

TODAY IN MARIST HISTORY:

205th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Institute

January 2, 1817

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS:

To understand the significance of the founding of the Marist Brothers on January 2, 1817, it is helpful to get a view into Marcellin's thinking, planning, and acting from the time he arrived in LaValla on August 13, 1816 to the beginning of the first Marist community on January 2, 1817. For those who are not familiar with the story of the beginnings of the Marist Brothers, here is a brief overview of the people and events that gave shape to the Marist legacy which we have inherited.

Marcellin was ordained a priest on July 22, 1816. He arrived in LaValla on August 13, 1816 where he was immediately faced with a number of challenges. In addition to his concerns about the faith-life of the people of the parish, Marcellin had a growing concern about the lack of educational opportunities for young people in the rural regions of France.

While in the seminary, Marcellin and some of his fellow seminarians talked about forming a Society of Mary composed of priests, sisters, brothers, and lay people. Marcellin was emphatic about the need for brothers to teach young people. The others, more interested in other aspects of the proposed Society of Mary, encouraged Marcellin to pursue his desire to found an order of teaching Brothers.

In his book, *A Heart That Knew No Bounds*, Brother Seán Sammon writes, The young priest saw education as a means for integrating faith and culture. Brother Jean-Baptiste tell us, "in founding his Institute, Champagnat had more in mind than providing primary instruction for children or even, than teaching them the truths of religion. He said, 'We aim at something better: we want to educate the children, to instruct them in their duty, to teach them to practice it, to give them a Christian spirit and attitudes and to form them to religious habits and the virtues possessed by a good Christian and a good citizen.'" (p. 31)

Another Champagnat scholar, Brother Stephen Farrell, FMS (Australia) in his book, *Achievement from the Depths* describes Marcellin's meeting with a potential candidate. "He (Marcellin) returned from Lyons on Saturday, October 5th, and next day, the Feast of the Holy Rosary in the Catholic Church, he decided to speak to a young man, Jean-Marie Granjon, about becoming a teacher. This young man's piety and decorum had impressed Marcellin ever since the priest's early days at Lavalla. The fact that this young man of 22 years had been a Grenadier in the Imperial Guard of Napoleon, no doubt gave him some prominence in the Lavalla community. Marcellin simply wished to talk to him and to make his acquaintance. The brief conversation revealed to the Curate that this farm worker might become the first member of the teaching institute he so much desired to found." (p. 64)

In a subsequent conversation several weeks later, Marcellin met with Jean-Marie Granjon again, and based on that conversation, he offered Jean-Marie a copy of "Le Manuel Chretien." When Jean-Marie told Marcellin that he could not read the book Marcellin told him that he would teach him.

A short time later, on **October 28, 1816**, just a little over two months after his arrival in La Valla, Marcellin was called to the Montagne home where young Jean-Baptiste Montagne, seventeen years old, was dying.



In talking with the young man, Marcellin quickly realized that the boy had no formal religious or academic education. Marcellin spent time with Jean-Baptiste and attempted to give him enough instruction so that he would have some sense of peace and hope as he prepared to meet his God.

Marcellin was not impulsive; he was decisive.

The death of young Jean-Baptiste touched him deeply. It made the concerns he already had about the educational inadequacies in rural France much more personal. He had to act.

Marcellin went back to Jean-Marie Granjon and asked him to become the first member of the teaching order of Brothers that he wished to found.

Brother Seán tells us, "*Jean-Marie, to be known later as Brother Jean-Marie, accepted the young priest's invitation on October 28, 1816; he was eager to give himself to the work. Marcellin had taken the first step to found his Little Brothers of Mary. A second step followed very quickly.*" (*A Heart That Knew No Bounds*, p. 32)

The second step was Marcellin's purchase of a small house near the rectory where he planned to house and train Jean-Marie and any other new recruits.

Brother Seán writes that "*Jean-Baptiste Audras, later Brother Louis, was only fourteen and a half when he asked to join the De La Salle Brothers at Saint-Chamond. Judging him to be too young, they advised him to continue discussing his vocation with his confessor. As luck would have it, that person was the young curate from La Valla. The boy told Marcellin that he had resolved to consecrate his life to God. After talking with Jean-Baptiste and his parents, and reflecting carefully on the situation, the priest invited young Audras to join Granjon.*" (*A Heart That Knew No Bounds*, p. 33)

After two months, the needed repairs on the recently purchased house were completed, and on **January 2, 1817**, Jean-Marie Granjon and Jean-Baptiste Audras moved into what has come to be known as the first community of Marist Brothers. That house has been called the "cradle of the Institute.



This is just the beginning of the story. Before Jean-Marie and Jean-Baptiste

and others who joined them could become teachers, they had to be educated in

all of the fundamentals that they had not had the opportunity to receive. While a

hired teacher gave the young recruits their academic formation, Marcellin

attended to their religious formation.

There is much more to the story, but that is for another time. For now, let us pause and consider that we are directly connected to something that happened on this day 205 years ago. Like Jean-Marie and Jean-Baptiste and, soon after, Jean-Claude Audras (Brother Laurent) and Gabriel Rivat (Brother François), we too have been called to live our lives as Marists and to be part of this holy heritage.

REFLECTION SONG:

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS (JOYCE JOHNSON ROUSE)

I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am stronger for their courage; I am wiser for their words.
I am lifted by their longing for a fair and brighter future.
I am grateful for their vision, for their toiling on this Earth.

We are standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before us,
They are saints, and they are humans, they are angels, they are friends.
We can see beyond the struggles and the troubles and the challenge,
When we know that by our efforts things will be better in the end.

They lift me higher than I could ever fly!
Carrying my burdens away.
I imagine our world if they hadn't tried.
We wouldn't be here celebrating today.
We wouldn't be so very blessed today

I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am honored by their passion for our liberty.
I will stand a little taller, I will work a little longer.
And my shoulders will be there to hold the ones who follow me.



LET US PRAY:



I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am stronger for their courage; I am wiser for their words.
I am lifted by their longing for a fair and brighter future.
I am grateful for their vision, for their toiling on this Earth.

We are standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before us,
They are saints, and they are humans, they are angels, they are friends.
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I am honored by their passion for our liberty.
I will stand a little taller, I will work a little longer.
And my shoulders will be there to hold the ones who follow me.

St. Marcellin Champagnat: pray for us.
Mary, our Good Mother: pray for us.
Let us remember: to pray for each other.

