

The Story of the Society of Mary

23. Heading for Rome

After Fr. Colin had been elected Central Superior, Fr. Champagnat urged him to bring the Marist project to the attention of the Holy Father. Champagnat had been advised by one of the Vicars General of the Archdiocese of Lyon that there were only two ways to get the Society approved: by the bishops, which was clearly a dead end, or by the Pope.

Colin wrote to Msgr. Macchi, the Nuncio in Paris whom Colin had visited. By now (1831) Macchi was a Cardinal in the Roman Curia, i.e. the Papal administrative offices. Macchi urged Colin to come to Rome in person. Bishop Devie, however, refused him permission, using as an excuse, but probably a legitimate cause for concern, the anti-clerical political and social unrest in the Papal States that had been stirred up by the revolutions in France and Belgium the previous year. So Colin waited and bided his time.

By 1833, he decided to try again. He wrote to Macchi, who then wrote to Bishop Devie, urging him to allow Colin to come to Rome to present the Marist project to the Pope. Devie called Colin in. The bishop was surprised to learn, and somewhat aggrieved, that Colin had already written to Rome, back in 1822 when the Marists wrote to the Pope, and again in 1831 and 1833 when Colin wrote to Cardinal Macchi. And of course Bishop Devie was not at all happy with the prospect of the Marists becoming a separate religious congregation and perhaps leaving his diocese; after all, the diocese was already short on priests. Colin told Devie that he really was not going specifically for Papal approval, but mainly to fulfill the vow he had made some years earlier to work for the realization of the Society of Mary until it would be submitted to Rome.

Was Colin seeking Papal approval at this time or not? It is not clear. There is some evidence he was, and some that he wasn't. In any case, Bishop Devie allowed Colin to go, but warned him that it would probably do no good.

Colin then went to Lyon, bringing with him a declaration from the Marist aspirants to the Pope. It would accompany the Rule that Colin would submit to the Pope. In all, seventeen Marist aspirants signed the declaration. Then, on August 23, 1833, a good number of them climbed the hill of Fourvière to the chapel of our Lady where the first group had made the Pledge to work for the establishment of the Society of Mary back in 1816. This time it was Fr. Colin who celebrated the Mass, and they all renewed their commitment.





Finally, Fr. Colin and his companions departed for the long journey to Rome. Colin took with him Frs. Pierre Chanel and Jean-Antoine Bourdin. The latter was from the archdiocese of Lyon, but at the time was teaching at the minor seminary in Belley. Chanel was from the diocese of Belley. Colin had originally been from Lyons but now belonged to the diocese of Belley. Thus both dioceses and the Marist groups in the two dioceses were evenly represented. And so it was that on August 29, the three pilgrims boarded a boat in Lyon that would bring them to the port of Marseilles where they would catch the ship to Italy.

To be continued...

In 1833 Fr. Colin, by then seen as central superior of the Marist project, made the first of five visits to Rome. At the Quirinale residence of the Pope he had his first audience, with the mission-minded Pope Gregory XVI.



Prayer for Vocations to the Society of Mary (Marists)

Lord Jesus

You gave the Church St Peter Chanel as an example to Marists and the people of Oceania of gentleness, compassion and love in action. Welcome many young men and women into the Marist Family, to work as Priests, Brothers and Sisters. Help us too, to share our charism with lay people throughout the world and to work in partnership with them in Mission for the good of your Church and our world. This prayer we make to the Father in your name and through the Holy Spirit. Amen

Mary Mother of the Church and our mother, choose more young people to follow Jesus your Son in religious life and priesthood and to bear your name as members of your Society.

(Please pray this prayer often.)

