

APRIL 2011

"You have all been baptized, you have put on Christ" (Gal 3,27)

With THE FAMILY OF William Joseph CHAMINADE in this month of the 250th anniversary of his birth



The cathedral Saint Front (Périgueux)

1) PERIGUEUX (1761 – 1771): A HOLY FAMILY!

The family of William Joseph was impressive in the human and Christian quality of their life, even if there were some shadows. Let's get to know them!

Paternal grandfather: Jean Chaminade, who was a sculptor in Saint-Astier, a small town near Périgueux (between Périgueux and Mussidan) (B *Origines* 1).

Mother Chaminade: Catherine Bethon.

Daughter of a Périgueux merchant, with Swiss Protestant ancestors converted to Catholicism (B *Origines* 1).

"I heard his mother tried to inculcate in him the traits of noble souls. This was the only time I ever heard him speak of himself. This testimony itself was a way of thanking his mother for what she had taught him". (Witness of Bro. Enjugier, November 30, 1909, Vasey p. 21). Very pious,

she had for a bedside book "*Instructions for dying well and exhorting the terminally ill.*" She herself died at Saint-Laurent, the property of her son, on September 9, 1794 (B *Or* 1).

Father Chaminade: Blaise Chaminade He practiced his trade as a skilled workman; he was gifted, too, with sound business acumen. To meet the needs of his growing family he improved his financial situation by laboring at two callings, as a worker in glass and as a retailer of cloth in a little shop on Place de la Claustre. He died in Périgueux, March 4, 1799, during William Joseph's exile in Spain.



At right, in the center, at 32 rue Bonaventure (formerly "Rue Froide"), the house of the Chaminade family.

Fifteen Chaminade brothers and sisters

Nine died at an early age and six survived:

1. Jean-Baptiste (1745-1790). The oldest: Jesuit, until the suppression of the Society in 1762. In 1771, he was one of the two directors of the Collège of Saint Charles of Mussidan where he formed his brother and introduced him to the spiritual and religious life, wielding a decisive influence upon him. He died a holy death there shortly before the dispersion of the community.

2. Blaise: (1747-1822) After a hunger strike of two days, by means of which he overcame the opposition of his father, he became Franciscan Recollect in 1762. During the Revolution, he was exiled to Italy and lived in Assisi. At the end of the Revolution, he returned to France, where he faithfully exercised his priesthood as vicar of Saint-Astier (near Périgueux), where he died in 1822.

3. Lucrèce: (1750-1826) married, no children. She was the godmother of William Joseph. She married a lawyer in 1780 who died in the first year of marriage, leaving her a widow. She left, probably in 1810, for Bordeaux, to the home of her brother, for whom she kept house [and] with whom she stayed until she died in 1826. (B *Or* 1).

4. François (1755-1844)

He joined his father, whom he succeeded, in the cloth trade. He married Marie Saulignac and they had four children. But his wife became seriously ill, and while she was still living, he fell in love with a servant in his house, much younger than he, Cecilia, with whom he seems to have had three children. After the death of his wife, he continued to live with Cecilia. He had another son, and later they were married civilly first, and two months later in the Church. Business was not good for François and he went broke several times. (B *Or* 1). The situation of his brother was a topic of great concern for Father Chaminade. From his eight children came the current descendants of the family, especially through Sophie, his third child, who married François (de) Lala.

5. Louis (Xavier) (1758-1808); diocesan priest It was he who was closest to William Joseph. They studied together in Mussidan, where they then also helped their older brother in the direction of the College of Saint Charles. They met again in exile in Saragossa. Both brothers remained always close to one another (B *Or* 1).

BAPTISM

The same day he was born he was baptized in the parish of Saint Silain [destroyed about 1790]. Named after his godfather, William Moreaux, a baker, probably a relative of his mother. His paternal great-grandfather was also called William Chaminade. The name of William was, therefore, known in the family (B Or 1.4). His sister Lucrece, eleven years old, was his godmother.

"On the eighth of April, one thousand seven hundred sixty-one, was baptized William Chaminade, born the same day, natural and legitimate son of Blaise Chaminade, citizen and merchant, and of Catherine Bethon, spouses. His godfather was William Moreaux and his godmother Lucrece-Marie Chaminade, both of this town. The said baptism was done in the presence of the undersigned: William Moreau godfather, Claude Jay, who did not sign because he did not know how, Dubois, pastor of Saint Silain."

William was also very close to his brother Louis (three years older than he). Together they went to the "Petite Mission," in Périgueux, where they received their first schooling. During 1769-70, Louis went to study in Mussidan and William stayed a year alone in the "Petite Mission." Upon returning from vacation, Luis began to interrupt the games with his brother, to go for just a few minutes into his room. William asked why he did it. "I am taking care of myself and my soul," replied Louis. He had learned from his brother Jean-Baptiste to do mental prayer. William wanted to do the same. And in fact he was also started on it by his brother Jean-Baptiste a little later.

At the time of his confirmation, Louis took the name of Xavier, of Jesuit and missionary inspiration. **William**, at his own confirmation, **would choose for himself the name of Joseph**, because it was he who had been closest to Mary.

And precisely from that moment, it would be **his preferred name and that which he**

always celebrated (in his letters can be seen that he celebrated his nameday on March 19, and all the communities sent him greetings on that day – cf. Letters 89, 191 and 431, etc.) (Benloch, *Origenes*, chap. 1).

2) STUDENT AND TEACHER AT SAINT CHARLES (1771-1791)

He remained there for 20 years. This was the place that formed his human and Christian personality. It was there also that he acquired his first apostolic experience, quite rich and varied, which would be of help to him for the rest of his life. His brother Jean-Baptiste had a decisive influence on him during all that period of his life, from all points of view.



Street near the former school, today no longer there. The Chaminade brothers were not its actual founders, but they guided its real development and prosperity.

The school was like a minor seminary, but in order to be economically viable it accepted also students who did not aim for the priesthood but who were educated along with the future seminarians (B Or 2.2).

When William Joseph entered the school as a pupil, the business manager was his brother Jean-Baptiste, and his other brother, Louis, was a student. William Joseph entered with the idea of the priesthood or of a consecrated vocation. He made his First Communion before the age of 11 and was notable for his piety.

Bishop Chamon of Saint Claude testified that: "your Founder was known for his piety. While very young, at the age of twelve, he could be seen to pass hours, as immobile as a statue, on his knees before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament" (Vasey, *Chaminade*, p. 42).

His brother Jean-Baptiste initiated him into mental prayer. William Joseph learned also to pray according to the Ignatian method (B Or 2.3).



Our Lady of Verdelsais, before whom William came to pray with his brother Jean-Baptiste in thanksgiving after his miraculous cure attributed to the Virgin Mary.

At 14 he became a postulant. At 15 he finished his Latin studies and was accepted as a teacher. He made a kind of novitiate, according to the Rule of Saint Charles (2 years or 18 months) and, after discernment with his brother Jean-Baptiste, he made private vows at age 14 or 15. Because they were private vows, they did not constitute a particular bond with the congregation of Saint Charles. These were the only vows Father Chaminade ever pronounced until the end of his life (B *Origenes* 2.3).

3) AN EXTENSIVE APOSTOLIC FORMATION (1776 – 1791)

1776-1778: He began to assist his brother Jean-Baptiste in the business management of the school in small bookkeeping jobs. At the same time, he was a “regent” or assistant teacher for the small children.

1778 – 1782: Theology studies at Mussidan (under the direction of Jean-Baptiste), in Bordeaux and probably in Paris (1782 – 1783).

May 14, 1785: Possible date of his priestly ordination.

CHAPLAIN

William Joseph carried on his priestly ministry in Mussidan, in three venues:

1. At the school: as priest, he did what Jean-Baptiste had done for him: spiritual direction, vocational discernment, preparation for the sacraments.
2. At the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rock, as chaplain. The statue of Our Lady of the Rock, of the *Pletà* type, but having a child alongside it, must have been the source of inspiration for the piety and the spirituality of William Joseph.

Our Lady of the Rock (15th C), today in the parish church of St. George. Before her he often prayed, from his childhood onwards, and, later, as a young priest, celebrated Mass.



3. At the hospital, next to the school. This building, still existing, is now a retirement home.



TEACHER

Of mathematics and physics [and perhaps of philosophy], from 1789.

BUSINESS MANAGER

Father Chaminade himself wrote to Father Lalanne (Letter III-837, April 26, 1836) *“I held the job of business manager for 16 or 17 years in a fairly large institution: I never had words with my principal superior [Probably his brother Jean-Baptiste], and the Institution, from being as poor as it was, became ever more and more prosperous.”* His brother François (who was already a merchant in Perigueux) helped him a great deal with his advice. In 1784, as we have already seen, Jean-Baptiste was named superior and William Joseph business manager. He had problems with those who did not pay promptly (there was not a lot of liquidity). William Joseph came to an institution in a bad financial situation. He knew how thankless a task it was to be business manager. Later on he would write (Letters II-498, January 20, 1330) *“It is the lot of Business Managers or Treasurers always to be blamed: it was so before the Revolution just as it is afterwards.”* And again (Letter III-590, May 10, 1831): *“It is the most unpleasant Office, in my*

opinion, that one can have to carry out in a Community: it sometimes demands great virtue and strength of character to carry it out conscientiously.”

Mussidan changed appearance: it was a well constructed school, airy, with courtyards and gardens, very healthful, beside the road from Mussidan to Bordeaux. It became a great cultural center : one of the best schools for science and for piety. The well-united team of the Chaminade brothers accomplished marvels. It should also be noted that the three brothers brought their aged parents to live at Mussidan. Blaise Chaminade left his business to his son François and settled with his wife near their three priest sons (B Or 2.5).

As a consequence of the Revolution, everything unfortunately ended with the closure of the school at Easter 1791 and their departure for Bordeaux at the end of the year.



The Cathedral of Saint Front in Perigueux

Dates of the month to celebrate : April 8, 2011 250th
Anniversary of the birth and baptism in Perigueux of William Chaminade, founder of the Marianist Family

[This document owes a great deal to the book of Father Eduardo BENLLOCH: *Origins of the Marianist family*, Madrid, 2001 / NACMS, 2010: a reading to be encouraged for this year!]