day to Fain-lès-Moutiers, and celebrated the Eucharist in the parish there. There we renewed our Baptismal promises at the same font where Zoe Catherine Labouré was baptized. It was very emotional to be able to renew our commitment as children of God in the same place where Zoe Catherine Labouré was born to new life.

All the participants have recognized that these have been grace filled days and have deepened our commitment to the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

WELCOME FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AT THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF THE AMM

Paris, 16 November 2009

Allow me to say once again to all of you: WELCOME to this “International Meeting of the Association of the Miraculous Medal”! We are calling this an “international meeting” because we have not yet developed our Statutes and so we cannot call this a “General Assembly.” After this Meeting, whose objective is to elaborate our General Statutes, we will be able, in the future, to hold General Assemblies, with the next one coming in about five or six years from now, depending on what we decide during these days.

In his letter inviting you to this Meeting, Father Enrique Rivas, Sub-director General, mentioned that these would be very special days because during this time together we would be talking about something we care about very much, and he was right. We are here together because of our love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, and at the same time, because of our dedication to our beloved Association of the Miraculous Medal.

Throughout this entire year, we have been celebrating our Jubilee, a time of gratitude to Mary for the message given through her appearance to Saint Catherine Laboure. This is also a time to give thanks for the Church's approbation of the Association one hundred years ago. Our hope is that in this meeting we will be able to consolidate the Association of the Miraculous Medal. This will certainly require serious work on our part as we strive to establish clear general guidelines for our Association, which will be represented through our General Statutes.

Statutes, like Norms or any other written document designed to give guidelines to an Association or a Congregation, are a result of extensive experience. I can attest to the fact that Father Rivas has been hard at work, along with us on the Council, with regard to all that is contained in this fundamental document of the General Statutes that we have today. We have reviewed repeatedly the various contributions that some of the countries had sent in, although the participation was small in comparison with the total number of countries, fifty-three, in which the Association of the Miraculous Medal exists. These contributions are valuable, and we have tried to incorporate all those that seemed significant in the development of the Statutes.

Once again I would like to speak about this reality of the Association's existence in different places in the world and in various cultures. We are not attempting to create uniformity in the Association. Rather, we hope for a sense of unity in the various expressions and approaches relating to our devotion to the Miraculous Medal, and in our methods of spreading its message in different countries.

In addition to the work, which will require effort and which we hope will involve the participation of all those present here, so that we will have a document that truly comes from the grassroots level, we hope that this will also be an opportunity for us to pray together as an Association. Here in our Religious Seat, which is rue du Bac, we have the opportunity to deepen our love for Mary and be strengthened and renewed in order to carry this message to all those who are open to hearing about God's love, through the love of his Mother Mary.

May our time together also be an occasion to get to know one another better, for we are an International Association, and most likely we know most about our own Association in our local area. Perhaps we have some familiarity at the national level, but as an International Association, our hope is to create connections among one another so that this message might become universally known. In this way, we can show that the love that we have for Mary our Mother and her Son, Jesus Christ, is manifested in our love for the entire world.

We hope that this will not only be a time for work, prayer and getting to know one another, but also an opportunity to enjoy being together as sisters and brothers, members of the Vincentian Family. The happiness that we share and that grows ever deeper among us comes from the same joy that Mary expressed at the moment of her Magnificat, when her greeting to her cousin Elizabeth came forth from their experience of love for one another, as well as the love between the two infants within their wombs. May our time together be an opportunity to express the joy of knowing that we are loved by God.

I would only add that this is what we will strive to put into practice through all that is presented to us here. I am certain that Father Enrique will assist us in staying on task in our participation in each of these activities. I am very pleased to be able to be present with all of you; we are all members of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, members who have the right to speak and dialogue among ourselves, whether we are priests, Daughters of Charity, or committed lay members in our Church. This is a characteristic that is unique to our Association, for this is the branch of the Vincentian Family in which there is full participation of members coming from all vocations. We will demonstrate to the rest of the Vincentian Family our ability to work together as a team and as an International Association, in order to carry out our responsibility of continuing to promote love for Mary our Mother and love for her Son Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, I ask Our Lord to help us to be faithful to our Jubilee theme: "One hundred years journeying with Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, with gratitude and creativity." May this celebration be a time of gratitude, and may Our Lord fill us with creativity so that this special mission that has been confided to us may long continue. God bless you all.

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General

GREETING FROM THE SUPERIORESS GENERAL AT THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF THE AMM

Paris, 16 November 2009

Dear Fathers, Dear Sisters and Dear Friends,

This morning, your meeting officially opened with the Eucharist presided over by Father Gregory, our Superior General and your Director General, followed by his introduction. It is now my pleasure to welcome you here, not only in my name, but in the name of all the Daughters of Charity. All the Sisters here in the Motherhouse are also very happy to have you with us. Some of our General Councillors are present with you this morning, including Sister Iliana Suarez who serves as the link between your Association and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

A warm welcome to each one of you very specially, the lay members, priests and Sisters who participate in this wonderful Association, as you gather **at the very site of the Apparitions** of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine Laboure. In fact, in this Chapel visited by so many pilgrims, everyone feels Mary's welcome. A young woman once said to me: *"Mary not only visited here, she is still here."* It is true, Mary draws all her children to her, by some mysterious instinct, not to hold on to them, but to lead them to her Son: *"Come to the foot of this altar."*

I like to think that during these days of reflection, **the Blessed Virgin will also be seated here among you**, here in this room, to listen to you and communicate to you the inspirations you need each time that you ask her for them. And even though this meeting is particularly focused on developing the Statutes for your Association, Mary will know how to give you the missionary fervor and energy needed to be able to discern how to best formulate these statutes, in fidelity to the mission confided to the Association as part of the Church of the third millennium.

I am sure you will also be spending time in prayer in **the Chapel**, in order to absorb the meaning of the message that Mary confided to Saint Catherine. It is a "treasure" of extraordinary grace and power, and there is no limit to what we can discover in it for our world today.

I take the opportunity, as I welcome you, to reflect with you a moment on **the person of Saint Catherine**. For all of us, she is not only a privileged witness to the Blessed Virgin, but also someone who lived out Gospel-inspired love in her everyday life, in an extraordinarily Vincentian way.

Beginning when she was a young girl, Catherine was open to God's presence, and at the age of nine, the death of her mother was a key step in her spiritual journey with Mary. Her attentiveness to poor persons was also a priority for her from a very young age, as she would refrain from food in order to share it with sick persons in her village.

At the age of 24, Catherine became a Daughter of Charity. Besides being chosen by Mary to be her messenger, Sister Catherine lived out the Vincentian charism simply but authentically in her daily life. Her priority was the service of poor persons, service that was fed and strengthened by a deeply spiritual and Eucharistic life.

Today, this young woman's manner of living is a call for *young people* to choose the pathway of active charity with a balanced lifestyle, a pathway of holiness in everyday life.

Through the simplicity of her life, Saint Catherine also has a connection with *ordinary people*. She leads them to turn their attention towards Mary and Jesus "purely and simply" and to place themselves at the service to their suffering sisters and brothers.

Every vocation of service to God and the neighbor, including the lay vocation, can draw inspiration from the witness of Saint Catherine's life. She appeared "*as the first to witness to a new form of holiness, one without human glory or triumph, that the Holy Spirit was beginning to bring forth for modern times*" to quote the writings of Father Laurentin.

In our Company, to speak of Saint Catherine is also to be on a level with **our Founders**. It is fitting to note that today, **the Jubilee celebration of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of the Founders coincides with the 100th anniversary of your Association**. Does this not demonstrate the complementarity of the Association and the Company, and at the same time, suggest some calls for our current world? The Medal continues to be a gift that God offers our contemporaries today as well as an invitation for us to witness to the ever-renewed strength of the Gospel in the face of the challenges in our world. It invites us to whole-heartedly involve ourselves in building a world that is more just and more loving.

My friends, I confide your gathering to Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Catherine, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. May they help you, and help all of us to re-energize our specific charism within the Vincentian Family so that it might always be at the service of those most in need, and that together, we might know how to witness to God's tender love to persons living in poverty.

ÈVELYNE FRANC, D.C.
Superioress General