

26. Marcellin Champagnat's Vocation

inter. David Cardinal Fesch, an uncle of Napoleon, wanted to re-open the seminaries around Lyons after the long rupture caused by the French Revolution. In that context, the following story reminds us of the call of young David as recounted in the Old Testament. It takes place in the spring of 1804 when Marcellin was 15 years old.

Father Alliot [the parish priest] thought for a while and answered: "Off hand, I don't know of anyone suitable. However", he added after further reflection, "there is the Champagnat family, with several boys who seem rather shy, but I haven't heard that any of them wants to study Latin. You have to pass through Rosey anyway, (that was the family's hamlet). Go in and see!"

The priest went to Rosey and paid Mr. Champagnat a visit. The greeting was cordial and respectful. After the usual exchange of courtesies, the visitor ventured the remark: "You don't know why I've come. The parish priest told me that you have several fine boys, pious and self-effacing who would be capable of studying Latin and becoming priests. I have come to see if this is true." The father was taken aback by those words and pointed out that his children had never shown a desire to study Latin. "Do you want to?", he asked the eldest, who was there. "No", he answered timidly, with a blush. "And where are the others?", the priest continued. The younger brother and little Marcellin who had been together at the mill, arrived as he spoke. "There now", said the father, "you see the priest has come to get you to study Latin. Do you want to go?" The answer from the younger brother was unequivocal. He gave out a short but expressive "No".

Marcellin mumbled a few confused and incomprehensible words. But the priest took him aside, examined him closely and was so delighted with his unassuming manner, his candour, his unpretentious attitude and his open and frank character, that he said to him: "My boy, you must study Latin and become a priest. It is God's will." A few minutes' conversation fixed Marcellin's will on his vocation and his will was never after to waver.

Life of Marcellin Champagnat, Bicentenary Ed., I, p. 9

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s cha-* The call of Marcellin was the beginning of a long spiritual experience that was to shape not only himself but all his spiritual heirs as well. The first moments of this experience have become a source of inspiration in the discernment of vocations at the level of their origin. Here we can see an example of where God seeks out and how God proceeds in his desire to give his charismatic gifts to the Church and to the world.

