**Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

**Commencement of the XXII General Chapter of the Institute**

**Call to Prayer -** (Isaiah 61:10)



V. I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God.

**R. With delight I rejoice in the Lord.**

V. I trusted in your mercy,
let my heart rejoice in your salvation.

**R. With delight I rejoice in the Lord.**

V. Let me sing of the Lord who has been good to me.

**R. With delight I rejoice in the Lord.**

**A prayer based on the Calls of the XXI General Chapter**

O God, you have a dream for each one of us, for humankind, and for our Institute. By listening to our hearts, may we discover your love, mercy and tenderness. **God of new beginnings, bless us.**

Marcellin’s experience of your love to drove him to be enterprising, daring and to take risks.
The essence of his dream was “to make Jesus Christ known and loved by children and young people”.

**God of new beginnings, encourage us.**

We remember Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt to protect the child Jesus. This image urges us to become experts and advocates for the rights of children and young people; speaking bravely and prophetically in public forums. **God of new beginnings, strengthen us.**

We acknowledge that at times we have not always protected the rights of children and young people confided to our care. **God of new beginnings, forgive us.**

We are called as Marists to be present among poor children and young people as they search for meaning. Marists with a passion to be signs of God’s love, and bold enough to move to areas where others do not go. **God of new beginnings, enable us.**

We are called as Marists to have a highly significant presence among poor children and young people. **God of new beginnings, challenge us**.

We are called as Marists to discern the best way for them to be present and close to children and young people so that our presence is more significant and visible. **God of new beginnings, enlighten us.**

We are called as Marists to propose new styles of community, in contact with poor children and young people, which will promote a simpler lifestyle. **God of new beginnings, confront us.**

We are called as Marists to see the world through the eyes of poor children and young people and thus change our hearts and attitudes as Mary did. **God of new beginnings, change us.**

We are called as Marists to act with urgency, to find new creative ways to educate, evangelize, advocate for, and to be in solidarity with poor young children and young people.

**God of new beginnings, through your Holy Spirit move our hearts and transform our minds to respond to the needs of children and young people according to your holy will. Amen.**

**Reading | Pope Francis - Letter to the Institute**

I encourage you to be open to the future with hope, journeying with a renewed spirit. This is not a different road you are taking, but one brought alive in the Spirit. Society today needs people who are solid in their convictions, who can give witness to what they believe in, and, in this way, build a better world for all. On this journey, you will be guided by the motto of your Religious Institute, “All to Jesus through Mary; all to Mary for Jesus”. Have confidence in Mary and allow yourselves to be guided by her in her humility and service, her readiness and silent commitment. These are the attitudes that a good Religious and educator must transmit through his example.

I thank the Lord and Mary, our Good Mother, as Saint Marcellin liked to call her, for the presence in the Church of your vocation and service, and I ask for you the gift of the Holy Spirit so that, led by God’s Spirit, you will bring to children and young people, as well as to all those in need, the nearness and tenderness of God.

**Reading | Br Emili - A New La Valla: Convocation of the 22nd General Chapter**

The convocation of the 22nd General Chapter, under the slogan *A New La Valla*, invites all of us to *A New Beginning*…

Saint Gregory of Nyssa (4th century) said that in our Christian *life we go from beginning to beginning, through beginnings that have no end*. That means that our life, as Christians, is a constant beginning again. For this reason, we dispose ourselves once more to listen to the Spirit, and we constantly prepare to carry out his will.

A *New La Valla*, then, is not a call to reproduce, in some nostalgic or romantic way, the first Marist community. Rather, it is to make La Valla relevant today, at the beginning of the 21st century, as a new world is emerging. The Marist Institute was not born once and for all in 1817. It continues to be born today.

**Gospel | Matthew 1:18-23**

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."

*A period of silent reflection followed by a shared reflection on the readings.*

**Intercessions**

Let us proclaim the greatness of our Saviour who chose to be born of the Virgin Mary. Confident that God will hear us we pray:

God of new beginnings, you call us forth to new life, may our General Chapter be marked by wisdom, audacity, gratitude and faith as we journey together into the future. Lord hear us, **Lord hear our prayer**.

Eternal Word, in the living flesh of Mary you found a dwelling place on earth; help us to bring your Good News to young people on the margins of society. Lord hear us, **Lord hear our prayer**.

Holy Spirit fill us with the faith, vision and courage of Marcellin Champagnat as we prepare to enter our third century as Champagnat Marists. Lord hear us, **Lord hear our prayer**.

**Prayer for the 22nd General Chapter**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit fill us with the faith, vision and courage

of our founder Saint Marcellin as we prepare

to enter our third century as Marists of Champagnat.

Gathered around Mary, Our Good Mother,

we desire to seek You, to be weavers of community

with all our sisters and brothers, and to bring your Good News to young people,

especially those on the periphery.

Ever-loving God, from our simple foundation in La Valla,

we come to the threshold of our third century,

to create together a new beginning.

Confident that you are faithful O God, and that we participate in Mary’s work,

we place our preparation, discernment and the decisions of our 22nd General Chapter

under your protection and guidance.

May this time of remembrance, reconciliation and celebration

be marked by wisdom, audacity, gratitude and faith

as we journey in haste to the future which beckons us, today and always.

Amen.

