

The Spirit

Spirit was something sacred to each one of us. St. Genis itself was the official headquarters, and it was also close to the Hermitage built by Champagnat, where his body lies. It is also where our first Brothers worked hard and long as a close-knit community dedicated to the service of youth, and especially to the poor and abandoned. It was here that most of our first Marist Brothers were already buried in the little sacred cemetery where one could come to pray, to meditate, and to plan quietly. This was part of our sacred legacy and we all felt the need to be close to it, to imbibe the spirit that animated these simple heroic souls. Everything about the place shouted to us the spirit of dedication and hard work; yes, it reminded us at every turn that all we needed was to live in the presence of God and not be afraid of hard work: Orare et Laborare, just three simple words to holiness and sainthoodâ€“a simple, specific, and effective program to live a life by.

At St. Genis there was a quiet simple little cemetery with its beds of flowers and the simple plaque listing the Brothersâ€™ names and the numbers of years dedicated to the Lord and to youth: sacred names handed down to us from our early books listing the names of those who lived dedicated lives and possessed heroic virtues. The lives seemed to be lived before our eyes as we studied each plaque on each simple grave. Every grave spoke to us of humility, simplicity, and modesty. These virtues seemed to glow from the plaques on these simple graves as we walked the sacred ground. It became a plan for us for it was proof positive that it was not just fiction taught by Champagnat but something to be realized, a path to be followed by all of us no matter where we were from, or no matter where we were to work. These were paths, yes, lives to be followed. It was this spirit that we carried along with us as we traveled the world in those sacred footsteps.

Near the graveyard was the garden of Brother Francois, which occupied his leisure time even in his old age. He planted, watered, and culled fresh flowers for our Mother Mary. This was a retreat lived with the eyes and not listened to with the ears, and sacred to recall. It was Champagnat very much alive before our eyes, showing us the way to Jesus through Mary.

We needed this spiritual renewal, for it would be something concrete to bring to our Brothers the world over not so much by our conferences but by our own example of Champagnat made alive today. It was a sacred legacy that we needed to share and to impart to others when and where needed. We would be in France for two years more and needed to imbibe as much of that spirit as possible if we were to continue in the sacred legacy left to us. It was good for us to be at St. Genis. The Marist tradition is not only a spirit, but also something sacred to become part of a lived life, to be shared by example, and to spur us on!