

OCTOBER 2011

FOLLOWING WILLIAM -JOSEPH CHAMINADE, MAN OF PRAYER, MASTER OF PRAYER

FATHER CHAMINADE, MAN OF PRAYER

From his youth...

As a child, pupil at Mussidan Seminary at age 10. Having observed the long times that his brother Jean-Baptiste, a former Jesuit, took for retreats, William Joseph asked him to teach him to pray. He made his first communion before the usual age and showed great devotion to the Eucharist. His whole life of prayer was already bathed in a strong Marian devotion, evident both in Mussidan and in Perigueux. He professed his first vows in the Congregation of Saint Charles at the age of 15. Ordained priest, he worked as the business manager of the Mussidan college: his spirituality never dispensed him from the concrete details of life.

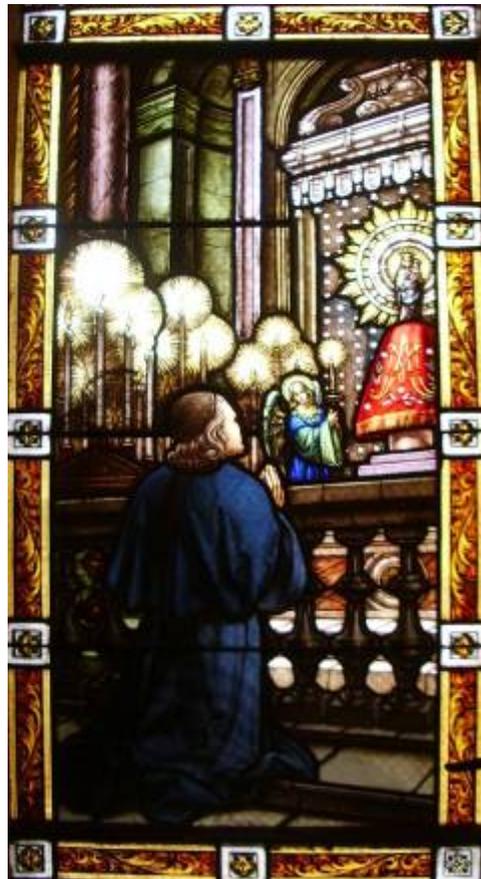
...during the Revolution...

Forced to leave Mussidan in 1791, he went to exercise his priestly ministry clandestinely in Bordeaux: he was the man of the sacraments, already a spiritual guide, in time given the responsibility of welcoming back and accepting the retraction of priests who had sworn the government oath.

... in Saragossa...

In 1797 he was forced into exile and went to Saragossa. This was his desert period, a time of reflection, of deepening his spiritual life. He sought the will of God in prayer, he passed long hours at the feet of Our Lady of the Pillar. A letter to Mlle de Lamourous gives a good account of his

dispositions: “... we will never be happy, we will never have peace of soul until our wishes be entirely conformed to those of God: may our submission and resignation to the dispositions of Providence give us a tranquility that is independent of changing events...” (Letter no. 15 of 2 March 1799).



... and in Bordeaux

This indefatigable missionary, who never ceased to think up new ways of evangelizing France, was primarily a man of prayer. Adèle de Trenquelléon witnessed to it: “See how Father Chaminade acts: he never hurries, he is always self-

possessed, but nonetheless he accomplishes a lot of work because grace does so much of it” (Letter no. 409.6 of 12 October 1820). A man of reflection, he never acted impulsively, but brought everything to prayer and acted only in that light. Very sparing of confidences, he expressed that as the line of action of his whole life when in full conflict with his Council in a letter of October 1844: “In general, I have said nothing, written nothing but what I believed Jesus Christ crucified wanted and commanded” (Letter no. 1344 of 12 October 1844).

FATHER CHAMINADE, MASTER OF PRAYER

Throughout the Founder’s life, Father Chaminade never ceased to form in prayer all those confided to his care, from the lay Sodalities beginning in 1800 up to the end of his life. He set as **goals of the religious Institutes** his own line of conduct:

- Strive for one’s own sanctification, i.e., nourish a true relationship with Christ
- Work for the salvation of others, i.e., be a missionary
- Take care of oneself, i.e., find a balance between the first two

Prayer was never separated from life, and he sought tirelessly to present methods that would lead to that unity.

The methods of prayer...

Starting with the classical methods of prayer of the time, which he gave to the Sodalists of Bordeaux, he already insisted on preparation for prayer in life by the practice of silence in particular and by what he would call, from the beginning of the religious foundations, the “method of the virtues.”

He was to complete the method in insisting upon faith and the practice of the presence of God in 1828.

In 1832, he insisted upon the change that prayer should bring about in one's life: his method stressed repentance, the need to "crucify the old man," i.e., to work at one's own conversion if one wished to pray.

The culmination of his research as a spiritual master would give in 1840 the method of meditation on the Creed. The heart of prayer is the faith as it has been revealed to us. It is upon that faith that we must base our life, faith is our sole guide.



Colegio del Pilar - Zaragoza

... while keeping oneself from illusion...

The method of the virtues is inseparable from prayer. Listen to what Father Chaminade wrote

to Sister Celestine, who was thinking about entering Carmel and remained uncertain about her vocation. He presents to her the difference between Carmel and the Daughters of Mary:

"... The Institute of Mary shows us, or rather points out, the path we must follow to go to God and to unite ourselves to him. The Reform of Saint Teresa makes known, more particularly, the way by which God comes to his creature and communicates himself to her. In each you see the same end, the same perfection, the same holiness, but the manner of tending to it is very different. (...)

In the Institute of Mary there are no long prayers, neither vocal nor mental, but much work, sanctified by recollection and a religious silence. In the Reform, there are long offices and long meditations, solitude, etc. Each is integral according to the design for sanctification offered by the Holy Spirit.

In the Institute of Mary, to the idea of personal sanctification is joined effective work toward the sanctification of the neighbor, while in the Reform of Saint Teresa, one is useful to religion by the prayers recited for the conversion of sinners and the perseverance of the just" (Letter no. 142 of 11 July 1820).

There are no long prayers, but the time of meditation prescribed in the Rule of Life is still one hour each day. The importance of conversion, of work on the virtues (recollection and silence here), shows how Father Chaminade wanted missionary religious, praying persons whose entire activity would become a prayer, a people of saints who witness first of all by their lives, before any preaching. And there is no saintly life without prayer.

...with Mary.

Mary takes her place very naturally in this perspective. She, the woman of faith who spent her life in routine tasks, was always alert to hear the Word and to obey the Father. She who became our Mother at the foot of the Cross could not be a better guide for our spiritual life. Father Chaminade recommended that we pray with her and never end our prayer without confiding to her whatever we have gained from it.



Our Lady of the Rosary (Anonymous)

Dates in the month to celebrate: 2 Anniversary of the Foundation of the SM (October 2, 1817) – 7 Our Lady of the Rosary – 9 Marianist World Day of Prayer (Shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar) – 12 Our Lady of the Pillar

Sr Dominique Saunier, FMI