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## Feast of St. Marcellin Champagnat

Br. Seán D. Sammon, Superior General



Did you ever think about looking at Marcellin Champagnat through the eyes of Brother François? And why François? Because this first Superior General of ours never ceased to pray that he become a living portrait of our Founder. And I am pleased to report that in his lifetime his prayers were answered.

Should we look at Marcellin through the eyes of François, what might we see? First of all, a man who took risks. Marcellin was not afraid to take a chance, to set aside his well made plans and try something new—even when the outcome was not assured. After all, he built the Hermitage following immediately upon the Institute's first vocation crisis. At a time when

most people would have been downsizing, the Founder was expanding. But then again, he believed without question that Mary would send him his needed recruits, and that she did.

Second, each and every time that François looked at Marcellin he could not help but see Mary. For the Founder was in love with the mother of Jesus. No doubt about it. And over time their relationship grew so close that Mary became his confidant; he eventually entrusted his Institute as well as its members and works to her.

Finally, should we look at the Founder through the eyes of our first Superior General we would see immediately a man who knew himself only too

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well. Impatient with pretense and self-promotion, Marcellin put great weight on the virtue of humility and struggled to give it a central place in his life.

His relationship with Mary had also taught him that this virtue was not to be associated with excessive self-abasement. For in being nobody other than herself, Mary came to discover the glory of God. Genuine humility is realized when we, like her, welcome God into our lives. For in so doing, we come to see ourselves as we truly are: creatures in the presence of the Creator.

Now, after looking at the Founder through the eyes of François, suppose that we turns his sights on us. What might he see? Unfortunately—and all too often—a Founder who takes risks and followers who prefer to play it safe; all in the name of prudence, and practicality, and what’s proper. At times, we must wonder: would some of us have tried to talk the Founder out of building the Hermitage?

Now, are there some among us who are risk takers like Marcellin? Of course. We have 50 of them in Asia at the moment, part of our mission ad gentes efforts. But when I think of them I often find myself asking: do I have their courage, their generosity of heart, their willingness to set out on the adventure that God has in mind for each of us?

And what about Mary? What would François see were he to look at her in Marcellin’s life and then in ours? Again, unfortunately, he might see a Founder in love with the mother of Jesus while we his followers work overtime to domesticate this remarkable woman of faith. Many of us no longer let her disturb us, shake up our world, touch our hearts.

But Mary, the mother of Jesus, is worthy of honor not only because



she is his mother but more importantly because she was his disciple. Were Marcellin here today, he would challenge you and me to restore her to her rightful place within our Institute and to entrust to her the work of its renewal. By engaging Mary in that effort as a fellow pilgrim and guide, we would not only be enlisting her aid, but also hopefully taking on her spirit of faith and openness to God’s will.

Let us not take this step, however, unless you and I are willing to deal with its consequences. For if we express to the mother of Jesus our keen desire to work for the full renewal of our Institute, chances are that she will accept our offer.

Finally, should François look at the Founder and see the virtue of humility, what might he find in us? A Founder who knew himself with all his strengths and weaknesses and many of us continuing to judge ourselves and our efforts by human standards rather than by those of God. For if you and I were honest, this would be our first admission: rather than live the gospel’s prophetic message fully, we still long for human approval, desire to be well thought of, pray that our work will be judged as ranking among the best in its class.

In more ways than we may care to admit, we resemble the Pharisees of old: looking for a Messiah king to restore our fortunes and missing the Suffering Servant who has come in his place.

So, what can we do to change; to learn to take greater risks, to restore Mary to her proper place within our Institute, to become a living portrait of the man and saint whose feast we mark today? The answer to that question has been with us since the beginning of the Society of Mary: take on the spirit of the mother of Jesus and make our own the message of her Magnificat. In Luke’s account of the Visitation we meet a young woman who though unschooled, and poor and powerless, remains nonetheless bold and enthusiastic. Having encountered God’s messenger, she sings out her revolutionary song telling all who will listen that God her Savior is coming to overturn oppression in favor of the poor of this earth. During so many ages since, herein lay the great scandal of Christianity: when the time was right, the Word of God was made manifest not at the centers of power and wealth but rather at the margins, among the poor.

Amen.

# Gabriel Rosset

## A lay marist "avant la lettre"

The experience of solidarity done during formation at Saint Paul Trois Châteaux had a deep impact in me. Not so much for the few hours that I was with some of the homeless people of Lyon's city. I had already been a lot of times, not just hours, but days with homeless people. This time the impact on me came from the discovery of an exceptional character: Gabriel ROSSET, layman, founder of the shelter "Our Lady of the homeless" in Lyon, on December 24th, 1950.

While reading Gabriel ROSSET's biography I said immediately to myself: "here there is a lay marist avant la lettre". He was born on November 28th, 1904 at Champier (Isère) and he passed away on December 30th, 1974 in Lyon. At that time we would not speak on lay Marist, however he has everything to be one. This scholar, teacher of Letters in the lay public School had both pedagogical and human qualities really extraordinary. Just this would leave him well placed in the Marist world. But we found in him many other qualities requested to those who want to be Marist both in soul and in heart. I find at least four.

1. He was a man of great devotion to Mary: when many of his friends underlined the lay statute of the work they were about to undertake at Christmas 1950 he insisted and, in fact, he imposed that their work was to be put

under Mary's protection. Therefore the name: Our Lady of the homeless. This would not impede that the Home was to be open to people of all confessions. In the Foyer all people are welcomed. Was not in this way Fr. Champagnat acted when he was founding his Congregation? On the other hand, one trapist monk knowing Gabriel ROSSET wrote: "His devotion to Mary was very simple and filial": isn't this devotion to Mary one of the features of Marist spirituality?

2. He was man of prayer, of faith and of great love to the Eucharist: it was in prayer that he found the necessary energy for his apostolate with the poor. For more than 20 years he went every week to the trapist monastery of Dombes. In one of those visits he wrote: "I try to meet myself in prayer and mainly in the Eucharistic prayer: it is here I do find the strength to give myself to others and to live this self offering day by day, making acts of patience, of courage and of love" (page 127). Doesn't this fully express Marist spirituality?

3. He was a mystic and a man of action with great love for the poor: a mystic following the tradition of great spiritual people like Agustine and Pascal; a man of action because in prayer he understood, once and for all, that God's Word asks Christians to welcome and succour the most unhappy and aban-

doned brothers, "the suffering members of Our Lord Jesus Christ" as he used to say. Didn't Marcellin Champagnat act in this way? On the other hand, doesn't our book of spirituality ask us to be mystics in action and to be close to the poor?

4. He was a man of great humility with a welcoming heart. Somebody wrote of him: "From the very beginning he has been a faithful Servant of the Home and there he would spend the whole time when his academic scheduled allowed". In fact, "SERVANT" was the only title he ever accepted. And his service and the Home he founded was inspired by Christ's Word. We find in Mt 25: "I naked and you dressed me....". Isn't humility the touchstone of Marist spirituality? And doesn't our book of spirituality call all Marists to welcome the Montagne of today?

It is possible that a more attentive reading of the book I was homeless and you welcomed me, Nouvelle Cité, Montrouge, 2004, collecting the texts of Gabriel ROSSET could present us more similarities between the spirituality of this man of God, extraordinarily human, and Marist spirituality that is simple, practical and real. But the four elements we have underlined show us strongly that Gabriel ROSSET was really a lay Marist "avant la lettre."

Br. Teófilo Minga

## Marist communities met in Talnique, El Salvador

Last Saturday, May 2, 2009, the Marist communities of El Salvador met in Talnique, La Libertad, to celebrate the first Intercommunity Meeting of the year. Thirty-four Brothers attended. Talnique, a mountain village dedicated almost totally to the planting and harvesting of coffee, is located in the

mountain range of Balsamo, an area which was hit hard by the earthquakes which occurred in 2001.

We were received in the parish hall by the Brothers of the present Talnique community: Efrain Romo, Agustin Guezmes and Miguel Angel Martinez. Besides enjoying

the happiness of the meeting, we were also able to share the reflection done in each community on the Orientation for the XXI General Chapter and, with that, to dream of the future and to sense and join together in the journey of our Institute and the Marist life taking root around the world.



# Searching and listening

## Intercommunity Meeting in Guatemala

With the inspiration of the theme of the XXI General Chapter, "New Hearts for a New World" and enlightened by the logo itself, a gigantic heart which is an expression of love without limits, and an invitation to open more and more the tent of the Congregation, the Brothers of Guatemala, with the Sisters of Marcellin Champagnat and some other Laymen and Laywomen, representing the Marist Fraternities of Guatemala, met at the Marist Residence on May 3, 2009, starting at 8 o'clock in the morning, the Central Objective of this big reunion was "To Prepare Ourselves by searching and listening, as Brothers, Sisters and Laymen, to the XXI General Chapter." Forty-two of us attended this meeting.

From 8 o'clock in the morning Brothers from far off were arriving after taking all the means necessary to be on time, not losing one moment of the happiness which they shared in the large Provincial Community... Some came the day before; they were the Brothers of Coatepeque, which is located near the border with Mexico. The punctuality was a good example of the love of the Brothers for each other. The members of the Marist family were happy to meet again and they were arriving as the rhythm and differences of their communities demanded: with sadness that the sick Brothers were not able to attend.

We began our meeting with great momentum, asking for the light of the Spirit so that our reflections concerning the soon to start General Chapter come up with good results. Our Brother Provincial presented us, in summary form, three keys to the meaning of our meeting:

- To celebrate the joy of the Resur-

rection of Christ, our Lamb, our hope

- The month of May, at the side of Mary, being invited to grow with her, Our Good Mother.
- Our part in supporting the XXI General Chapter which is soon to start.

We were reminded of the different phases in the life of our Congregation which are preparing us for this event which will determine our future: First, the worldwide reflection on what it means to be a Brother, the identity and the mission of the Brother; the involvement of the laymen and laywomen in our apostolate, and the different ways they identify with us; the diverse Lay Movements and their closeness to the Brothers.

The second important issue was seeing the support of each one of these groups, coming from all over the world and now, after very serious reflection, we come to the third step. We must try to come up with a synthesis of the ideas and different themes which previous reflections produced.

In order to facilitate this work, we divided ourselves into five groups and we agreed on the major themes which come forth from previous reflections, which were:

- a - The Identity of the Brother, His Future Role/Profile, Signs of His Identity.
- b - The Lay Marist, Identity and Signs Of, Their Formation for the Marist Mission.
- c - The Marist Mission. Seen as the Heart of Our Charism.... The



Complementarity Between/Among Brothers and Lay Marists.

d - Again, to go to the sources of Marist Spirituality, Steps for an increasingly real, effective, shared responsibility with the Church, With Our Founder, With our history...

e - Other reflection themes for the General Chapter... Here the theme of vocation strongly surfaced

This was the work of the groups. At the end of our meeting we experienced the satisfaction of and fruits or our lively reflection. Thus, we present the synthesis of the work done by the Marists of Guatemala.

The following step will come for us, a very extensive Province: to develop a total sense of Province, by sharing the reflections of all countries in the Province.

Only a short time remained for our Meeting, and at one o'clock in the afternoon we came together for the closing : The Family Meal, which was fully shared with the overflowing joy of being a Marist Family with great visions for the future of our beloved Congregation.

