

The Story of the Society of Mary

5. Pondering the Pledge

In our last episode our twelve young men signed a commitment to work toward the establishment of the Society of Mary. (We can now call them “Marist aspirants” because they aspired to become Marists once the Society of Mary was founded) Marists today call this commitment they signed the “Fourvière Pledge.” Before we move on with the story, let us take a closer look at this foundational text.

First, why do they want to found a Society of Mary? We saw how they believed that Mary was asking them to do this. But to what purpose? They affirm that it is “not for some human motive.” Toward the end of the pledge, they state the overall goal: “saving souls in every way” under Mary’s name. This will be an active religious community involved in every kind of ministry. And all this is “for the greater glory of God and the honor of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus.”

Second, what resources will they rely on? They indicate two things: “we can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens us”, and they will be “nourished with the words of faith and of the wholesome teaching which by his grace we have received.” They are clearly men with a strong, living faith.

Third, what will they contribute to this project? Everything! “We irrevocably dedicate ourselves and all our goods...without hope of material benefit”; and “we shall spend ourselves and all we have in saving souls...”

Finally, what price are they willing to pay? “We pledge ourselves to accept all sufferings, trials, inconveniences and, if needs be, torture...” These are not idle words or the romantic musings of youth. These men, in their short lifetimes, have seen priests and religious imprisoned, sometimes in damp and leaky ships anchored offshore in which many died; tortured at times; or put to death by the guillotine. And there was no guarantee that in spite of the defeat of Napoleon and the re-establishment of the monarchy, these dangers would not soon return. And eventually some of the people who join the project later on, would undertake perilous voyages to dangerous parts of the world to bring the Gospel to many distant lands, and would be killed in the process. Such was the dedication and the fate of St. Peter Chanel, a Marist priest and first martyr of Oceania.

All those who commit themselves to the Marist way of life and service, be it as priests, sisters, brothers, or lay folk, look to the Fourvière Pledge as the primordial Marist commitment and the model for our dedication.





As stated earlier, the signing of the Pledge in the chapel of our Lady on the hill of Fourvière in the city of Lyon, France, took place on July 23, 1816. Thus July 23, 2016, was the two hundredth anniversary of the Fourvière Pledge, and thus the two-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Society of Mary. If you would like further information about the Fourvière Pledge, go to

<https://www.societyofmaryusa.org/resources/pdfs/TheFourvierePledge1816.pdf>

To be continued....

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.)



In the chapel of the Blessed Virgin of Fourvière. Jean-Claude and his companions pledged to form the Society of Mary whenever they could.



On 23 July 1816 the day after Jean-Claude's priestly ordination, a group of 12 Marist aspirants climbed the hill of Fourvière to the ancient chapel of the Blessed Virgin.

