

This month I want to honour and reflect with the Marist Brothers who form the largest part of our Marist family. St. Marcellin Champagnat was canonized April 18, 1999 while his Feast day is in June. On January 2, 1817, Marcellin Champagnat returned home with two young men. He dreamt that they – together with many more in the future – would carry the Gospel to the children and young people most in need. The Marist Brothers consider that as the date of Foundation of the Marist Institute (FMS), so this year starting 2nd January, they began celebrating their Bi-Centenary. Brother Emili Túru, the Superior General of the Marist Brothers, shared a reflection for this Bi-centenary based on three words: Gratitude, Forgiveness and Commitment. Even though it is written for the Brothers and those within the Champagnat Marist movement it struck me how these themes have value for all of us. I am sharing the aspects which struck me.

Brother Emili shared, “This is the perfect moment to express our joy and gratitude to God for the gift of Saint Marcellin Champagnat to the church and the world.

- Gratitude for raising up a [Marist] religious family to make Jesus known and loved by children and young people, especially those who are marginalised.
- Gratitude for the almost 38,000 men who, in the course of 200 years, have made their profession as Marist Brothers.
- Gratitude for all those who have died as brothers and whose remains have been buried, like seeds of life, in many places across the five continents.
- Gratitude too for those who were among [the Brothers] for a number of years, and who later decided to choose another way of life.
- Gratitude for the holiness of thousands of brothers, who, frequently in a silent and anonymous way taught us what it meant to live the Gospel in the way of Mary,
- Gratitude for the many thousands of Lay men and women who are committed to the Marist mission and who desire to present a Marian face to the Church. Their contribution has been extremely important for the development of the Marist Charism...
- Gratitude for so many generations of men and women who have been influenced in a positive way by Marist Brothers education, and who have integrated and promoted its values, as they tried to live as good believers and good citizens.

Forgiveness:

At the same time as we give thanks, there is a deep desire to ask forgiveness.

- Forgiveness for the times we have not witnessed to the values we profess and instead of edifying others, have caused scandal.

- Forgiveness for our infidelity to the inspiration of the Spirit: at times we have lacked courage to follow the movements of the Spirit or perhaps we have gone on the opposite direction.
- Forgiveness because at times, paralysed by our comfort or fears, we have not gone out to encounter the children and young peoples on the margins of our societies today...

Commitment:

Today after 200 years, we are the recipients of a wonderful heritage, full of light, but also with its shadows. It is on that heritage that we commit ourselves to build the future. We desire to give ourselves this opportunity for a new beginning, taking the best of the past and open to the newness of God's Spirit.

As Marists... we wish to renew our commitment to the church and the world:

- Our commitment to build a church with a Marian face; open, inclusive, missionary, a servant church, especially through the lives of each one of us and those of our Marist communities.
- Our commitment to constantly improve our ministry of evangelisation through education... A holistic education takes its inspiration from the values of the Gospel, in the way of Mary of Nazareth and Marcellin.
- Our commitment to go out to geographical and existential peripheries..., especially to those who find themselves in situations of poverty and great vulnerability...
- Our commitment to be open to the calls of the Spirit of God, present in our world and in each of us, especially by nurturing our inner lives."

Brother Emili continues, "We begin [anew] giving thanks, asking for forgiveness, and renewing our commitment. Let us hope that the celebration of our Marist bicentenary will be another step on the journey towards personal and institutional conversion!

Mary our Good Mother, first disciple of the Lord, woman of faith and commitment, accompanies us on our way toward this third Marist centenary, full of hope. May she, who has always done everything among us, continue to bless us and to give us increase."

So let us pray for the Marist Brothers and all those they minister to. Also let's reflect on our own lives and live with gratitude for all that has been, forgiveness for our failings and weaknesses, and commitment to live more deeply with Mary our Lay Marist calling.