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Doors open to a future of hope

Centenary of the Marist presence in Avellanes



10 September 2010 completed 100 years of Marist presence in the Monestir de Santa María de Bellpuig de les Avellanes. The first Marists who occupied this former Premonstratentian monastery were a group of 70 novices, with their teachers, coming from Sant Adreu de Palomar (Barcelona). The novitiate and the provincial house, which operated in this city were burned down during the tragic week of Barcelona (1909). The Brothers moved to Avellanes to continue the novitiate. Marist Spain, which was beginning to expand, needed more space and a suitable climate for the formation of young Marists. They established themselves in a XII century monastery, half in ruins, created in 1166 for Premonstratentian monks with the support of the Counts of Urgell. The

abbey conserved the Romanesque cloister of the medieval period (XII-XIII centuries), the chapter hall (XIII) and the Gothic church (XIV). It was the first and largest Premonstratentian abbey of the old Crown of Aragón and had been abandoned following the disentailment policies of Mendizábal. In this way, the monastery escaped the effects of the Mendizábal programme. Three quarters of a century had passed since the monks abandoned the place.

With the Marist presence in these lands of Lerida, the Marist Institute has already written new chapters in the history of civil and ecclesiastical life. The number of persons formed in this house have spread its name throughout the world as missionaries bearers of faith and culture. In

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harmony with each age and with the reality of the institutions, the buildings have been transformed and the church, burial place of the Counts of Urgell, has been rebuilt. Today, the transformation of the ancient spaces of the monastery into a hospice and house of spirituality offers a house with doors open to the needs of our world.

The celebration of the 100 years of Marist presence in the lands of the Noguera has taken the shape of a varied programme, developed over years, which reached its solemn climax on 10 September 2010. The programme has embraced two very different but integrated centres of interest: the presence of the Brothers who have lived very significant parts of their lives in this house, and the relationship with outside institutions and authorities.

The afternoon of 8 September, anniversary of many takings of the habit and first professions, brought together a large group of Brothers, some coming from afar, around the image of Mary, which had presided for many years over the great moments in the life of the novitiate. Reunited as a community of brothers around the image, they celebrated a vigil of Marian prayer, interspersed with the songs of Kairoi and tears of gratitude. In the same way, the day of 9 September was marked by a Marist community character. The dawn rosary was the opportunity for the brothers to return again to Mary's feet to recall: "Do you remember, Mother, how many times the Salve was recited

at your feet?" Brother Emili Turú, Superior General, who accompanied the brothers during this day, reminded all at the foot of the statue that "Mary has done everything for us", as in the time of Champagnat. And he added: "The Institute has lived through more difficult times than those we are living in. See how Mary holds in her hands a child: a child is a fragile life. It is like a symbol of the Institute. She points with a finger to Jesus. Her gesture invites us to keep on making room where life is fragile. The Lord is counting on us to go to the many places of the Institute in which the fragility of the little one endures, trusting that Mary will continue to do everything for us".

The Eucharist brought together those present to give thanks for the favours the Lord has done the Institute, the Province, this house and so many brothers and lay men it has formed. The president and animator was Father Manuel Portillo, who knew how to be in rhythm with the hearts of his listeners in order to unite them in a song of gratitude to the Lord and his Mother.

The next morning was dedicated to visiting the different parts of the house which had received the touch of the architect and been given a new physiognomy, creating attractive surroundings. The brothers were especially interested in the latest remodelling of the cemetery, resting place of more than 400 brothers, in the Archives of the house and the Province, which occupy ample space, and the Archiu Gavín, which

houses 48 different collections, some of them unique in the world, such as the one composed of photographs of all the religious buildings (hermitages, temples, churches, oratories...) of Catalonia.

During the afternoon, the brothers visited the towns of Vilanova de la Sal, Avellanès, Tartareu and Os de Balaguer. Towns linked to the Marist history of these 100 years, particularly in the period of the civil war, when many families gave shelter in their houses to the brothers in formation who had to abandon the monastery.

The celebrations of 10 September welcomed in the authorities, friends and sympathisers of the Monastery. The central act of the morning was the celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by the Archbishop of La Seu d'Úrgell, who is at the same time Co-Prince of Andorra. The monastery belongs to his diocese. Accompanying him in the celebration, besides the priest friends of the house, were the Abbot General of the Premonstratensians, Fr. Thomas Handgrätiger and Fr. Ramon Prat, Vicar General of the diocese of Lleida.

Following the Mass, there was a cultural ceremony for the presentation of the book "La fuerza de la fraternidad" which records the chronological story, by decades, of the 100 years of the Marist presence in the monastery. The authorities present also spoke to point out the more important events of the celebration of this event. Brother Maurice Berquet, Superior Provincial, ran through the past to pick out the more significant milestones of this house which has been called the "Hermitage of Cataluña". The Abbot General of the Premonstratensians, invited especially for the occasion, recorded "Bellipodium... as an ancient part of our order..., liberated by the Marists from 75 years of secularism... and which today is manifesting new life". The president of the Regional Council, Mr Vicent Font, appreciated the good relations of the region with the monastery and the support it received through its facilities and its open door policy. The Mayor of Os de Balaguer, Mr Ignasi Cor-



tés, emphasized the importance of the initiatives that had been undertaken to promote rural tourism and the collaboration which had the renovation of the monastery had entailed. The Director General for Religious Affairs of the Legislative Assembly of Catalonia, Mrs Monserrat Coll, thanked the brothers for their contribution to the country through formal education, their presence in the social centres and leisure time education.

At the end of the ceremony, a commemorative plaque commemorating

the centenary was unveiled next to the entrance to the house.

In the afternoon, there was a gathering with a large representation of the Marist family of Catalonia, to place in relief the life which the house of Avellanes has generated and which it continues to generate. Quotations from the Marist Constitutions served as guide to emphasize that Avellanes has been a community of family and work, centred on Jesus Christ and open to the young: community with Mary who invites to silence and encounter

with God; community in mission in the style of Champagnat. All these features were expressed by means of testimonies, representations, songs and plastic elements.

A large group of brothers, coming from different places, who made their novitiate in this house, took part in the events organised to celebrate this jubilee. Among the authorities present may be mentioned Brothers Emili Turú, Superior General, and Joe MacKee, Vicar General, both of whom did their novitiate in this house, and the Brother Provincials of Ibérica, Ambrosio Alonso Díez, Mediterránea, Antonio Giménez de Bagüés, and Compostela, Óscar Martín Vicario.

At various times, as if a gospel of life and fruitfulness was being recorded, one heard: "In those times..." There were moments for remembering, times for something of nostalgia, but above all a great openness towards the future with hope and faith. As Brother Jaume Parés, Superior of the welcoming community, said, "the centenary is not only a look back to the past with a grateful heart, but a challenge to continue responding to the calls of the world of today".



125th anniversary of the arrival of the Marist Brothers in Canada

Meeting of Marist Fathers and Brothers

El On 2 August 2010, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the Marist brothers in Canada, a celebration of friendship was held at Château-Richer by the Marist Fathers and Brothers.

30 Marist Fathers from Québec took part in the gathering with Fr. Kevin Duffy, assistant general of the Marist Fathers for Canada, Fr. Jacques Ar-

guin, provincial, and Br. Bernard Beaudin, provincial. The reception began at 16.30 in the chapel decorated for the jubilee year.

« On the occasion of their Province Assembly, the Marist Fathers have chosen to gather here in your chapel – said one of the Fathers – to mark with you your arrival in Canada, 125 years ago. To give special significance to this

gathering, which I would say is an historic one, several Brothers and Fathers will now come forward to place a little lamp in the lamp holder in front, forming the letter M, for Mary, our Queen and Mother for all since the beginning. During this rite, we will chant the refrain: « If the Lord does not build the house, the builders work in vain ». We will repeat this chant after each of the verses of Psalm 127 (126) read by two

representatives of the communities. »

Our chapel choir this year delivers us five invitations in Latin: LAUDATE, GAUDETE, JUBILATE, CANTATE and JUBILATE DEO.

Then the animator provided a brief history of the Society of Mary: « On 23 July 1816, so 194 years and 10 days ago, a dozen new priests ordained the day before, went to the old chapel of Fourvière, in Lyon, and there read together an act of consecration in which

they promised to give themselves entirely to founding the congregation bearing the name of Mary. Jean-Claude Colin and Marcellin Champagnat, our respective founders, were part of that group. They kept their word. »

Br. Bernard Beaudin offered his thanks for this gesture of friendship and thanks on this memorable anniversary.

The programme continued with a visit to the Galerie Champagnat and the Centre Historique Champagnat. An

aperitif of friendship and good cheer prepared us for a country dinner at the Gazébo (authentic Canadian menu!): beans in lard, maple syrup crêpes of Château-Richer. The whole instilled with that good humour of the Québécois who are, so the song goes, « refined, galant, hospitable. »

This historic meeting ended in a climate of « see you again, until next time! »



Bringing uniformity to programmes of initial formation

Meeting of Marist formators of Africa

The Brothers in charge of houses of initial formation and the vocation promoters of Africa held a meeting from 19 to 23 July 2010 at Marist International Centre (MIC), Nairobi, Kenya. This meeting formed part of the long process of improving and standardizing the programmes of initial formation in our houses of formation from the stage of vocations recruitment and the aspirancy up to the post-novitiate, and of a dialogue between the agents of formation in Africa. The Brothers had previously organized this type of meeting in 1999 and 2007.



All the provinces and the district sent at least one Brother who is working as vocations promoter or formator. The community of Marist International Centre (MIC) was strongly represented by a big number of Brothers.

The participants made reflections and exchanges on vocation discernment, formation to prayer, and the best method of accompanying the young men in our houses of formation. The last day was consecrated to taking resolutions

for the formators and recommendations to be addressed to the major superiors in view of improving methods of formation work at each level.

Among the most important recommendations are the revision of the formation programme at each level established in 1999 and the consideration of the work of vocations promotion as

a quite separate responsibility carried out by a Brother with no other function. The participants also recommended that the major superiors prolong the period of formation for the aspirants and postulants, each group having a whole year of formation instead of 6 months. They also undertook to hold similar meetings at the end of every two years of work.

