

21. The Name of “Little Brothers of Mary”

Marie con- ie de Marcellin Champagnat was no intellectual. His early formation shows him rather as one gifted for concrete action. Mary quickly became his model. According to the Gospel, her discreet manner did not mean doing nothing. Quite the contrary, she proclaimed the Reign of God, above all, through her actions and presence. Marcellin drew on Mary's life to shape the distinctive features of his spirituality.

When Father Champagnat founded his Institute he had two goals in mind: to provide the benefits of Christian education for poor country children; and to honour Mary by the imitation of her virtues and the propagation of her devotion. However, since the Blessed Virgin was particularly remarkable for her humility, and since the role of teaching little children is necessarily a humble one, he wanted humility, simplicity and modesty to be the distinctive characteristics of his new Institute.

So that the Brothers might fully grasp this intention of his, Father Champagnat gave them the name of the Little Brothers of Mary; this name was to remind them constantly of what they should be. The word “little”, which hurts the feelings of some people, which those ignorant of the Congregation's spirit find an enigma, and which some regard as superfluous and useless, has not been given to the Brothers without strong motives. The Founder intended this word to teach them that the spirit of their vocation is a spirit of humility; that their life should be a humble life, hidden and unknown; that humility should be their favourite virtue; and that it is by the daily practice of humility that they will work efficaciously at their own sanctification and that of the children in their care. This word “little” can be described as the stamp of the Institute, or the mould which forms its members; it is the mirror which keeps on reflecting the spirit of the Founder; and it demonstrates to them as well as teaches them, what they are committed to be and the image they ought to project.

Life of Marcellin Champagnat, Bicentenary Ed., II, pp. 398-399

briè- : voit avec The name, “Little Brother of Mary”, summarises the whole spirituality of Champagnat. It expresses in a nutshell Marcellin's spiritual experience and journey. It tells us how he saw himself (“little” – humble circumstances), how he saw others (as brothers and sisters), and how he related to God (through and like Mary). This is the legacy he has left his spiritual sons.

