

## Onward to St. Genis

The Marist Chapter was over, and we each now had our tasks for the improvement of the congregation. We were about to pack our belongings and head from Grugliasco to our headquarters at St. Genis Laval not far from Lyon, France. This was the cradle of the congregation of Marist Brothers. We knew it would be a tiring trip, but we had a special van with enough places for every one of us going back. We took the trip and the close quarters as an opportunity for our team to get acquainted with one another and to become prepared to work together for the good of the congregation. We were from all over the world, but still a close Marist family. It sometimes felt as though we had always been together. Chapters have a way of unifying members and reminding them of their common mission.

We had returned to France and to the Mother House where on the following day we would be holding our first meeting. That morning after grace and the reading of the life of the saint for the day, we filled our coffee mugs, French style, with coffee followed by breaking our fresh bread into our coffee, thus turning it into a morning soup. Bro. Charles Raphael gave us the Benedicamus to allow us to talk and exchange freely our first impressions, whereupon Brother Leonida reminded the new General that the custom required the Superiors to complete their meal in silence. It was then that one of the old-timers reminded him that he was no longer the General and that he should allow a free hand to the new General to operate as he saw fit. All clapped hands and cheered that the new General felt the need to have a morning exchange of views with his Councilors. After the second day Brother Leonida left on his journey back to Mexico. We continued to enjoy the brief morning exchange of views after the reading of the life of the saint, and we all felt that we were off to a good start and would enjoy life together.

Some of our preliminary sessions helped us to get used to working together and to become aware of what was expected of us. There really were two parts to our task. The first required that we visit all the Brothers of the area assigned to us and that we keep the General Council informed of the various needs and problems and propose some possible solutions if we had any. This meant that after visiting our areas we needed to submit full reports to the Council. We also needed to make the various requests of the Province regarding the needs of our areas, and these requests were discussed together in order to arrive at a proper solution. We needed full reports on the problems and blessings of a Province and a good idea of any special means needed to be able to improve that service. It was clear that we needed to get to know our area very well and to make whatever suggestions we might have for the improvement of the situations.

The Assistants were not only in charge of their Assistancy but were also told to choose a buddy confrere on the Council. Then when we found it necessary to be away on a visitation our buddy could look after our mail and keep an eye on our students present at the Mother House from our specific areas. So, we were to work with and for the General Council, and also help out our an freres when absent from the General House, and he would also get the same when absent. We had to take turns going off on visitation so that the General always had enough advisors remaining with him. Twice per year there were assigned periods for all the Assistants to be together to take care of the main problems of the administration that required the full Council to gather in order to make special decisions.

There was another responsibility of the General Council that required the cooperation of all. That was the organization and operation of the various Second Novitiates that had the mission of the further training of our various Brothers. The Second Novitiates were important and helpful, but there was only one at first, and it was located in France. All the Brothers were required to go there, but the instruction was in French. We first responded to a great need for another such unit for the many Provinces of Spain and Brazil. The instruction was in Spanish and served our needs well since the two languages are so close. Much later in our administration we started a Second Novitate session in English to serve the many Provinces of England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Philippines, and the Chinese Brothers working all through Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore, all of whom took their training in English.

At first there was only a French Second Novitiate for all to attend. Then came the Spanish one for the Spanish and Brazilian Provinces. It was soon after being on the Council that I had been sent to visit our American Brothers attending the French Second Novitiate. I returned with the story that would break the camel's back. I had interviewed all my men regarding how they were getting along with the French instruction when the subject turned to Confession. When they could find an English-speaking Confessor everything was okay, but usually they relied on the following system for Confession: there was a small booklet listing the various commandments, each on a separate page to cover all the possibilities. The Confessor had a copy as well as each Penitent. The Penitent would refer to each page and would indicate by his fingers if it was once, twice or three times. When the priest was ready to give the blessing he would point out at the bottom of the page where it was marked "act of contrition." That said, the blessing was given and the Confessor gave penance by showing a number of fingers and then saying out loud, "Ave Maria."

When I returned from my visit to the Second Novitiate and dramatized what measure of participation we had reached, all agreed that there must be a place for the English-speaking training as well. They asked Brothers Hilary, Justinian, and myself if we had come up with any solutions. We explained that we had already found a place in Switzerland, and English-speaking Confessors, and that we were leaving the next day to implement that decision, if the Council voted unanimously in favor of it. When we explained how providing the training in English would help many Provinces, there was no further problem.

We also explained that the Second Novitiate was so arranged that if ever there was a war and our administration became crippled, the English Second Novitiate at Fribourg could be closed temporarily and the residence used to provide quarters for all our Major Superiors in Switzerland during wartime. That was the cherry on the cake, which really was never needed since the approval had been granted already. These special training sessions for our older religious have been a blessing over the years and continue to this day, and are used by our Brothers from England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, India, Philippines, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, the United States, and the Islands.