

GRATITUDE, FORGIVENESS, COMMITMENT

Bicentenary of the Marist Institute 2nd January 2017

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Superior General

2nd January 2017. On a day, just like today exactly 200 years ago, Marcellin Champagnat began in this very house a project he felt had come from God and was burning within him.

Today the Marist Institute celebrates 200 years of existence.

And from within me, three words surface: gratitude, forgiveness and commitment.



GRATITUDE

This is the perfect moment to express our joy and our gratitude to God for the gift of Marcellin Champagnat to the Church and to the world.

Gratitude for raising up, through him, a new religious family to *make Jesus Christ 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 these 200 years, have made their profession as Marist Brothers. Gratitude for all those who died as brothers and whose remains have been buried, like small seeds of life, in many places across the five continents.

Gratitude too for those who were among us 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, especially over the last 60 years or so.

Gratitude for so many generations of men and women who have been influenced in a positive way by a Marist education, and who have integrated and promoted its values, as they tried to live as *good believers and good citizens*. The trust that each one of these families places in our Marist institutions is a source of great joy.

FORGIVENESS

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

Forgiveness for the times we have not witnessed to the values we profess and, instead of edifying others, we have been a cause for scandal.

Forgiveness for our infidelity to the inspiration of the Spirit: at times, we have lacked the courage to follow the movements of the Spirit or perhaps we have even gone in the opposite direction.

Forgiveness because, at times, paralysed by our comfort or fears, we have not gone out to encounter the children and young people on the margins of our societies, the new *Montagnes* of today.

Forgiveness because in some of our institutions, which should have been havens of safety for all children and young people, there have been situations of abuse which have left deep wounds, frequently for life. Forgiveness in a very special way to those who suffered that abuse because, as an institution, we have not always acted with care, or as quickly and decisively as such situations demand. Or perhaps we have simply not made enough effort to prevent them.

COMMITMENT

Today, after 200 years, we are the recipients of a wonderful heritage, full of light, but also with its shadows. And it is on this 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 of Champagnat, we wish to renew our commitment to the Church and to 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 the education of the children and young people entrusted to our care. A holistic education, which takes its inspiration from the values of the gospel, in the way of Mary of Nazareth and Marcellin.
- Our commitment to go out to the geographical and existential peripheries to children and young people, especially to those who find themselves in situations of poverty and great vulnerability.
- Our commitment to defend and promote the rights of children at the United Nations and in the societies where we are present, and, in a particular way, in each of our educational institutions.
- 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.

We begin this year 2017 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 towards 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.

I wish you all every happiness during this year of our bicentenary!