



Director's Letter No. 8

by Fr. Karl Stehlin, Director of the Militia Immaculatae

100th Anniversary of the M.I., October 2017

Dear Knights of the Immaculata!

Exactly 100 years ago Saint Maximilian Kolbe, with the permission of his superior, founded the Militia Immaculatae. There is no better way to recall this memorable event, than to let the founder speak about it himself:

“A LOT OF WATER has already passed under the bridge: it all took place nearly 18 years ago, so I have almost forgotten a number of details.

However, since the Fr. Guardian [Kornel Czupryk] commands me to give an account of the beginnings of the M.I., I will describe what my memory allows me still to recall.

I remember talking with my brother clerics about the wretched state of our Order and about its future. And in those moments, the following idea was being impressed on my mind: either rebuild it or break it all up. I felt deep sorrow for those young people who often came to us with the best intention and most of the time ended up losing their ideal of holiness in the very friary. Yet I did not quite know what to do.

Let me go further back in time.

I still recall how as a young boy I had bought a small statue of the Immaculata for five kopeks. And in the minor seminary, where we attended Mass in the choir, with my face to the ground, I promised the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, whose image overlooked the altar, that I would fight for her. But how? I did not know. Yet, I envisioned a fight with material weapons.

For that reason, when time came for me to enter the novitiate, I confided to the Father Master, Fr. Dionizy (Sowiak), of blessed memory, that difficulty of mine in entering religious life. He transformed my decision into a commitment to recite the “Sub tuum praesidium” every day. I have continued to recite that prayer to this day, even if I know now what type of battle the Immaculata had at heart.

Although I was very prone to pride, I felt strongly drawn to the Immaculata. In my small cell, on my kneeler, I always kept the image of a saint to whom the Immaculata had appeared. And I would often turn to her in prayer. On seeing that, a friar told me that I must be very devoted to that saint.

When in Rome the Freemasons started coming out in the open daringly, flaunting their banners under the windows of the Vatican, depicting, on the black banners of the followers of Giordano Bruno, St. Michael the Archangel crushed under the foot of Lucifer, and openly lashing out against the Holy Father in propaganda pamphlets, the thought came of setting up an association committed to fighting Freemasonry and other servants of Lucifer. To make sure that such idea was coming from the Immaculata, I sought counsel from my spiritual director at the time, Fr. Alessandro Basile, a Jesuit, ordinary confessor of students at the College. Having obtained assurance from holy obedience, I decided to get down to work.

In the meantime, however, we moved to the "Vigna" friary, which is about a 20–30 minute walk from the College, for a holiday period. During a football game, blood started coming out of my mouth. I drew aside and lay down on the grass. Br. Girolamo Biasi, of blessed memory, took care of me. I spat up blood for quite a while. Soon after, I went to the doctor. I rejoiced at the thought that perhaps I was already nearing the end of my life. The doctor ordered me to go back [to the College] in a coach and go to bed. Medication could barely stop the flow of blood, which kept coming out. During those days, the young and pious cleric Br. Girolamo Biasi, of blessed memory, used to come to see me.

Two weeks later, the doctor finally allowed me to go out for the first time. In the company of another cleric, Br. [Giovanni] Ossanna I got to the "Vigna," albeit with difficulty. When the clerics saw me, they cheered and were in high spirits, and brought me fresh figs, wine and bread. Having had something to eat and drink, my aches and pangs ceased, and for the first time I mentioned the idea of starting an association to Br. Girolamo Biasi and Fr. Iosif Pal, who had been ordained a priest before me although we were attending the same year of theology. However, I stipulated that each of them should consult their spiritual directors first, to make sure that it was in fact God's will.

Having recovered some of my strength, I was sent to Viterbo, with the cleric Br. Antoni Głowiński, my colleague, for an additional vacation period. On that occasion, Br. Antoni Głowiński joined the MI. Shortly after, Br. Antonio Mansi, of blessed memory, and Br. Enrico Granata, both clerics of the province of Naples also enrolled.

No one at the College knew of the existence of this association except those who belonged to the MI. Only the Rector, Fr. Stefano Ignudi, in his capacity as Superior, was aware of the M.I.'s existence. For our part, we did not do anything without his permission, because that was a mark of obedience, namely, the will of the Immaculata. Thus, with the consent of the Fr. Rector, on the 16th of October 1917, the first meeting of the first seven members took place, namely:

- (1) Fr. Iosif Pal, a young priest of the Romanian Province;
- (2) Br. Antoni Głowiński, deacon of the Romanian Province (d. October 18, 1918);
- (3) Br. Girolamo Biasi, from the Province of Padua (d. 1929);

- (4) Br. Quirico Pignalberi, of the Roman Province;
- (5) Br. Antonio Mansi, of the Province of Naples (d. October 31, 1918);
- (6) Br. Enrico Granata, of the Province of Naples;
- (7) myself.

The meeting took place at night, in secret, in a locked, inner cell that was constructed by means of a temporary wall. In front of us there was a little statue of the Immaculata between two lighted candles. Br. Girolamo Biasi acted as secretary. The purpose of this first meeting was the discussion of the "program of the M.I." (the M.I. certificate), especially since Fr. Alessandro Basile, who was also confessor to the Pope [Benedict XV], had promised he would ask the Holy Father for a blessing of the M.I. Fr. Basile, however, did not keep his promise, and we obtained our first oral blessing of the Holy Father via Bishop Msgr. Dominique Jaquet, professor of ecclesiastical history in our College.

For more than a year after that first meeting, the M.I. made no progress. In fact, all kinds of setbacks piled up, to the point that members were uncomfortable even mentioning it among themselves. One of them even tried to convince the others that the M.I. was something useless. It was then that, with wonderful signs of election, the Immaculata summoned to her side Fr. Antoni Głowiński, and ten days later, Br. Antonio Mansi, both victims of the Spanish flu. As for me, the condition of my lungs got worse: every time I coughed, I spat blood. That is when it all started to change. Having been excused from school, I took the opportunity to copy out the "Program of M.I." and gave it to the Most Rev. Fr. General (or rather the Vicar General, Fr. Domenico Tavani), in order to obtain his blessing in writing." If there were at least 12 of you..." said the Most Rev. Fr. General. He wrote his blessing and voiced his desire (I believe on that very occasion) that the MI should be propagated among our youth.

Membership started to increase, and has increased more and more ever since. In that early period of life of the Militia, our activity — besides private prayer — consisted in handing out medals of the Immaculata, called "Miraculous Medals." On one occasion, the same Most Rev. Fr. General gave us money to purchase some. Fr. Maximilian Kolbe

It would be almost a profanation to comment these so simple, humble and truly supernatural account. May we learn from these precious lines the generosity and all the virtues of the first Knight of the Immaculata, and in particular:

1/ the supernatural understanding and appreciation of all trials and sufferings united with those of Our Lord and the Sorrowful Mother;

2/ the absolute conviction, that the efficacy of this army of Our Lady depends entirely on the perfect submission to the will of the Immaculata expressed clearly through supernatural obedience towards the superiors;

3/ the humility of the founder who puts himself at the last place deeply convinced of his total unworthiness;

4/ the understanding that Our Lady and only Our Lady can save the ideal of holiness in the Church and preserve us from becoming indifferent and lukewarm; she also is our only and last hope when we face the worst enemies of the Church and Our Lord, the Freemasons and their immense world power;

5/ the experience that all what is great and pleasant in Our Lord's eyes, must be born and must grow in trials, contradictions and apparent defeats;

6/ the importance of the "friends in heaven", the triumphant Church: the more we ask them for assistance and attribute to their intercession our successes, the more the blessings.

Remember also, that on this anniversary of the foundation of the M.I. each Knight can obtain a plenary indulgence, another sign of Heaven's blessings.

Let us begin the second century of the Militia Immaculatae with a firm desire to follow the footsteps of the Holy Founder, to love the Immaculata effectively seeking always and everywhere to please her and to fulfill Her Will.

With my priestly blessing,
Manila, 16th of October 2017
Fr. Karl Stehlin