

## 1955â€“Champagnat Beatification

I had the privilege of living the first thirty years of my life under the influence of the Marist Brothers, a group of men dedicated to education and to a life in the service of Jesus in imitation of their model, the Blessed Virgin. We had been carefully trained to live a closed life as a special family imitating Marcellin Champagnat, the holy Marist Father who was considered the Founder of the Marist Brothers.

As a young priest with some other newly ordained priests for the Diocese of Lyons, Father Champagnat dedicated himself to a life of service for the poor in imitation of Mary who loved and served Jesus the way no one else had ever done. The life of a Marist Brother was to be modeled in imitation of Mary. We had learned that all through our years of religious service and had prayed daily to imitate our holy Founder, Marcellin Champagnat. We read his life and accounts of the many favors attributed to him in his life of prayer and hard work. We had invoked him at the end of every prayer we ever said, and we regularly prayed for his beatification. We heard of the many favors obtained through his intercession and were confident that he was in Heaven and that if we lived in imitation of his dedication, with Godâ€™s help we also would one day be with him in Heaven. We had an assigned prayer for his beatification. We had also heard of some miracles obtained through his intercession and that these miracles were being examined by the Holy See before the Founder could be declared Blessed. Already after a study of his life and writings he had been assigned the title of Venerable Marcellin Champagnat.

The news came to us that on Pentecost Sunday in 1955 the Holy Father would declare to the entire Church that there was a new Blessed in Heaven in the person of Blessed Marcellin Champagnat. We had prayed for this for years, and it was a thrill that our prayers had been heard. Each Province was to send representatives to attend the proclamation, and I was chosen as the Master of Scholastics and Vice Provincial to be one of the lucky Brothers.

I will never forget the experience. It was an occasion to meet the Holy Father as well and our Major Superiors who were then still in France. Our Procurator General to the Holy See and Postulator of our causes was the one to read in Latin, and then in Italian, the document about our holy Founder and the action of the Holy Father. The Basilica of Rome was decorated in its entire splendor for this special occasion. A drapery from the ceiling to the floor of the Basilica concealed a special painting of our Founder. The Basilica was decorated for the occasion and it was indeed filled to capacity with Marist Fathers, Brothers, and Sisters filling the basilica. Bro. Alessandro di Pietro read the proclamation in Latin and then in Italian and presented his document to the Holy Father. Pope Pius XII in a really majestic way extended his hands towards the drapery saying, â€œLet it be proclaimed that this is the servant of God, Blessed Marcellin Champagnat.â€ All the lights of the Basilica were lit and the various organs exploded in a musical thrill to join the entire congregation in tears of joy and cheers. I felt a thrill as shivers ran up and down my spine, and my heart was ready to burst in full gratitude to the Lord that our saintly Founder had been declared Blessed.

The two who had been cured by our Founderâ€™s intercession were presented also to the Holy Father for a special blessing. There was Mrs. Grondin of Lewiston, Maine, who had been completely cured of cancer, and one of our students from Madagascar, who had also been miraculously cured of spinal meningitis. It was a day of glory and joy for all the Marist families the world over. We could never thank the Lord enough.