



ORDINE DEI SERVI DI MARIA - CURIA GENERALIZIA
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Ave Maria

My dear Brothers and Sisters of the Servite Family,
This year marks the 130th anniversary of the canonization of our Seven First Fathers, the founders of our religious family.

In 1884 Pope Leo XIII decided that the cause of canonization of the Seven could continue after an interval of 150 years. He believed the four miracles granted through the joint intercession of the Seven justified the procedure and on January 15, 1888, Leo XIII canonized our Seven First Fathers.

In his Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis wrote: "All our Institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins we see the hand of God who, in his Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church... Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities."

In accord with these precious words of Pope Francis in this anniversary year of the canonization of our Seven First Fathers I would call on all members, branches, and communities of our religious family, the Servants of Mary, to contemplate with joy and renewed zeal the history and lives of our Seven Fathers, to rediscover their "journey and to discern in that journey the inspiration, ideals, plans and values that moved them!

I would like to recall, briefly, the most important and well known inspirational elements that characterized our Founders.

Our Seven First Fathers ...

... lived a common life. They were a genuine community. Even before founding the Order they were active members of a lay community in Florence: the "*Societas major Dominae Nostrae*." After founding the Order, they continued this spirit of community. The "*Legenda de Origine*" tells us that they made all important decisions collectively. People knew them as an inseparable community. Consequently, they were canonized together as if they were a single person. This is the only case in the history of the Church where a group of saints, not martyrs, were canonized together.

...they lived a Marian life. Veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary had its origin in the Marian spirituality of the lay community of which they were members before founding the Order. The Seven made this a characteristic of the Order they founded. Our Fathers

called Mary their “Lady (mistress)” the “Lady of the Order” and they called their new Order the *Servants of Mary*. They affirmed with determination that it was Mary herself who brought about the foundation and name of the Order. In all the challenges and crises of their lives they trusted and took refuge in the intercession of the Virgin Mary, “*their Mother and their Lady.*”

... *they lived a life of service.* The Seven were inspired by the desire to live Christian love by serving others. The “*Legenda de Origine*” tells us that they never refused any act of service – even the most simple or humble. They did the work of the community with their own hands. The “*Legenda*” also tells us they never refused any favor people asked of them. “Day and night” people sought them out on Monte Senario for advice and spiritual direction. Their decision to establish a community in the city of Florence was proof of their desire to be close to people and serve them.

My heartfelt thanks to Fra Jorge M. Jiménez Delgadillo, Councilor and General Regent of Studies and to Fra Franco M. Azzalli, President of the Historical Institute for making available on the Order’s website, www.servidimaria.net, study material for the 130th anniversary of the canonization of our Founders.

With my whole heart I entrust all the communities of our religious family to the intercession of our Seven Fathers and to the grace of God. May the Virgin Mary join with us in our pilgrimage through the world and history.

Rome, February 17, 2018
Prot. 23/2018



Fra Gottfried M. Wolff, O.S.M.
Prior general