

Marian College Graduation“September 20, 1946

We had worked so hard and prayed so long to get the approval for our Marian College that when it did reach us, it did not take us by surprise. Naturally the whole campus was delighted and very much excited about our success. We made it a point to contact at once the people who had helped us to make it possible. I telephoned Dr. Roy J. Deferrari of Catholic University and also decided to notify our General House in Rome. At that time we were having a General Chapter in Rome with the Superiors of all of the countries where our Marists were working. We notified them of our success and invited them to feel free to send us candidates from their countries upon their return home. And that was exactly what some of them did, accounting for the variety of nationalities present in our first years.

We held a special prayer service that evening and I decided that we would celebrate by enjoying our supper al fresco outside the Greystone uilding where Brother Nilus had built a special table for us to be able to have our Sunday and holiday suppers outside on the lawn. I had gone to Esopus that afternoon in order to get an eight-inch-long baby Japanese maple that we planted on that spot after our supper. We said our evening Office with special gusto that night, for we had so much for which to thank the Lord, who had indeed come through for us. We did concentrate on keeping it a low-key celebration and enjoyed our supper out in the open on our campus grove, planting the small Japanese maple and then closing with the singing of the Salve Regina. The Brothers were told that they were free for the rest of the evening, and I took the four graduates in our community car and drove them to Connecticut to a special place where we knew we could get the best in ice cream servings with all the toppings imaginable. Our community would further celebrate together the following Sunday with a special movie that the Brothers had long been waiting to see.

In the spirit of Champagnat we intended to keep the celebration low-key as he would have liked it, and the four graduates were allowed a visit home with their families on the following Sunday. As already explained, it would only be later that the name of the college would become Marist College, once the Marist Fathers had released the name for us and they agreed to call theirs a Marist seminary instead of Marist College. In the spirit of Champagnat we would continue to do good quietly in keeping with our special Marist spirit. The names of the first four graduates were Bro. Bernard Frederick Twomy, Bro. Christopher Emile Connelly, Bro. John Bosco Normandin, and Bro. Patrick Eugene Magee, the only survivor. He is the Director of our community at Marist High School in Chicago, Illinois.

In the life of a religious Brother it is a normal procedure after a number of years for the candidate to make what is called the Second Novitiate. It is usually offered to a Marist Brother after some ten years or so of profession of the vows. He now is mature, has had experience in the religious life, has been active in the apostolic, and is quite knowledgeable of the professed life he has undertaken. It is a time to get away from the distractions of everyday life, and to have some quiet spiritual time reevaluating his life thus far. It is time to see whether or not he is satisfied with his dedication, or if there is some need for adjusting, and whether or not he is ready to face a more demanding assignment.

The Brother takes his initial vows for one year and renews this same consecration each year for five years. After the five years, he is then invited to make his vows for life. The experiment has been completed, and he is now mature enough to realize whether this is the life for him, or whether he should look elsewhere. It is a chance to evaluate his consecration to the Lord by his vows, and also to check on his dedication to his task of being a teacher, trying to help youth to find their place in life and directing them towards a happy and prosperous future.

He is a Brother who has been teaching for at least five years, has taken the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and has lived a life of community with his confreres. He should have completed his degree fields by this time. It is now that he may need some reflecting; he may have problems to deal with and should be given the time and help needed to carry on towards a different apostolic with maybe less work to face. It is a sacred time to see what has to be improved, altered, or maybe faced with even greater generosity. After this he may well be called upon to become Director of a community or assume special obligations that will help him as well as the work of the Brotherhood. At this time he knows the religious life quite well, and may well be invited to take a

fourth vow, that of stability. The essence of that vow is a two-fold pledge never to leave the Marist Brothers under any circumstances and to live the life as an example, which will be an invitation to young people to join and come to serve. It is intended to guarantee the quality of our Marist Brotherhood, and also is a beacon calling others to come and do likewise in the service of the Lord.

The Second Novitiate is a five-month time of renewal. It is done usually in a place close to where the Order was started, and where the religious can go to the Founder's grave and travel through the area that he worked. The Brother tries to recap some of his initial fervor and dedication in this work for the Lord.

I was invited to go to France for this, and my companion from the States who was to come with me was Bro. Arthur Xavier, who was then the librarian at Marist College. It was going to be my first voyage and we were to head there for the program, which was to start on January 20, 1949. We left a little earlier in order to have some time to visit, as we had planned to make a stop at the grave and place of work of the saintly Cure of Ars. He had been a slow learner who had been accepted mostly because of his saintly life of edification, and more especially his saintly influence on sinners in the privacy of the confessional. There were all kinds of stories of the great good he had been doing for souls to the point where the devil had twice tried to intervene by burning the confessional.

It was after our visit to the good Cure of Ars that we stopped for lunch in the bitter cold and were pleased to taste the French cooking that we had heard so much about. While we were at lunch an old lady in her eighties came in with a little girl of three to get out of the cold and to have a warm drink. It was when she spoke to the waiter that we were surprised to hear her ask for "Deux St. Genis, oui l'arquebuse des Freres Maristes" (please give us two St. Genis, the after-dinner drink of the Marist Brothers). The waiter then brought the two cups with a cube of sugar in each and poured a small glass of the arquebuse in each and then poured the boiling water in the cup and stirred. "Voila! et bonne sante Madame." The old lady saw our surprise and assured us that this was the best medication for the start of the flu, and it was assured to be so because the Marist Brothers made it.

We were some eighteen or twenty from various countries who had come to follow the course. It was an introduction to the international aspect of our religious family, which would mean so much to me in my future life. We prayed together, the same prayers as we had prayed in the United States except that these were in French. We had two conferences per day, along with periods of discussion and many adequate assigned readings. It was a mirror of the life together that we had lived in our first Novitiate, but this was with international Marists, and I found it fascinating. Two Brothers provided our instructions, whereas another two French Brothers were in charge of the food service and were ready to provide travel to the doctors if needed. We played various games and went on weekly walks in the countryside, where we were fascinated by the country life as lived in France. Some of our Major Superiors came from St. Genis Laval, which was then the Mother House of the congregation. They came to visit and interview.

It was a time of peace, quiet, and closeness with the Lord, and was an ideal occasion for renewal, but what struck us most was that it was a time to experience the vastness of our religious family, which extended around the globe. This was also the time to do what we were called upon to do that was special to our Marist life in America. We visited the sacred shrines of the congregation both at St. Genis and at the Hermitage, which made us feel so close to our beloved Founder and wanting very much to be like him in our dedication.

The Brother Master of the Second Novitiate was a small thin Frenchman, Bro. Henri Noe, who was quite experienced and most kind to all of us grand Novices who were physically much bigger than he was. He was not only young but also capable and friendly. We had several interviews with him as he helped us along in our path of closeness to Our Lord and Our Lady. We also had several talks given to us by the various Assistant Generals who came from the Mother House on a weekly basis to lecture on some aspect of our religious life. Thus, we came to know most of the leaders of our religious family. Besides, on our long weekly walks, we made close friends with the various young Brothers from a variety of countries. It was especially pleasing to me, for I had already received a number of foreign young Brothers who had come to register for a degree at Marian College. Young Brothers from many of the countries represented had attended Marian College in the past three years, and this provided a new attachment for me.

We had come with awe to make this Second Novitiate; we would return with greater affection for our worldwide Marist family. It was a grace that would prove most useful for my future apostolic life that I was then totally ignorant of. After five months we left having made many new friends, being very much more attached to our Marist family and much closer to our saintly Founding Father. Little did I know then that I would be present at his beatification six years later in Rome. We had been right at home in a strange country as we headed back to our own real home in the U.S.A.