

The beatification of Fr. William Joseph Chaminade

LORENZO AMIGO (SM)

The beatification of Fr. William Chaminade represents the final consecration of the marianist family, which has celebrated the happening with great joy.

For the first time, the figure of Fr. Chaminade, the great and original founder of a Family made up of both clergy and secular members, has been made public. Such is the feeling expressed repeatedly to the ecclesiastic community as well as the Marianist Family itself. For the Marial Alliance in particular, a secular institute present in three countries and number few in terms of members, it has been a chance to make its existence known to the rest of the Marianist Family, thanks to its coordinator Isabel de Cantellauve.

Just as the preparation for the event was made as a Family, so have the three great days of intense experiences been celebrated in a family atmosphere.

THE VIGIL OF THE BEATIFICATION

The morning of Saturday, September 2, took us to the General Curia where several hundred young people, while the teenagers gathered at the parish Santo Nome. By way of diverse activities, the meaning of beatification was explained to them. After lunch, there was a march through the city evoking the figure and his message.

At 5:00 in the afternoon, the Marianist Family gathered in prayer in the patio of Saint

Mary's College. Some 4,000 people filled the place. The prayer session mixed songs with moments for personal reflection. The silence during the nearly two hours of celebration was awe-inspiring. The four principal leaders of the Marianist Family presided: Enrique Llano, Isabel de Cantellauve, Blanca Jamar and David Fleming.

The prayer was centered around the theme: Learning with Mary, and used as a guideline the scene of the Annunciation: "The Marianist spirit is the spirit of Mary". The reflection emphasized different experiences of Mary which the Marianist Family has transformed to modern times: receiving the word, presentation of different branches of the Marianist Family, the greeting of the angels, the calling, poverty, promise, the sign and the "yes" of Mary.

THE BEATIFICATION OF FATHER CHAMINADE

On Sunday the 3rd, it was necessary to rise bright and early because everyone wanted to get a seat in Saint Peter's Square.

During the long period of waiting, we were introduced to the new blessed figures through their own writings: Pious IX, John



XXIII, Tommaso Reggio, William Joseph Chaminade and Columba Marmion. The two popes so different, their presence in the ceremony had captured the majority of the media's attention with both praise and controversy, which, on one hand, meant the beatification would be more talked about than others, but on the other hand, overshadowed the other three figures about to be beatified. Ignoring the issue of beatifying both popes in the same ceremony, I experienced once again that in the Church there is room for everyone and that, as the pope pointed out, the beatification does not mean having to agree with the decisions made by a saint in his or her time.

One could not but be moved upon seeing Father Enrique Torres behind the Archbishop of Bordeaux presenting the figure of our Founder. Enrique represented the tenacious work of diverse Marianist postulators who had fought for this difficult cause. How could we not praise the efforts of those who patiently took on this challenging task and clarified the final years of our Founders life, so often debated? I liked the presentation because it focused on the heart of his mission. How can the challenges of a modern culture

be confronted in Christianity? Only through new and creative answers at the service of Mary.

In homily, the pope briefly mentioned four characteristics of the Founder. Firstly, and curiously enough, he presented him as a creator of new ways to profess the faith in order to reach out to those farthest from it, which is something very modern. Second of all, the life of the Founder appears

Just as the preparation for the event was made as a Family, so have the three great days of intense experiences been celebrated in a family atmosphere.

entirely centered around Christ. Thirdly, his filial endearment of Mary allowed him to always find peace, a somewhat insufficient description of what Mary meant to our Founder, who considered, above all, a woman of Mission. Finally, his concern for

human, religious and moral education is a call to the entire Church to direct its attention towards young people.

THE EUCHARIST OF THANKSGIVING

At five o'clock on the afternoon on Monday the fourth, the Marianist Family filled Saint Paul's Basilica to celebrate the Eucharist of Thanksgiving. It could not have been a more beautiful and awe-inspiring act, not only for the number of those who attended, more than 4,000, but also for the set-up of the celebration: presided by Monsignor Raymond Roussin, Marianist bishop from Canada, and several Spanish bishops, either former students or close to the Marianist life, such as Monsignor Agustín Cortés or Monsignor Elías Yanes, archbishop of Zaragoza. With them at the celebration were Fr. David Fleming, Superior General and Fr. José María Arnaiz, Assistant General, and some 150 Marianist priests.

It was the celebration that best expressed the reality and ideal of the Marianist Family. The following day, a friend of the Marianists, though she doesn't belong to any of the groups, gave me her impressions. I think she had understood perfectly the message. "You Marianists have a



funny way of being with the lay which is totally different from other congregations. Yesterday, at Saint Paul's, it was incredible to see two women at the head side-by-side with two men, one of whom was a member of the lay."

His filial endearment of Mary allowed him to always find peace, a somewhat insufficient description of what Mary meant to our Founder, who considered, above all, a woman of Mission.

The Gospel was read in several languages to appeal to the different groups of pilgrims present, Austrians, Germans, Japanese, etc. Fr. David Fleming gave his sermon in French, Italian, Spanish and English. "You are all missionaries," repeated the words of Fr. Chaminade. Our day confronts a situation of religious



indifference greater than that felt in the times of the Founder. That is our challenge and mission: Spreading the Gospel as a Marianist Family.

Before the offertory, the Marianist family showed its vitality through the consecration of different members: The renewal of temporary vows by Jean-Marie Leclerc (France), the definitive vows by Mathieu Balana (Togo) and Christophe Muyuka (Congo). To represent the societies, the one from Korea did its act of consecration. The most exciting moment was without a doubt when Elena Otero, of the societies of Argentina, miraculously cured by the intercession of Father Chaminade, also made the consecration. A loud applause accompanied her as she embraced the leaders of the Marianist Family.

The Spanish Family made its presence known with two very significant gestures. The first expressed the perseverance of the Otero family, of Burgos, which has contributed six children to the Marianist way of life. The second, the center of the entire celebration, was the sending of members to Cuba to form the first Marianist

community there, in Camgüey: Celestino Bacas, Juan Bielza, Pedro Castañeda and Francisco Valls.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

He has been a difficult figure not only for the Church but for the very Marianist life itself. It has only been after many years and thanks to the faithfulness of some of his disciples that we can finally learn the truth about his persona and life. He was a saint, and that is how the Church has made it. His beatification has come at a time of crisis for the Marianist religious life, at least in the traditional countries where it was implanted more than a century ago. Nor can we say that Christianity in those countries is going through the best of times.

The number of members of the societies reminds us of the road that we still have to travel before we finally "form a nation of saints that prove that the Gospel can be lived nowadays with all the demands of its message and spirit". For more than forty years, I have prayed for the beatification of our Founder, and I am happy to see my prayers have been answered.