

WITH MARCELLIN, TAKE THE LONG VIEW...



Br. José Santamarta – General House

Message of Brother Superior General to the Marists of Champagnat

ON THE FEAST DAY OF SAINT MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT



Rome, June 6, 2021

Dear Marists of Champagnat:

A year ago, we reflected on St. Marcellin's confidence, boldness and fraternity as some of the basic elements that spurred him to keep moving ahead, to not be paralysed by fear and to not remain cosily in his comfort zone in the difficult times in which he found himself.

Looking at our current context



Mario Araya – Tabatinga, Brazil

One year on, we are still living in a context of uncertainty and instability around the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc in many parts of the globe. Although it seems that some matters are being brought under control, we find ourselves faced with other social, political and economic problems; they may have been present before but have now surfaced due to the pandemic, or they have sprung up as emerging issues yet to be addressed, supported or resolved.

It has been a real blessing to witness the degree of solidarity

shown during the pandemic: the risk-taking of so many in the health services and the generosity of those who have fearlessly reached out to the most needy and vulnerable. It is pleasing as well to see the human face of solidarity in evidence in many parts of the Institute, within, between and beyond our communities, our apostolic works, Provinces and Districts. In one way or another, we have felt more like a global family, despite the physical separation and the limitations that exist today in regard to travelling and meeting one other.

At the same time, many situations have become evident in the world where an attitude of self-protection and looking out for one's own predominates, where people easily forget and leave aside those who are suffering the most. Relationships have proved a challenge in both communities and families, sometimes resulting in psychological barriers or hurts that could be considered worse than the virus itself. Many have experienced anxiety and profound grief related to the serious illness and the loss of loved ones. A good number of people have lost their jobs and new pockets of poverty are emerging. The contrast between countries or states that are well-resourced and those with more limited means in the fields of health and economic activity is becoming more obvious.

Marcellin took the long view ...

As I reflect on these situations, the image of Marcellin as a man of vision comes to my mind. He was capable of envisioning *a horizon far beyond* his own confines and limitations. Several episodes in his life show us clearly that he did not lose heart when difficulties arose. We can even say that the difficulties themselves strengthened his capacity for resilience. Here are a few events that come to mind in relation to Champagnat and his capacity *to take the long view*:

- ✓ Marcellin had the intuition of founding a congregation of brothers, something which was quite unusual at the time and which his own fellow priests did not understand.

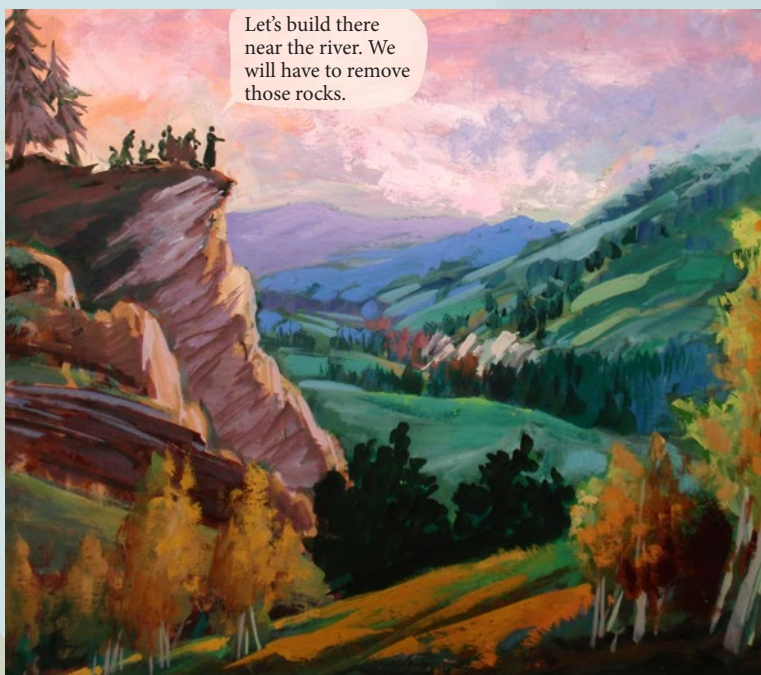


Commemorative Plaque in the Chapel of Our Lady of Fourvière.

- The day after his ordination to the priesthood, he went to the shrine of Notre Dame de Fourvière with Father Colin and his other companions to begin the Society of Mary. A day later, on 24th July 1816, Marcellin returned to the shrine to consecrate himself once again to the Blessed Virgin and to entrust his project to her.
- ✓ His first steps as curate in the parish of La Valla were not easy, spread out as it was over deep valleys and steep mountains. Marcellin did not hesitate to walk long distances to minister to the faithful, especially the sick. His contacts with the people showed him the ignorance and poverty that characterised their lives, largely as a result of the revolution. In particular, he was struck by the conditions of the children and young people around him; one need only recall the episode of the young Montagne.
 - ✓ His idea of starting a group continued to grow and, *taking the long view*, he humbly entrusted his project to God: "I often said to him: "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your holy will" (Ps 39:9; Heb 10:9)." There were other times, however, when he was overcome by fear of deluding himself, and earnestly prayed: "If my inspiration does not come from you, my God, if it is not conducive to your glory and the salvation of souls, drive it far from me". (Life, p. 57).
 - ✓ Not yet five months into his stay in the parish of La Valla, he began our Institute on 2nd January 1817. Marcellin offered guidance and encouragement to the first brothers. He realised the importance of spending more time with them and so decided to go and live with the brothers. The parish priest tried to dissuade him, but he could not be discouraged. He knew that taking the lead and sharing their lot, becoming one with them, giving them example and practising what he was telling them, was the best way to help them appreciate their vocation. (Cf. Life, p. 73).
 - ✓ A few years later, *taking the long view*, he set about building a large house to accommodate the brothers. He did so without enough funds at the time and, together with the

brothers and the masons, he set to work. He succeeded in inaugurating the beautiful house of N.D. de l'Hermitage in 1825, a place that has been of spiritual benefit to so many generations of Marists.

- ✓ With regard to mission, he took the long view, opting for novel educational approaches and teaching methods, even when, as we know, he himself did not understand them as well as others. His heart that knew no bounds moved him to send some of his confrères to Oceania, while he would have preferred to be on the boat himself. We remember that he often repeated, "*All the dioceses of the world enter into our designs*".
- ✓ His vision was novel as well in generating an education centred on love and presence, rather than on correction or punishment. His target group was not just children without schools, but also those in marginalised situations such as orphans, deaf-mutes and others. He envisioned communities of brothers, with a strong emphasis on fraternal life, placing themselves at the service of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable.



Along with these elements that reflect Champagnat's vision, we know of situations in his life which were not easy but in which he was able *to take the long view*: periods when vocations faltered; frequent criticisms, even from clerics close to him; difficulties in paying off the debts he was responsible for; some crises within the community of brothers; difficulties in relation to some schools; the times he was gravely ill and vulnerable; the long wait to obtain authorisation from the Institute; periods of social, political, religious crisis; etc. In the face of all these challenges, Marcellin was able to keep moving forward, *to cut into the rock and to build*. His faith and his deep conviction that this work was God's work, Mary's work, made him always hopeful. He knew how to walk alongside his brothers, listening to them, encouraging them and also confronting them when necessary.

Taking the long view ourselves

Along with Champagnat's founding intuition that gave birth to our Institute, throughout our history we have had remarkable examples of people of vision able to face a variety of crises, even persecution, *people who took the long view*. Today, brothers and lay people, we want to continue to journey together as we seek to keep Marcellin's dream alive in our different settings. We are invited to be people of vision. It is time to develop more creativity and to innovate.



In a few months, it will be four years since we received the calls of the XXII General Chapter: *to journey together as a global charismatic family, to be beacons of hope, the face and hands of God's tender mercy, bridge-builders, journeying with children and young people living on the margins of life and responding boldly to emerging needs...* These prophetic calls retain great relevance for us today.

- ✓ *Beacons of hope* light up our world and let us *see into the distance*. At the same time, the light they cast allows them to be seen from afar and to generate optimism. We have been invited to form *homes of light* both in our communities and in our apostolic works, their light letting us see into the distance and, at the same time, attracting others. We cannot remain paralysed by the situations of uncertainty and complexity that we live in, but rather we are being invited to look and reach beyond our own securities. We have to *look beyond* our personal doors and windows to discover the new areas of need that are emerging, and we have to grow in our capacity for giving in solidarity. This is what Marcellin did continually throughout his life.
- ✓ As *bridge-builders*, we take the *long view* when it comes to boundaries and chasms: bridges that open a path to deeper, more personal relationships with those we live and work with on a daily basis and with those we serve in our ministry; bridges that span the gulfs and cross the borders associated with intercultural and international differences; bridges that enable communication and solidarity support, the sharing of resources; bridges between different generations, welcoming children and youth with all their values and limitations, as well as welcoming and respecting the older generations whose wisdom and experience is a source of richness and empowerment for all of us. We are called to make plain the prophecy of mercy and brotherhood, being *the face and hands of God's tender mercy*.
- ✓ When facing *new peripheries and emerging situations*, we must try to learn more about them and respond boldly. In *taking the long view*, we have to move beyond a focus on our own comfort and security to become more supportive of others. Pope Francis, in his recent Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, refers to the value of solidarity in this way:

At a time when everything seems to disintegrate and lose consistency, it is good for us to appeal to the "solidity" born of the consciousness that we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future. Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. And service in great part means "caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable

members of our families, our society, our people”. In offering such service, individuals learn to “set aside their own wishes and desires, their pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable... Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, ‘suffers’ that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people”. (n. 115).

Happy Feastday!

Like Marcellin, let us be encouraged to take the long view, and seek to respond with the same enthusiasm and intuition that he responded with in his day. We can count on the same enlightenment and strength that he had from Mary, our Good Mother, who continues to inspire and accompany us on this journey.

This Sunday, June 6th, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ in many parts of the world (in some it is celebrated on Thursday the 3rd). We are heirs to Marcellin’s great love and devotion to the Eucharist. Inspired by Mary, the centrality of Jesus in his life was evident. Around this Solemnity, let us give thanks for the gift of our Father and Founder. Happy celebration of Champagnat Day!

***Fraternally,
Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba
Superior General***

