

The Story of the Society of Mary

10. Assignment to Cerdon

It was at the request of his brother Pierre, newly appointed Cure (pastor) of the parish in the town of Cerdon, that Jean-Claude Colin was assigned there as well, to be Pierre's curate or pastoral associate.

Cerdon was in the easternmost part of the Archdiocese of Lyon, about halfway between Lyon in France and Geneva in Switzerland, on the road that connected the two cities. It was situated at the foot of the Bugey Mountains that will figure later in our story. It was in the French Department of Ain, in what had been, prior to the Revolution, the separate diocese of Belley. The area of Cerdon and the Bugey were among the least desirable places for a priest to be assigned, far from the diocesan center in Lyon, some considering it a kind of "exile"!

The Colin brothers found the people of Cerdon to be generally good and pious people, though they indulged in drinking and dancing, which were frowned upon. And some worked on Sundays, especially during the harvest, which for some was a necessity, but for those better off, simply a way to increase their wealth.

The assignment to Cerdon with his brother proved a great help to Jean-Claude. Given his scrupulosity and his aversion to putting himself forward, he did not make the best first impression on the people. He later admitted, "At first when I was curate, from all sides they complained that I was cold, that I was dead. I have greatly changed." Undoubtedly his brother helped draw him out. In any case, one Sunday, instead of the monotonous moral lessons he had been giving, he spoke instead vigorously and from the heart. Those who had previously found him boring were now elated when it was Jean-Claude who ascended the pulpit to preach! Later he would put these skills as a bold and forthright preacher to good use as an itinerant missionary.

But let us go back to Cerdon. When he learned that he was to be assigned to the parish where his brother was pastor, he had great misgivings. Having signed the Pledge of Fourvière, he was deeply committed to the Marist project, and had plans for how he would work at the project. He feared "that the love I have for my brother may prove an obstacle to realizing" those plans. But his spiritual director, Fr. Cholleton, used to Colin's scruples, told him, "Go ahead and have no fear; your brother will be your first companion."

And this indeed proved true. But Jean-Claude waited a full year to tell his brother about the Marist project. When he first came to Cerdon, all he told Pierre was that he would be





receiving mail that he couldn't tell him about. Finally, when he did explain the project to his brother, Pierre immediately said he wanted to be part of it. This would be a fruitful collaboration. Together they would take initiatives to seek Papal approval of the Society; to begin the foundation of the Marist Sisters; and, with the approval of their bishop while yet diocesan priests, to launch the first truly Marist ministry, the re-evangelization of the Bugey region through parish missions.

To be continued...



The newly-ordained Fr. Jean-Claude Colin was appointed with his brother Pierre to the village of Cerdon, high in the Bugey mountains to the east of Lyon. The village lies in the confluence of three valleys in a remote, wine-growing district.



The church of Innimont in the Bugey Mountains, one of the twenty-seven parishes visited by Fr. Colin during his time as a missionary. Winter was the only time the missions could be held, the farmers no longer able to work long hours in the fields.

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.)

