



Superiore generale dei Fratelli Maristi

MESSAGE FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT, 2010

On a day like this, 170 years ago, Br. François had the sad duty of informing the Institute that their loved brother and friend was dead: "On Saturday 6 June, at half-past four in the morning, our good Father Superior went to sleep peacefully in the Lord, after a serene decline of three quarters of an hour... In these sad circumstances, we invite you, very dear brothers, to unite your tears and hopes to ours. Mourn for a good father, a worthy Superior and Founder, a holy priest of Mary, our support, our guide, our tender consoler. Mourn because death has taken from us one who knew so well how to share our sufferings and to direct our steps on the path of salvation... It falls to us now to recall and follow attentively his last and most influential teachings; to bring them alive in one each of us, imitating the virtues we admired in him, and, more than ever, coming closer together around our good and tender Mother".

It is easy to imagine the emotion contained in these few lines, written by one who had been at Champagnat's side since he was ten years old. He had spent more than twenty there and now, at the age of 32, was writing as first Superior General of the Institute. The love and admiration he felt for Marcellin are undeniable, as can be seen in the expressions he uses in referring to him. But, as a man of faith, he looked immediately towards the future and saw himself invited to take up Champagnat's inheritance: "It falls to us now..." He himself proposed to turn himself into a "living image" of the Founder, and he was recognized as such by the brothers.

From the great love he professed for Champagnat, Br. François also appreciated, in a very obvious way, the house of the Hermitage, which he frequently referred to as "the great reliquary of Fr. Champagnat". "Everything speaks to us of Fr. Champagnat, everything reminds us of this good Father. The walls, the partitions, the floors tell us that he was at once mason, plasterer, carpenter. He walked on these floors, he passed through these rooms; he prayed here, sang, heard confessions, celebrated the Mass, gave communion in this chapel that he built himself; he worked the land, the garden... struck the hard rock to bring it down. Finally, he rests here among us". Who better able than Br. François to understand the enormous symbolic value of our Motherhouse, having spent 56 years at the Hermitage?

"Reclaiming the spirit of the Hermitage". The invitation seems to me to parallel what Br. François said in communicating the death of the Founder: "It falls to us now to recall and follow attentively his last and most influential teachings; to bring them alive in each of us, imitating the virtues that we admired in him and, more than ever, coming closer together around our good and tender Mother".

It falls to us. It is up to me to appropriate for myself the spirit of the Hermitage. And this is the invitation I feel strongly today. To make an interior pilgrimage to the source from which spring the faith, the audacity, the courage of Champagnat and the first brothers. From where did this power come to them to make them overcome all the difficulties and give life with joy to the service of the Marist mission?

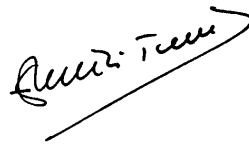
It seems to me that it will be difficult for us to travel the road towards "new lands" requested by our XXI General Chapter, if at the same time we do not take initiatives to let our roots sink in search of what will give nourishment to our lives and meaning to our work.

This year, I will be celebrating the feast of our Holy Founder in Oceania where, as we know, the Marist presence goes back to our beginnings. So I invite the whole Institute to give heartfelt thanks to the Lord for

all the good achieved in this region through the various branches of the Society of Mary and, in a special way, by the more than four thousand Marists of Champagnat who are at present striving to serve some 41,000 children and young people in this part of the world.

Within a few days I will have the opportunity to meet with the brothers who are in a great Asian country as members of the Sector "Asia ad gentes". I would like to commend them and all members of the Sector to your prayers, but particularly during this day.

The second reading for the proper liturgy of Saint Marcellin Champagnat evokes for us the first Christian community united around Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is, in fact, our fount of inspiration, our travelling companion, the one who calls us to build the Church of Pentecost. At no time like today do the words of Marcellin in his Spiritual Testament have more force: "May it please that good Mother to preserve you, give you increase, and bring you to holiness".

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Emili Turú", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right and then curves upwards.

Br. Emili Turú,
Superior General