

Marianist Calendar of Saints

by José María Salaverri, SM

Translated by Michael Galvin, SM

On July 31, 2000, I received a letter from Father José Antonio Martínez Puches, a Dominican priest who is the director and the driving force for the publishing house EDITASE. In his letter he congratulated us on the occasion of the beatification of our Founder and added: “And I wanted to talk to you about Blessed Chaminade. We would like you to provide about 6 to 7 pages about his life and accomplishments. This would be part of a series of books that we are preparing to publish for next year—twelve books, one for each month of the calendar dedicated to the new Christian year. Since the memorial for the newly Blessed Chaminade will be celebrated on January 22, it is urgent that we prepare his biography in a timely fashion.”

I accepted the assignment of preparing the biography. I suggested that we prepare a memorial for Blessed Jakob Gapp, who will be memorialized on August 13. I offered to prepare that biography as well. Moreover, when I mentioned Blessed Carlos, Fidel, and Jesus, he accepted my offer to prepare short narratives for them in memorials for September 18. I thought maybe these compact biographies could serve to introduce their lives to our students or to anybody else who might be interested.

In the case of Faustino, I prepared a second folder intended for the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*. This publication is produced exclusively in Italian by the editorial agency of Città Nuova. Father Enrique Torres explained: “This publication is an initiative of the Pontifical Lateran University. The work is comprised of twelve volumes, plus a volume of indices accompanied by an appendix. A second appendix will soon be published to provide information about those who have been declared “Servants of God.” That title has been conferred on those who have been admitted to the first step of a diocesan process of consideration for eventual beatification. An important consideration of our working with the staff of the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* puts us in contact with those who work with the postulators, with the general curias, etc. Father Torres asked me to draft a brief summary of the life and spirituality of Faustino Pérez-Manglano and an accompanying bibliography that would follow the editorial protocols of the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*.”

José María Salaverri, SM

Valencia, Spain

November 1, 2000

On the Feast of All Saints



For the New Christian Year

January 22

**Blessed William Joseph Chaminade
(1761-1850)**

Saragossa, October 11, 1797

On the evening of that day, after a long trek from the French border, a French priest was arriving in Saragossa. He was tired, but the sight of the lone (at that time) tower of the Basilica of the Virgin of the Pillar was balm to his tired feet during the last miles of his journey. To top it off, he unwittingly arrived just in time to celebrate vespers on the eve of the patronal feast of the basilica. There was joy in the streets. How envious he was to gaze upon the simple folk of the city expressing their vibrant love for the Virgin!

He had left behind some hard years of ministry in Bordeaux, especially the cruelest period of the Revolution: the Terror. But just at this moment, when it seemed that the persecution had slackened, they expelled him as an undesirable. This happened to him who loved his country so much. For his exile he had chosen Saragossa, a city known for its devotion to Mary. Mary was his great love. In his first visit to the Basilica of the Virgen del Pilar, he was unable to hold back a tear as he murmured: “My Lady, how long will I have to stay here?”

A Large Family

On April 8, 1761, Blaise Chaminade, a cloth merchant in Périgueux, and his wife Catherine, welcomed their sixth child. The other five that had preceded him in life also rejoiced to greet his arrival. A large family is a grace. You learn solidarity, tolerance, and fraternal love...very fashionable words today. In families with only one or two children there is a danger that these qualities remain abstract ideas and not concrete experiences. As a matter of fact his oldest brother, Jean Baptiste, 16 years older than William, was not there. After finishing his secondary studies with the Jesuits, he decided to follow them. But soon he had to return home because the Society of Jesus was suppressed in France. He would become a diocesan priest and an educator at the Collège of Saint Charles in Mussidan. In 1762, the second brother, Blaise, wanted to become an Augustinian Recollect. His father, a good Christian, but one looking to the continuation of his

business, was opposed. Without thinking twice, Blaise initiated a fast—what today we call a hunger strike, which overcame parental opposition.

The newborn child was baptized William. He was the youngest, but he was not pampered. He would never forget a lesson that his mother gave him, one that was paradigmatic of Catherine's methods of her training her family. The little boy disliked having his hair combed. His mother was blunt: "Look, my spoiled little kitten, there must be a cost for being so handsome."

With His Brother at His Side

William was precocious and liked to study. So in 1771, his parents entrusted him to his older brother Jean Baptiste, who by that time was the director of the Collège of Saint Charles in Mussidan, 35 kilometers southwest of Périgueux. When he received the sacrament of confirmation he added Joseph to his first name. Wasn't Joseph the name of the person who was nearest to Mary? He wanted to be as close to Mary as he could be. Thereafter he always signed his name: W. Joseph Chaminade. He was a cheerful, pious, very balanced and steady young man in all that he undertook.

An incident at school served to further strengthen his love for the Virgin Mary. When he was twelve years old, while he was hiking, he climbed up the side of an abandoned quarry. A companion who was climbing above him loosened a rock that rolled down the slope and struck William Joseph's foot. The wound was rather severe; despite careful attention it refused to heal.

Finally, after six weeks without improvement, he and Jean Baptiste made a promise to the Virgin. If his foot would heal, they would make a pilgrimage on foot to the shrine of Our Lady of Verdélais. This was not a petty promise, given the fact that the shrine was 80 kilometers away. But the remedy took effect. The wound was healed. Without waiting for anything else, the two brothers set out on their pilgrimage. There was no protest from the young man's foot.

In 1776 at the conclusion of his secondary studies, he asked his brother to approve of his joining the Congregation of Saint Charles, which consisted of a group of diocesan priests who staffed the secondary school. He began his theological studies. These were years of silence, of prayer, of work, of maturation in his faith life.... He completed a doctorate and his study for the priesthood in Paris.

In those years his life was very much a "hidden life." The details of those years are not known; so hidden that we do not even know the exact date or place of his ordination. However, in 1785 he signed his name as a priest. He taught at the secondary school. He was the treasurer at the school and exercised his priestly ministry at the shrine of Notre Dame du Roc. He was peaceful but nonetheless tireless.

The Storm Erupts

In 1789 the Estates General met in Paris amid omens of political turbulence, symbolized in the storming of the Bastille on July 14. In January 1790 Jean Baptiste died. This was a crushing blow to the school. Another yet more telling blow came in July when the National Assembly adopted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, whereby every priest was obligated to swear allegiance to the State.

That oath was in practice a schismatic act since its purpose was to separate the Church in France from its visible head in Rome. The priests of Mussidan refused. The school ceased to exist, the priests were declared outlaws and were branded as the “nonjuring clergy” along with all of the clergy who refused to swear allegiance only to the State. They had to go underground in their ministry. They had to adopt disguises, and they had to go into hiding.

William Joseph bought a house in Bordeaux in the name of his elderly parents. He thought correctly that there in a big city he could better develop his ministry without being recognized and pursued.

He would walk the streets dressed as a street merchant or a tinker. Often he walked through the Place de la Nation, where for nearly a year, between 1793 and 1794, the guillotine was standing in the public square. On more than one occasion from the balcony of a house, he gave absolution to the prisoners in the wagons of the detainees who were destined to die on the guillotine.

There were children who would inform him about the needs of the community: “In this house, such and such a floor number...they need.” And the tinker would administer the sacrament to the sick, hear confession, celebrate the Eucharist, and perform weddings. More than once the police interrupted a celebration. Everybody pretended innocence. He would always escape. Halfway through the Reign of Terror more than twenty priests had fallen—more than half of those who had hidden in Bordeaux. William Joseph confided later: “In some cases, I escaped the guillotine by only the thickness of a wooden panel.” Once some soldiers of the National Guard followed him to his parents' house. The housekeeper, Marie Dubourg, had only time enough to hide him under a large laundry basket.

When his pursuers arrived and questioned the woman: “Madame Citizen, have you seen a priest around here?” She answered them “All the time all that you see is priests around here. There must be one under this laundry basket.” All broke out in laughter. And she added: “All of you are tired. I'll serve you a glass of wine.” And all gathered around the salvific laundry basket. All had a few quaffs. And all left happy.

The Silent Years

It seemed that the storm had let up with the fall of Robespierre. However, in 1797, as we have already seen, there were great numbers that were banished. In Saragossa there were many French priests. They had been very welcome there but were not officially allowed to minister. To make a living, apart from the Masses entrusted to him, William Joseph

crafted artificial flowers, or produced images of saints in plaster or wax by using molds." He would muse, "I am waiting for the moment when I can make them flesh and blood." Above all he would study, pray, and read.

At the feet of the statue of the Virgin of the Pillar he refreshed his soul and dreamt of his future ministries. There he "saw" his future disciples. Years later he would tell them "Just as I see you now, I saw you a long time ago." and would not be more specific than that. His time in Saragossa was a key time in his life. From there he would return with new energy and new ideas. For that reason his disciples have borne the image of the Virgin of the Pillar to the ends of the earth.

The Hour of the Laity

His exile lasted three years. In November 1800 Napoleon initiated his coup d'état: he named himself First Consul. The exiles were allowed to return. Without wasting a minute William Joseph returned to Bordeaux and rushed to set up an apartment with a chapel on Rue Saint Simon. He wanted to dedicate himself to youth before all and above all. One day he met for discussion with two young men who did not know each other. He asked both to bring a friend to the next gathering. After their next meeting he asked the four men to invite additional acquaintances. By the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, there were twelve men present for the gathering.

And more would come, attracted by the priest who understood them so well and who knew so well how to awaken their enthusiasm. He founded the "Sodality of the Immaculate Conception" that today is known as "The Marianist Lay Community." Inspired by the Jesuits, Chaminade gave the groups an additional apostolic orientation. He recognized that the moment was ripe to train lay apostles. In that respect his Sodality was a precursor of later movements. William Joseph explained that their Baptism should encourage them to "multiply Christians." Therefore he asked them not only to live out their Baptism but also to renew the promises of that Baptism. On February 2, 1801, each of eleven young men, with his hand on the Gospels, read a personal commitment: "I, ... , servant of God and son of the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, commit and consecrate myself to the service of the Virgin Mary. I promise to honor her and make her honored as Mother of Youth, with all my power." "Mother of Youth"—an original way of addressing Mary as patroness. Then there came mature men and women, but young people would always be an apostolic predilection. The group would grow in number, despite the problems they had with Napoleon and with other governments. The young were the apple of the eye of Chaminade, "they were seen as a holy militia moving ahead in Mary's name to assist her in her mission to re-Christianize society."

How enthusiastically Chaminade describes the situation: "In the most perverted century of all time, amid the corruption within it, in the midst of all vices, is born a pure-blooded generation, a virtuous generation." He says that that is the family of the purest Mary. Napoleon waged wars all across Europe with obligatory military service without time limits. Many sodalists were called up for service. Nevertheless, in 1808, when Napoleon invaded Spain, the Sodality of Bordeaux had 300 young men and 250 young women, together with many fathers and mothers of the families. William Joseph Chaminade's

name was to be found at the origin and support of most of the vibrant activity of the post-revolutionary Christian renewal in Bordeaux.

Among the sodalists were many ardent apostles filled with God and working in Mary's name as they sought to meet the needs that were there. Illiteracy was rife; sodalists opened a school. Other sodalists came upon exploited groups of unaccompanied children who left the countryside to work as chimney sweeps. Sodalists helped them to organize. For those who were unemployed, sodalists set up a placement office. For those with little religious instruction, sodalists prepared classes. Sodalists initiated new classes for other useful topics, and practical skills; sodalists would put together mobile libraries where needed. The sodalists were involved in everything! By the way, in all of those years among all of the young people working then in the sodality, there were approximately one hundred men and women who joined religious congregations or the priesthood — including six bishops.

Thérèse and Adèle

Two bold women in the life of William Joseph. Very different in age, in character, and in training. Both are now in the process of beatification. Thérèse de Lamourous (1754-1836) was somewhat older than William Joseph, her spiritual director. During the time of the Terror she risked her life teaching catechism to people and assisting nonjuring priests in their ministry. She was to become the soul of the women's Sodality. Father Chaminade was the spiritual director and confessor of the House of the Miséricorde, an organization ministering to repentant prostitutes in Bordeaux. Thérèse helped in this work... after one day, having overcome her reluctance, she decided to stay there with them and founded a new religious institute—the Sisters of Mercy.

Adèle de Trenquelléon (1789-1828) entered Chaminade's sphere of ministry much later and by “chance.” She was born in the year of the outbreak of the Revolution. She was the daughter of a well-to-do officer of the Royal Guard. Members of her family were exiled to parts of Portugal and Spain. The circumstances of her youngest years were difficult. The deep faith of her parents guided her in those times. On the return to their homeland in 1803, following her confirmation, she and her friends organized an association aimed at living an authentic Christian life with an emphasis on helping the poor.

In 1808 providentially she became acquainted with and quite enthusiastic with the Sodality of Bordeaux. She requested to affiliate her association with the Sodality of Bordeaux. She established a cordial-yet-profound correspondence with William Joseph. With time Adèle and William Joseph shared mutual admiration and affection. She truly became the daughter of Father Chaminade's soul.

In 1816 she sought Father Chaminade's help to fulfill her wish to consecrate herself to God. With his aid she inaugurated the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, Marianist in Agen. What a sorrow and great loss it was for her spiritual father when he had to cope with her untimely death at a very young age in 1828!

The “Great Memorable Day”

Jean Baptiste Lalanne, a medical student, was one of the first sodalists. At the age of 22 he came to visit with his spiritual father on May 1, 1817. He explained that he had thought deeply about what he wished to say. He wanted to put himself completely at the disposition of Father Chaminade. He felt called to embrace a lifestyle and an apostolate similar to his. Chaminade was deeply moved. “I have been waiting for this for so many years.” He then explained his dream. Let us form a group of men consecrated to God by religious vows, without a religious habit, with agility that will enable them to adapt themselves to all situations.... He concluded with the declaration “And we will put everything under the protection of The Immaculate Mary and declare in our humility that we will be the heel of the woman.”

Others would answer the call: seven, in fact. Jean Baptiste and another wanted to be priests; there were a teacher and two students who wanted to pursue education as religious but without being priests. Two workers also joined; they were coopers who made barrels for the good wine of the region. On October 2, 1817, these seven young men decided to found “a man who would not die”: the Society of Mary, a religious institute in which religious, priests, educators and workers would labor on an equal footing, without any privilege for anyone. Chaminade was not afraid to adopt the threefold slogan of the revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—that seemed to him, and rightly so, very Christian. He would often repeat meaningful precepts: “Union without confusion,” “All of us are missionaries”; “Maria Duce” [“Mary leads the way”]; and as Mary told the servers at Cana, “Do whatever He tells you.” Chaminade was happy. The Society of Mary was born, the Marianists were born. And the Marianist Family was brought to completion: lay people, religious, male and female.

In October of 1817 Lalanne and his companions began their life together. What will these young men do? Take care of the Soldality, of course. But besides that, they will do all that they can “to spread the faith.” An obvious fact was that in France the majority of the people were illiterate. Moreover, there were very few Christian primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, education was an apostolate that could be more efficacious than any other ministry as a means to “multiplying Christians.” The Marianists became educators. Jean Baptiste Lalanne was to become a pioneer in teaching methodology. The Southwest of France was soon to be covered by schools run by Marianists; lay teachers collaborated with the Marianists. Normal schools were launched. Soon the Society of Mary opened schools in the northeast, and in the other corner of France: Alsace and Lorraine, an area that soon teemed with Marianist schools.

A Test of the Devil...Or Maybe of the Lord

The July Revolution of 1831 that terminated the reign of Charles X, also brought a sledgehammer blow to the wave of expansion of the schools. But political events had never daunted Father Chaminade. His house was searched. He had to leave Bordeaux and move to Agen for several years. There the Marianists had a school and a community of beloved Daughters of Mary. He hoped that better times lay ahead!

There followed a painful event that broke his heart. The defection of two of the first

seven Marianists deeply wounded his spirit. In May of 1832, when he was 71 years old, Father Chaminade received sad news from two of his closest collaborators who had been with him at the founding of the Institute. Auguste Brougnon-Perrière and Father Jean Baptiste Collineau lost their faith—not in God, but rather their faith in Father Chaminade. They came to believe that there was no great future for the Society of Mary; the Society was not a solid enterprise. They thought that it was absurd to place priests and unordained religious on an equal footing. Father Chaminade was old. When love fades away, imperfections and difficulties cloud the picture. Like the disciples of Emmaus whose eyes were obscured by sadness.

The new archbishop of Bordeaux, Bishop de Cheverus, who knew little of Father Chaminade, without any prior consultation, gave full credence to the two dissatisfied religious and released them from their vows. And moreover, the priest was appointed canon of the cathedral of the diocese. In the opinion of the archbishop of Bordeaux the Society of Mary was in its death throes.

“Mary's Power Has Not Diminished”

It would be impossible to miss the fact that William Joseph was a man of deep faith. He knew that the works that he had undertaken had been “inspired by God.” One of the mottoes that he had repeatedly instilled in his disciples was: “Be firm in your faith,” and he was a stellar exemplar of this in his own life. His firmness would be richly rewarded. In 1839 he received a decree of praise for his two Institutes from the Holy See. He wrote a beautiful letter to all of the religious to inculcate in them a love of their vocation and to imbue confidence in the Society of Mary, “which has been totally placed under the banner and at the service of their august patroness.”

He shines a spotlight on Mary's role:

In our time the power of Mary has not been in any way diminished. She will vanquish the heresy of our age (religious indifference) as she has repelled all the others in the past. She continues being the quintessential woman, the woman promised to crush the head of the snake.... She's the hope, the joy, and the life of the Church...for her is reserved in our day a great victory; to her corresponds the glory of saving the faith that is threatened to face shipwreck in our time.

And as a deservedly famous religious order has taken the name and banner of Jesus Christ, we have taken the name and banner of Mary, ready to fly where she calls us to extend her mission, through the extension of the kingdom of God in souls.

Time has validated his intuition and efforts. His foundations and spirituality have survived until today and are still doing good throughout the entire world.

“Nonetheless She Shall Crush Your Head”

Mary was the greatest source of strength for William Joseph Chaminade. One day, in his old age, he confided: “By the great mercy of God, I have for quite some time lived and breathed only to spread devotion to the august Virgin Mary. My greatest wish every day is to see growth of the number of people who venerate her, and I pray for the multiplication of the branches of her family.” Chaminade was quiet, but tenacious, always attentive to the signs of God; when inspired by faith, he was adamant. Nobody could hold him back. Someone called this trait “quiet strength.”

His last years would bring him more complications. But he dealt with them. In the novitiate of Saint Anne de Bordeaux, he was half blind. He would rest his hand on the shoulder of a novice and ask him to guide him to the back of the poplar grove where there was a statue of the Immaculate Conception. With his trembling hand he would grope to find the head of the serpent under foot of the Blessed Mother, and with a resonant voice he would cry out: “Despite everything, she has crushed your head, and she will crush your head forever.”

He knew that Christ in the end would be victorious despite the many pitfalls that the snake would set to challenge Mary, her son and the Church.

On January 22, 1850, William Joseph died peacefully. He left behind a family, a “man who does not die.” One Hundred and fifty years later, Pope John Paul II solemnly beatified him on September 3 in the Jubilee year of 2000 in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

Bibliography

Biography in English

Eduardo Benlloch, SM, *Chaminade's Message Today* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2001).

Bibliography in Spanish (translation of titles)

Vincent Gizard, *William Joseph Chaminade: New Wineskins for New Wine* (Madrid: PPC, 1998).

Emilio Ortega, SM, *The Man Who Wanted To Be Called Joseph* (Madrid: SPM, 1999).