



**Message
of the
Superior
General
for the
Feast of
St. Marcellin
Champagnat,
June 6, 2024**

Dear Marists of Champagnat:

We celebrate together with joy the feast of St. Marcellin Champagnat and give thanks to God for the gift of our Marist charism, a gift to the Church and to the world.

At the present time, in many countries across the world, we are living through complex social situations, experiencing war and insecurity. Natural disasters have disrupted the lives of many in various parts of the world. These difficult conditions touch also certain areas of Marist life. Among those affected are people linked to the Institute: educators, family members, friends... Confronted with these new situations of hardship and marginalization, it is comforting to know that many Marists of Champagnat, brothers and lay, are helping in solidarity. Motivated by the Marist charism that we have received as gift, all of us are invited to unite with the suffering of so many and to offer support.

Our charism, inspired by the Spirit through St. Marcellin and the first brothers, has been

nurtured and developed over 207 years via the witness and dedication of so many Marists of Champagnat. Today, we form part of the great family that has inherited this gift. We are called to appreciate it, to keep it alive, and to adapt it to our age so that it continues to work for good.

On April 18, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the canonization of St. Marcellin Champagnat, the day on which he was declared a saint for the Church and for the world. He was a simple man, who lived with great trust in God and in Mary, our Good Mother, and who taught us to live fraternity and to respond boldly to the needs of the children and young people of his time. Pope John Paul II said on the day of his canonization:

“St Marcellin proclaimed the Gospel with a burning heart. He was sensitive to the spiritual and educational needs of his time, especially to religious ignorance and the situations of neglect experienced in a particular way by the young (...) Let us ask the Lord to give us a heart that burns like that of Marcellin Champagnat, to do him honour and to be his witnesses”.

How has the witness of Saint Marcellin Champagnat encouraged me personally? How do I try to live each day the call to holiness that all Christians receive?

Let's remember also that a few days ago, in the month of May, we celebrated the bicentenary of the laying of the first stone in the construction of Notre-Dame del'Hermitage. Seven years after the beginning of the Institute in La Valla, Marcellin, together with the brothers, set out to build this large and beautiful house that would serve for the formation of novices and as a place of meeting, retreat and rest for the brothers. This house continues to be for all of us today a center of animation and of connection with the origins of our Institute.

It gives us joy to recognize that Champagnat was able to listen in his heart to the intuitions of the Spirit and to respond with audacity, in spite of the difficulties he faced and the criticisms that fell on him. For Champagnat, everything that was accomplished was not his personal work, but the work of God and Mary. He was animated every day by his contemplative prayer, his friendly and close fraternal life, and his dedication to the service of children and young people, especially those most in need.

It is a grace for us to celebrate 200 years of this important part of our history. And it also encourages us to imagine what it would mean today to “rebuild a New Hermitage” in our present context. I believe that during these months of bi-centennial celebration we can reflect on how to continue to spread the gift of the Marist charism we have received. Learning to use the strength and creativity of Marcellin and the first brothers who hewed the rock and built on a solid foundation. What helps us to live the experience of St. Marcellin and the

first brothers? What is the solid foundation we need today for this reconstruction?

On this June 6, we celebrate and pray in communion with all the places that make up the global Marist family, particularly with those who are suffering difficult situations. We place ourselves in the hands of Mary, our Good Mother, who inspires and accompanies us daily in our Marist life and mission.

Happy Saint Marcellin Champagnat Day!

Fraternally yours,
Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba, Superior General

