



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?

I think that Fr. Marcellin as well as Br. François would be very happy if they could see the renovations achieved at this house they loved so much, particularly since they are intended to recover, with new force, the goal for which it was built: to be a house of formation, a school of spirituality. During Easter week, I had the opportunity to be at the Hermitage, and was able to appreciate that today we can not only count on buildings prepared for the future, but that we have recovered and placed in relief elements that connect us with its builder, Champagnat, and our first brothers.

How many meetings, how many sacrifices and concerns have taken place since February 2004, when the possibility of renewing the "Marist places" started being talked about! My most cordial gratitude to Br. Sean and the members of his Council, as well as the Provincial and the Council of the Hermitage, the first movers of the project. A special thanks to the province of the Hermitage, which not only generously assumed a good part of the cost of the project, but also took on responsibility for day to day supervision of the work. Thanks also to the administrative units for their collaboration, in accordance with their means, and for all those who offered help on a personal basis. Thanks to the "Marists of Champagnat" who have agreed to form part of the present Hermitage community, leaving behind their homelands and their

personal projects to become part of an Institute project. And thanks to all the persons who were so involved in the different planning and accompaniment committees as well as in the actual carrying out of the project.

“Reclaiming the spirit of the Hermitage”. Under this suggestive title, Br. Sean wrote a letter three years ago to the whole Institute, explaining the Hermitage Project: “This project includes both the renewal of persons and of places and has two aims: a) Developing a new program of welcome and animation for visitors to Notre Dame de l’Hermitage; b) Planning and carrying out the renovation of the buildings and other significant spaces that are part of the property of the Hermitage, so that they will facilitate the implementation of the above mention program”.

“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”.

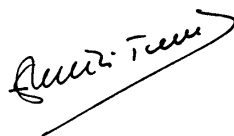
It falls to us. It is up to me to appropriate for myself the spirit of the Hermitage. And this is the invitation I feel strongly today. To make an interior pilgrimage to the source from which spring the faith, the audacity, the courage of Champagnat and the first brothers. From where did this power come 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", with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Br. Emili Turú,
Superior General