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Updates

26/01/2011: Deceased Brothers: Richard Johannes Straßner (West Central Europe); Delfim Elias - Brasil Centro-Sul

26/01/2011: Provincial meeting of the Province of « Méditerranée »

25/01/2011: Photo gallery: Birthday of Br. Emili Turú, Superior General

25/01/2011: Br. Mario Iori (1912-2011)

24/01/2011: Deceased Brothers: Emmanuel Gros (Prov. L'Hermitage); Julio Valbuena Garrán (Prov. América Central)

24/01/2011: Launching of the centenary of Marist Life in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

22/01/2011: Epiphany readings and the Ad Gentes people

21/01/2011: The Brothers François, Basilio Rueda and Alfano

20/01/2011: Photo gallery: S. Marcellin's Center - Bucarest

20/01/2011: Photos: Postulat Ampahidrano, Madagascar

20/01/2011: Marist News N. 138

20/01/2011: 7th Provincial Chapter of the Province of Nigeria

18/01/2011: Deceased Brother: Marco Aurelio Ospina López (Rodrigo Tomás) - Norandina

19/01/2011: Meeting of four Marist General Councils

Our Portrait

The Brothers François, Basilio Rueda and Alfano



If we are attentive to the models of sanctity of our Marist Family, January offers a unique coincidence of dates:

- the 21st of January we recall the life and death (1996) of Brother Basilio Rueda,
- the 22nd of January, the life and death (1881) of Brother François,
- and the same date, 22 January, the signing of the decree of heroicity of the virtues of Brother Alfano (1991).

These three Brothers, who have had their causes as confessors opened, come together on these days, and the dates have been preceded by that of the foundation of our Family on the 2nd of January. On one hand, the source, and on the other, three Brothers who have received the Marist charism and brought it to shine in holiness.

The three, Basilio, François, Alfano are very different, and each has developed a facet of the great portrait of the Brother:

living on the frontiers of the Church and at the heart of the Church, living with men and with God; working to make Christ known to youth and to root Christ deeply in the soul of apostles.

Focusing our regard on our various models of holiness, our confessors: François, Alfano, Basilio, and our martyrs of Oceania, China, Spain, Africa, we can ask what portrait of a Brother do they paint. From the lives and activities of thousands of Brothers throughout the world, what great mosaic can be found which may be like the portrait of the Brother?

The answer seems to be suggested by a picture of our Founder, a picture which was made on the occasion of the canonisation or just before: it was made up of thousands of faces, the faces of Brothers, and in each Brother's face could be divined the faces of innumerable children and youth the Brothers had formed. This is certainly one of the answers. The por-

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trait of the Founder thus formed from the faces and lives of so many Brothers is indeed the ideal portrait of the Brother. The Brother's portrait is the sum of the lives and mission of all the Brothers. This portrait is called the « communion of Marist saints ». When Br. François decided to be the living portrait of the Founder, his intuition was absolutely correct. In the DNA of every true Brother, there is the portrait of the Founder.

But our Marist saints have known how to accentuate certain traits in a such way that by looking at them we see more clearly who we are. Brothers François and Alfano were much concerned about the interior life, being rooted in Christ. Formators of Brothers, they could in truth say with their lives: « Something which has existed from the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes, that we have watched and touched with our own hands : the Word who is life, ... What we have seen and heard we are telling you so that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1Jn : 1-3). In the portrait of the Brother, this is a basic characteristic: hearing, seeing, touching, watching, living with the Lord. Without this intimacy, no Brother can really be one.

As for Brother Basilio, he tells us that the Brother's mission, in fact, has no boundaries, embracing the whole ambition of the Founder, who said: « All the dioceses of the world enter into our views ». During his time with the Better World, from 1961 to 1964, he ploughed many countries: Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, the countries of Central America, Spain, Italy, forming priests, preaching to bishops, promoting Vatican II... Basilio, in fact, enormously broadened the mission of the Brother, showing us that, when it is a matter of proclaiming Christ, of serving the Church, there are no frontiers. As Superior General he took up his travels again so as to be close to all the Brothers.

Other Brothers have been stationed

on difficult frontiers of the Church: Br Henri Vergès in dialogue with the Moslem world, Brs Servando, Miguel Angel, Fernando and Julio, who preferred the inhuman situation of a refugee camp to their fine colleges or peaceful missions. They were true pioneers of « *missio ad gentes!* ». They wagered their hearts and lives to the extent of losing them. Coming close, giving their lives for the least, is another marked trait of the portrait of the Brother.

It was no different for our martyrs of Spain. In the full spate of persecution, they continued to open schools, and to maintain contact with youth as long as they could. It happened that teacher and pupils were shot together. Brothers of high culture or Brothers engaged in manual work marched towards martyrdom together, showing us how much Christ was the absolute for them. All these have contributed to the Brother's portrait the traits of audacity and absolute fidelity.

Our saints lived far from mediocrity. It is a concrete and frequent snare, this temptation of settling down, of being content with a life of habit, marked by the bell, the clock, the watch, the cellular phone... Opposed to a settled life, Br. Bernardo multiplied apostolic initiatives: study groups, theatre companies, mobile library, study bursaries for the poorest pupils, saving bank for young men working in the mines, apostolic movements among youth, cultural conferences, prayer evenings, hospitality to the poor, folkloric activities, visits to the sick, vocations recruitment and accompaniment. Bernardo was far from being settled down. An abundant generosity, inventive, humane, constantly finds new fields of apostolate. Being on the watch for new fields of apostolate in the world of youth is an aspect of the Brother's portrait which Bernardo, and also Laurentino, Virgilio and the other martyrs lived and remind us of.

Our models of holiness trace in the portrait of the Brother traits which speak of boldness and tenderness, plunging in and the hand held out to

others, a life close to God and concerned with the sufferings and joys of youth. All could make their own the phrase with which Br. François often ended his letters: « You well know, Brothers, what a tender affection I have always had for you! ». They made a special point of cultivating the brotherhood which is the first characteristic of the portrait of the Brother.

So all the ambitions of Marcellin are fulfilled, the attainment of the first places at the crib, the cross and the altar, as well as the apostolic ambition embracing « all the dioceses of the world ». Our Marist saints cultivate the sensitivity of the Founder to discover new lands of mission, new aspirations among the young, poverty hitherto unknown and today awaiting the attentive closeness of a Brother.

Our saints tell us that our portrait of the Brother is never painted once for all, but is enriched by all the treasures each Brother brings. It is a portrait which lives, grows, become impoverished too, and one for which I am responsible; responsible for its luminosity, its capacity to speak of Jesus, its capacity to say « Brother » unambiguously.

There are two portraits of the Brother, the official one, a composite of the lives, works, prayers of the Brothers forming the Marist Family. The other portrait is the one which shines on the face of each Brother and which is, as it were, closer to people, the one youth can see when looking at us. It is especially on this face that the young can see or not see Christ, contemplate and love him or encounter only an ordinary human face. For the Lord to shine on us, we need to expose ourselves to his light, cultivate intimacy with him. Then we can say: «Something that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes, that we have watched and touched with our hands : the Word who is life, ... What we have seen and heard we are telling you so that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1Jn 1-3).

The Virgin Mary in the life of the Marist Brother

From a place for Mary in the Institute to a place with Mary in the Church

In 2010, the General House celebrated the feast of Saint Marcellin Champagnat on Saturday 5 June, since the 6th was a Sunday. The superiors invited the other members of the Marist Family, Fathers and Sisters, as well as all the staff of the house, and friends and neighbours of long-standing such as the Trappists, the Little Sisters of Charles de Foucauld, etc. We were on the point of starting Mass in the main chapel, and I was struck by the figure of Mary on the central altar-piece. The lighting made her beautiful and radiant. At her feet Champagnat kneeling, hands joined in prayer. With the feast, the mystery was palpable. We were in a chapel dedicated to Mary. She occupied the centre, seated, with her son protectively in her lap, as on a throne. Symbols indicated her maternity. The child Jesus, naked, seated, his head leaning on his mother's heart, presided over the scene. Four strong stones, embedded in the angles of the walls, supported the dome, recording the four great privileges of Mary: Mother of God, Mediatrix, Immaculate and Assumed. On the left hand side of the choir screen, next to the organ, in a base relief of terracotta, was the angel messenger of the annunciation. In a similar position on the right, Mary was listening and welcoming the Word into her womb. Between the two, there was all the spiritual dynamic of the altar, on which the Word is proclaimed, celebrated and shared in a fraternal banquet. The Word, who became flesh in Mary's womb, dwells among us.

I thought that the annunciation to Mary had an artistic continuation in the central altar-piece of the cha-



pel and this reminded me of certain chapters of the history of our origins. In his seminary years, Marcellin declared himself the "slave of Mary". Mary was for him the model of fidelity to the Lord. And in his turn, Marcellin conceived in his heart through the working of the Holy Spirit the family of the Brothers. This personal experience of the founder seemed to me a clear reference to the Marial face of the Church. Marcellin's interior life was guided by the concrete application of the Marial principle of the Church.

The Marists of Champagnat, the Little Brothers of Mary, were conceived by Marcellin during the time of his seminary formation. This time of interior formation was a time of annunciation. The angel of the Lord announced to Marcellin, and he conceived the Brothers by the working of the Holy

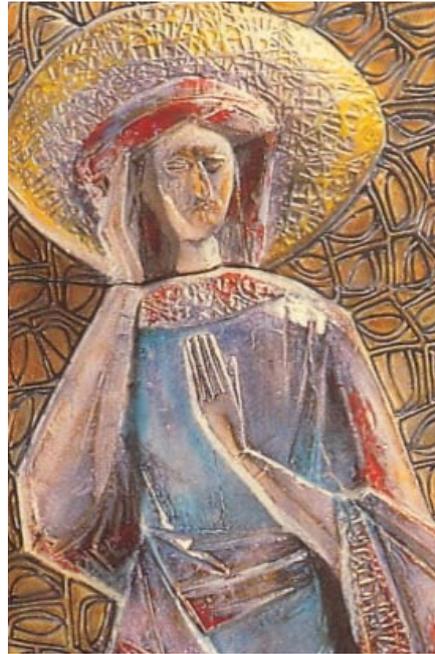
Spirit. This gestation was completed in a moment of interior emptying which generated a maternal womb of total availability to the will of God. The new cell of the Church made fertile by the Marist charism is the origin of his intuition: we need brothers. There all we Marists were engendered by the charism of Champagnat. Thus was born the Church made up of the Marist believers who chose to live their faith and consecration to God in a community of brothers.

The Marist charism received with total openness in the heart of Marcellin produces a first ecclesial fruit: the beginning of a family of believers who come together as the little brothers of Mary. "This charism was a grace for Marcellin, a special gift of the Spirit, the fruit of his own discernment of what God was asking of him. Out of that process gradually came insights

which clarified and unified what was most important to him, a growing sense of direction in his life, an identification with a special way of living his life in union with Christ. From this flowed his particular spirituality and spirit, and his orientation toward an apostolate centred in the Christian education of youth, and especially those most in need”(Charles Howard, Circulars V 29 (1990) p. 237-8.).

In a grouping of seminarists whose future projects were guided predominantly by the Church’s Petrine principle, Marcellin’s attitude stood out, for enlightened by an intuition guided by the Marian principle, he insisted on promoting the participation of lay faithful as an integral presence in the Society of Mary project to make it complete. Without the brothers, something essential would be missing in the project. His intuition was expressed in the phrase “we need brothers”. This existential attitude of Marcellin, which emphasized the need for basic believers in an ecclesial project founded and animated by clerics, makes manifest the depth with which he grasped the mystery of the Church. We can affirm that in his conception, the Marial principle prevailed over the Petrine principle. In an organization of priests, he thought that the brothers were indispensable. Marcellin did not elaborate theological theories about the Marial principle, nor did he know it as a theological given, but he put it into practice and made it live, promoting it prophetically for times to come.

The logic of this annunciation, experienced during the time of seminary formation, had its complementary moment when Champagnat gave birth to his project in La Valla. Between the two time limits, the Nazareth of the seminary and the Bethlehem of La Valla acquire a perfect unity. The Nazareth of the seminary is full of the Word of annunciation. The angel of the Lord communicates



with Marcellin through his professors, spiritual directors, confessors, and seminary companions. The Logos, the Word of God, takes flesh in his heart.

This ecclesial origin of our Institute stamps the brothers with the fundamentals of their proper identity. We are born in the Church, of the Church and for the Church in the womb of a ‘yes’ which would adhere to a new incarnation of the Church in a world turned upside down by the French Revolution. If the first cell of the Church was Jesus become man by the yes of Mary, the fruitfulness of our life as Marists, who say yes to God, cannot exist without a new cell of the Church which introduces brotherhood amidst a world broken and alienated from God.

For the brothers, this origin, directly related to the Marial principle of the Church, commits us to promoting, defending and loving a Church which lives in the vanguard of the gestation of faith, at the frontier posts of evangelization and catechesis. The Church mother has conceived, in her maternal womb, what nested in the heart of Marcellin, a new community of faith characterised by being little

brothers of Mary. Born as a clear expression of the maternity of Mary in the life of Marcellin, the Institute is an emphatic feature of the Marial face of the Church. To be brother among brothers manifests a particular characteristic of the Church’s Marial face. To foster the fruitfulness of the Church by means of spreading fraternity among the men and women of today makes manifest what the Marist has to make the Marial face of the Church shine forth. To live in brotherhood whatever the race, language and nation is to show the Marial face of the Church of Jesus.

The altar-piece of the main chapel of the General House feels to me, then, like an apoteosis of Mary’s annunciation to Marcellin. The Mother’s look places the Word in the joined, praying hands of Marcellin. Marcellin’s attitude, of kneeling, totally directed towards the Mother, his attitude of receptiveness and his gaze turned to the heights, is the concrete description of his total emptiness, his total availability, made a womb at once maternal and paternal, in which is born the new community of believers, called the little brothers of Mary. In the centre Jesus, the Lord, the Word made flesh in the womb of Mary, is what harmonises and gives meaning to everything that happens.

Five angels proclaim the interior fiesta. Two of them are musicians and three singers. Angels guardians and messengers of the five Continents in which the sons of Champagnat are called to bear fruit. Five universal mouths which sing a Magnificat for the marvels God has worked in Mary and in Marcellin. Five angels who summon all the dioceses of the world where the fraternity born of the Marist charism is becoming evident. Five witnesses of the Marial features of the Church incarnated in the Marists.

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