

MAY 2011

William-Joseph CHAMINADE, awakener of vocations



Throughout his life, through his complete devotedness and his holiness, Father Chaminade aroused a great fervor among people, including many vocations of all kinds. Let us look at some of their remarkable fruits.

1795 – IN BORDEAUX, AFTER THE PERSECUTION OF THE “TERROR”

After the persecution eased off a bit, Father Chaminade became particularly interested in the situation of the youth of the city. Here is how Father Simler described his activity:

“What was difficult was to reach the great number of them.... He decided to prepare at least an elite of young people who would be capable of cooperating in a future apostolate when better times might come.

“He had no difficulty in succeeding. Endowed with a great talent for winning hearts, he was, from that time on, a center around which gathered a certain number of young men. In private sessions, in discrete meetings, he forewarned them of the dangers to which their faith and their morals were exposed. He presented the apostolate to them ... and initiated them into the role he wanted them to play in the future....

[One of them was] “Denys Joffre, he whom the entire diocese of Bordeaux would know later under the name of the ‘holy pastor of Gaillan’ and who really worshipped Father Chaminade....

“Denys shared his impressions with his father:

‘I have found the priest my heart was looking for. He is a saint, he is my guide, he will be my model, because I will be a priest. My decision is more than ever unshakeable. I won’t get there as fast as I would like: the times are still difficult. I will continue to work everyday; I can’t go to see this saint except in the evening, and still not every evening. But he has assured me that soon he will keep me with him night and day, and that I will be his first disciple. That is his hope and also mine...’

We find, at the same time, other young men around him who were inspired with similar attitudes. One of them was Raymond Amis. Later he became a priest and died as the pastor of Hourtin in the Gironde. Another, Guillaume Bouet, is better known to us; he was a native Bordelais, was thirty years old in 1796 and aspired to the priesthood. Some forty years later, he wrote to Father Chaminade [August 20, 1846] :

‘We have had some conferences where I have found God’s blessing... I shall never forget what I owe to you. In our meetings you made the peace of Christ circulate in my veins’. (Simler – ch. 6)

1795-1836 – MARIE THÉRÈSE DE LAMOUREOUS

When Marie-Thérèse (1754-1836) confided herself to Father Chaminade for the first time, in 1795, she was filled with a great thirst for holiness. But he saw two obstacles within her.

1) *“God inspires you above all with a great desire to belong entirely to him.... You have yet a great way to go. You must still reach ... that degree of perfection in which you will no longer give in to your nature, your senses, your imagination or your own mind, but obey God himself who wishes to reign within you as your sovereign Master. ... The acts of virtue which you perform are still very imperfect, because they are governed more by your reason or your imagination than guided by grace .”*(LI – 9 of 27/05/1796)

2) *“Your imagination has gained great influence over you. It is the principal cause of the habitual anxieties which trouble you.”* (Ibid). He is alluding here to the scruples which gnawed at her and drained her, and of which he would cure her completely.

One of the fruits appeared in December 1796, when Marie-Thérèse wrote an act of offering to God in reparation for the crimes of the Revolution. From exile, Father Chaminade would send her thirty-three letters of direction, of which are preserved extracts which she copied into a notebook. Afterwards, she never ceased to show her fervent generosity, being attentive to all appeals:

- during the persecution in putting herself at the service of the Christians in spite of the great dangers;
- at the birth of the Sodality when she became a leader;
- in 1801 in accepting responsibility for the house of the Miséricorde for repentant girls, whence would spring a religious congregation of which she would be the foundress.

“Chaminade’s letters to her from Saragossa are the last written record of the spiritual direction Chaminade continued to give to Marie-Thérèse until her final years. Once they were both in Bordeaux, there was little need to write to one another. For the next thirty-six years they would be living a few minutes’ walk from each other. We cannot therefore know either the content or the methodology of the spiritual guidance he gave her; however, we can see in her life and work the kind of person she became under his tutelage. ... Marie Thérèse Charlotte de Lamourous had been prepared for a mission of which she was still unaware” (J. Stefanelli, *Mlle de Lamourous*, p. 94)

1808-1828 – ADÈLE DE BATZ DE TRENQUELLÉON

Completely different was the direction that Father Chaminade gave to Adèle. She lived 140 kilometers from Bordeaux. In 1808 Adèle learned of the existence of the Sodality of the Immaculate in Bordeaux. That would be the beginning of contacts that became deeper and deeper, through intermediaries and by couriers, with Father Chaminade.



The group of young women of the Agen region (the "Little Society") became associated thus with that of Bordeaux. Beginning in 1810 a "dear project" grew in the heart of Adèle, that of founding a religious community intended for personal sanctification of its members and for the evangelization of the countryside. There again the dialogue with Father Chaminade would be decisive. He would direct and counsel her, respecting and deepening Adèle's intuitions, but pushing her further on certain points. He also knew how to hold fast against the bishop of Agen who encouraged the project but wanted to modify certain aspects of her idea. Marie-Thérèse de Lamourous would be in Agen on May 25, 1816, to bring her experience to bear on the new foundation. Father Chaminade himself met Adèle for the first time only on the following June 8th; the first decisive step had been taken without his having yet seen her: a beautiful sign of the confidence he showed in direction when he felt there was a response. A sign, moreover, of his great capacity for discernment of personalities. He would continue to assist Adèle (henceforth Mother Marie of the Conception) in her responsibility as Superior until her death in 1828.

"What will distinguish you from the other Orders is zeal for the salvation of souls: you should spread the knowledge of the principles of religion and virtues, and you should multiply Christians. ... What will we do? You should teach about religion, form young people from all levels of society to virtue, help them become true sodalists, organize meetings either general or in divisions or small groups, etc., encourage young people to make retreats, offer them guidance in their choice of a state of life, etc. Your whole community will be made up of religious missionaries".

(A Adèle de Trenquellion, 3 octobre 1815 – L I-57)

In the Sodality, a "SOCIETY OF FIFTEEN"

In the young men's group, during that same year of 1816, fifteen generous sodalists resolved **to live as religious in the world**. Among them we notice names that will come up again later: Bidon, Cantau, Lalanne, Collineau, Auguste Clouzet, Daguzan. The diverse backgrounds of these young

men confirm the existence of the principle of equality and Christian fraternity that inspired the Sodality of Bordeaux. ...

On Easter Day, 1816, the fifteen of them made the following commitment : *"In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, for the greater glory of God, and under the protection of the august Virgin Mary Immaculate, we, Brothers in Jesus Christ, wishing to unite our efforts to work together for our sanctification and for the multiplication of servants of our good and sovereign Master, have made the following covenant with each other:*

Each according to his needs, we bind ourselves to a Rule of life which contains the following four articles: 1. Communion every two weeks; 2. Meditation every day; 3. Examen of prevision every morning; 4. Examen of conscience every evening. 'We each take on the responsibility of forming a student in the true Christian spirit.

We submit our Rule of Life, the guidance of our students, and the other works of zeal that we might be able to do to our common director; and in his hands we profess a vow of obedience, for about three months, in all that touches on these matters" (Gadiou-Délas, 45-46)

THURSDAY, MAY 1, 1817: "A VERY MEMORABLE DAY "

"In the early months of 1817 there was an important mission to be given in Bordeaux. ... The Bordeaux mission lasted for five weeks and brought about some extraordinary results. ... on the closing day 1,200 National Guards carried a huge cross in procession, and placed it in the apse of the cathedral. That was Sunday, April 27.

The following Thursday, May 1, 'a very memorable day,' as the Founder would later say, the young Jean-Baptiste Lalanne [21 years old] came knocking at Father Chaminade's door. As he came out of this interview, he went to find his friend Collineau, who immediately welcomed the project of a new religious Order. His colleague at the boarding school, Monsieur Brougnon-Perrière, 'Monsieur Auguste,' was likewise won over. And the two merchants Daguzan and Clouzet also gave their assent. ..."

On October 2, 1817, after a retreat preached

by Father Chaminade, the five young men declared their desire to "devote themselves to God and to Mary by the vows of religion." "Not far from the Madeleine, toward the back of the side street of Ségur, there was a small home for rent. That became the cradle of the Society of Mary. Two more joined them and Fr. Lalanne wrote: *'the seven of us went there to prepare ourselves, by study and prayer, for the works which God's Providence would place on our shoulders. We did not wear any habit. We even agreed that we would avoid any special customs that would call attention to us. We avoided the titles of Father, or Brother, or superior – we were called Monsieur. ... As a sign of our consecration and union we adopted only a gold ring'* " (Délas 46...48)

ALL CALLED ... ALL MISSIONARIES

In 1804 the seminary in Bordeaux reopened; the superior and part of the candidates came from the Sodality. It was the same for the new religious congregations (Gathering of the Sacred Heart, Daughters of the Sacred Heart) and the older ones (Ursulines, Daughters of Charity, Carmel, Sisters of Nevers,...). The lay people who affirmed their

vocation as lay Christians within the heart of the Sodality numbered in the hundreds!



The cross of the Mission of 1817. It was erected in the apse of the Cathedral of St. Andrew; since 1830 it has been inside. Placed all over its surface, flaming hearts bear the names of the faithful. Originally, a plaque on the pedestal read: *"If God gives his son for the salvation of the world in an excess of love, may all our love respond."*

Dates of the month to celebrate : **1** Meeting of JB Lalanne and Father Chaminade – **15** Day of prayer for vocations – **25** Mary, Help of Christians: 195th anniversary of the Foundation of the FMI (May 25, 1816).