

Sharing Our Marianist Stories, Episode 45
Inspiration in Exile with Carol Ramey

00:00 – Carol Ramey

Inspiration is something that moves the intellect or emotions toward an experience of newfound clarity, ideas, or invention. It is often described as an exhilarating experience.

00:14 – Mike Bennett

Father Chaminade's exile in Saragossa, Spain, was a time of inspiration and transformation that continues to inspire the Marianist Family today.

00:23 – Carol Ramey

Inspiration is an infusion of an impulse of illumination. Inspiration is divine guidance or influence exerted directly on the mind and the soul. Inspiration is the inbreaking of creative power.

00:41 – Mike Bennett

May these insights and those that follow from the late Carl Ramey, former NACMS director, inspire us to reflect more deeply on Father Chaminade's inspiration, the influence of Our Lady of the Pillar, and how the Marianist charism is inspiring us today. I'm Mike Bennett, Media Administrator for NACMS.

01:02 – Carol Ramey

For most, inspiration comes as a surprise. Inspiration can come around small matters like how you get your young child to bed a night, or at life-altering concerns, as when we realize we have a vocation to a particular state in life. As Christians, we often identify the Holy Spirit as the source of inspiration that has stimulated us to see more clearly into our life of grace, our faith, and our practices that flow from that grace and faith. The Holy Spirit often calls upon Mary, the mother of God, to be a collaborator. The Spirit leads us to Mary. Mary leads us to the Spirit.

01:49 – Carol Ramey

For Father Chaminade, the Spirit definitely led him to Mary for inspiration. He often advised his followers to look to Mary and her inspiration as a guide for their own decisions and actions. Remember the famous line from his *Letter of 1839 to the Retreat Masters*? He wrote, "Mary is a complete reason for us to have hope: our mother, our refuge, our help and our strengths, our lives." Several Marianist authors have remarked that this passage demonstrates, [that] even though Chaminade had a special devotion to Mary from his youth, his time at Saragosa stayed with him very deeply for the rest of his life. It was a powerful illumination, influence, and inbreaking of creative power.

02:40 – Carol Ramey

The biographies tell us that after he had been forced to leave Bordeaux, France, Father Chaminade arrived in Saragossa, Spain on the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Pillar. The feast day was a festival with processions and lights in the plaza around the basilica where the statue resides, which must have been a wonderful and welcome experience after so many years of the Church's suppression by the revolutionaries back home. We also know that Chaminade returns to

the basilica regularly to pray to Mary, looking to her to open him to the Spirit in the same way she opened herself when the angel [Gabriel] came to ask her to be the mother of God. Fr. Eduardo Benlloch, one of Chaminade's biographers, writes, "Mary moves toward an undefined and uncertain future, abandons human security, and goes out of herself to enter fully into the action of God." Father Chaminade asks the Spirit for the same bold and binding faith of Mary.

03:48 – Carol Ramey

Father Chaminade reflects on all that has happened, particularly how the French Revolution ended most of what he thought he had been called to do. Like Mary, he pondered things in his heart. He thinks of the way Mary trusted God through the horror of her son's passion and death. Within his experience of violent chaos and exile, he asks to be able to embrace the mystery of God, just as Mary did in her darkest moments. He realizes how Mary was able not only to quiet herself and pray, but to also go out to others in need, like her cousin Elizabeth's or the young couple at Cana, or the grief-stricken John, into whose care she is given at the foot of the cross. He then comes to a new understanding of Mary.

04:56 – Carol Ramey

The Spirit inspires Chaminade to look at her in a totally new way. He will still honor her and practice traditional devotion to her. But he sees that through her, Christ will be brought back into France and beyond. It will be through her that we are brothers and sisters of Christ, with Mary our mother. It is through this sense of family that the church will be revitalized. He leaves Saragossa and returns to France to found lay communities and the vowed religious communities, both in service to a new way to be church. These communities in permanent mission will welcome all people, all states of life, one great family under Mary's protection, the Marianist Family. This Family, then, will go out into the world in whatever ways are needed, always bringing Christ with them.

05:54 – Mike Bennett

In his book *Chaminade's Message Today*, Fr. Eduardo Benlloch emphasizes that Chaminade's experience of Our Lady of the Pillar and the vibrant, tangible expression of Catholic faith in Saragossa fueled the transformation that Chaminade experienced while in exile.

06:13 – Carol Ramey

Fr. Benlloch writes that Chaminade takes a turn after his time in Saragossa. He could have gone back to France to resume duties as a teacher or a pastor, or even to respond to opportunities to enter the hierarchy. But he does not do the expected. He has a new mission, new energy. He has been inspired. So, we too, as Chaminade did, can sit with Mary, reflecting on the circumstances of our lives and what lies ahead. We can recall her faith, her goodness, and her bold actions, and ask the Spirit to instill that faith, that goodness, that courage for bold action in us. To be inspired to live Christ's life, even if this means a turn from what we expect or from what is expected of us by others. Isn't it comforting to know that we can sit with Mary, to listen for any initiative the Spirit may have in mind for us? Isn't it a source of confidence to know that we can receive an illumination or an inbreaking, and that we can respond with whatever is required to move beyond that exhilaration into action? And that we can do this with Mary's trust and courage?

07:55 – Carol Ramey

Sometimes, I imagine myself on a bench with the young Mary, the betrothed virgin, asking her to give me her sense of trust despite the ambiguity of the message brought by the angel and the courage to say “yes,” despite the obvious dangers inherent in her agreement. Other times, I sit with the older Mary, the wise Mary, the practical Mary. I ask that she help me reopen myself to the stirrings of the Spirit, to overcome my hesitations that are bred by years of accumulated disillusionment or failure. I'd pray for inspiration that will fill me with the new or renewed vision, new or renewed mission, and a new or renewed energy and creativity. I am inspired by Mary's “Yes” and her perseverance. I remind myself of Father Chaminade's inspiration and how he persevered despite obstacles and even failures. I imagine how tempted he must have been to disillusionment. I'm inspired by how he was able to recollect God's unconditional love with [the] Spirit's beckoning and Mary's companionship throughout his life. Inspiration, can we dare to hope for this experience? How about we walk down an imaginary avenue with Mary and Blessed Chaminade and talk over our openness to an inbreaking?

09:30 – Mike Bennett

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