

## 22. What is a Brother?

*For Marcellin being faithful to the call he felt at the bedside of the dying youth, Montagne, who was completely ignorant of God, involved a choice of ministry for his Brothers. The role of the brother was now clearly defined for him, and he stuck to it, sometimes going so far as to forbid other tasks even when these were requested by parish priests.*

**Our holy Founder had a high opinion of the Brothers' religious vocation and their ministry. In his conferences, he often praised the value and merit of the exalted function of catechist. He went on and on whenever he was praising this task, which he called an apostolic ministry, and whenever he was speaking of all the good which can be done by a Brother who really has the spirit of his state. To engrave his teachings on this point more deeply on the minds of the Brothers, in a sort of outline form, he usually limited himself to answering this question: What is a Brother? Here is the substance of his answers. We think they contain what is best suited to make the Brothers understand the holiness of their vocation, and give them a high esteem for their task of catechizing children. What is a Brother?**

1. A Brother is someone predestined for great piety, a very pure life and solid virtue, a soul for whom God's mercy has special plans.
2. A Brother is God's co-worker and Jesus Christ's partner in the holy mission of saving souls.
3. A Brother is the wise man Isaiah speaks of, who spends his life laying foundations and rebuilding ruins.
4. A Brother is a substitute father and mother.
5. A Brother is the assistant of the pastors of the church.
6. A Brother replaces soldiers and police officers.
7. A Brother is the children's guardian angel.
8. A Brother is a model and a living gospel for the children and for everyone else.
9. A Brother is a sower of the gospel.
10. A Brother is a man who, following the example of Jesus Christ, passes through this world doing good.
11. Finally, a Brother is a very effective bulwark against the evil and contagion of the world.

Opinions, Conferences, Sayings and Instructions of Marcellin Champagnat, pp. 15-25

At the time Champagnat gave this instruction to the Brothers, they were still a small group of young men with little education. He wanted to build up their confidence in their particular vocation and apostolate. As is true for any group in its beginning stage, a brother's identity had to be made clear. Here, Marcellin is giving his brothers a practical instruction on who they are. He defines the brother in terms of his relationship to God, his mission of evangelization in the Church and in society at large, his role among young people, and the witness of his life. This text, simple as it is, remains an indispensable point of reference in understanding the identity of Marist Brothers.

