

## "One in mind and heart"

At first sight, the last prayer that Jesus prayed for His disciples on the night before He died is surprising. Jesus did not pray, as we might have expected, that His disciples would become more numerous and cover the earth; or that they would be able to express His teaching in sound theological terms; or that they would have the energy to enable them to preach with power and eloquence. He prayed simply "that they may be one" so that the world would believe that Jesus was God and had been sent by the Father for the salvation of the world. The first compelling proof of the existence of God, of the divinity of Jesus, and of the truth of the Gospel would not be the eloquence or energy or even the sanctity of individual Christians, but their unity of mind and heart. This is evident in the early days of Christianity when tradition tells us that non-believers were initially attracted to Christianity not so much by the truth of the Gospel, but by the communion in love of those who lived it. "See how these Christians love one another!" St Luke in the Acts of the Apostles seems almost to make a deliberate connection between the fact that the early Christians lived in communion of mind and heart, and the fact that many were brought to belief in the Gospel, as if one were the result of the other.

From the start of the Marist enterprise, this was understood by all those who joined, and it was spelled out by those who became founders of the various branches of the enterprise. For Jean-Claude Colin, this communion of mind and heart was basic to the very mission of the Society. It would be the means by which Marists would learn to discover the Gospel together and live it as Mary did; it would be the vehicle for reconciliation and evangelisation; and it would be a way to "begin a new church over again". Individuals, even when working with great zeal to offer to people a different experience or understanding of the Church, may often be able to do little more than prove the rule by being an exception to it. When, however, a *community* reflects the exception, the effect is overwhelming. This is why it was so important for the early Marists to see the enterprise as one of several branches, including a branch for lay people, all united in mind and heart. The last days of the world will come not when God is sick of wayward humanity and decides to rain fire and brimstone on the earth, but when the whole world, like the early Church, is "united in mind and heart". The special vocation of Marists is to help to bring this about in the world.

1838

Father Colin said, "When I first presented my request (for approval of the Society of Mary) to Rome, it was with the great hope that, through it, the last centuries of the world would see what the first century witnessed: the multitude of believers having but one heart and one soul."

*The Mayet Memoirs*

## An extraordinary impression

The first novitiate for candidates for the Marist Fathers was a house in Belley known as La Capucinière. It was one of Jean-Claude Colin's favourite communities, and he lived there as Superior of the house in his first three years as Superior General of the Society of Mary. A biographer of Colin, writing of this community, said: "... the family spirit, with its deep affection and the relaxed and cordial atmosphere that characterised mutual relationships, was one of the charms of life at La Capucinière. Despite differences of age or social condition, these theology students, who sometimes originated from 20 different dioceses, made only one heart and one soul.... It is beyond doubt that, during those years, still so close to the beginnings, and in this house in which they chiefly lived, it was impossible not to notice an extraordinary degree of good will and fervour."

A novice during those years wrote in a letter to a friend: "How wonderful, how good, to live as only one heart and soul: "cor unum et anima una". It is a sight that at my first coming to this house made an extraordinary impression on me."

## Family Spirit

One very important aspect of Marcellin Champagnat's spirituality was his family spirit. We know that this was a point to which he used to refer often during his conferences to the Brothers. He wanted their Communities to resemble those of the early Christians, where all loved one another, shared with one another and prayed for one another. And further, he wanted this spirit to radiate round them to facilitate the unity of the human family. This is an important element of our mission in the Church and in the world.

*Charles Howard, fms*

## Compelling proof

Recent Popes have laid great stress on the importance of unity and communion as a sign of "church" and as the primary means of spreading the Gospel. In his letter on Evangelisation, Paul VI wrote:

*Take a Christian or a handful of Christians, who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelisation.*

Pope John Paul II adds to this some reflections on the special place of Mary in bringing about this unity of mind and heart:

*Every time a Church is born in a country, one can see that the Church always has the presence of the mother who guarantees brotherhood and a welcome for the Holy Spirit.*

*Only Mary could make one heart and one mind of Jesus' Apostles, before and after Pentecost, as if Christ wanted to show us that he entrusted to his mother's maternal care the mission of making the Church a single family where love reigns and where first of all he or she who suffers is loved more. Yes, in Mary we have the model of unbounded love which is the bond of unity for all who are "disciples" and "brothers" of Jesus, through faith and baptism.*

## Source of Strength

In one way or another, each of the founding personalities refers to this theme – sometimes using the precise Latin phrase "*cor unum et anima una*" ("*one in mind and heart*") – as one of the fundamentals of Marist life, and all of them stressed this attitude in their last words to their Religious Family:

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT.

Dear Brothers, I beg of you with all the love of my heart, and by all the love you bear me, keep ever alive among you the charity of Christ. Love one another as Jesus Christ has loved you. Be of one heart and one mind. Have the world say of the Little Brothers of Mary, what they said of the first Christians: "See how they love one another!" That is the desire of my heart and my burning wish at this last moment of my life. Yes, my dearest Brothers, hear these last words of your Father, which are those of our Blessed Saviour: Love one another.

*Spiritual Testament. June 6 1840*

JEANNE-MARIE CHAVOIN.

Pray for me, dear sisters. Be very united among yourselves, love simplicity.... Always be a bond of union between your sisters so that all may have but one heart and one soul and so draw down heaven's blessing on this house.

*Last recorded words. June 29, 1858*

JEAN-CLAUDE COLIN.

Now that the drafting of our Constitutions is finished, let us bless God! Everything tells me that my mission is accomplished and that all that remains for me is to prepare for death....

May you always love one another, my dear brothers, as sons of the most tender and loving of mothers. Your unity will be your strength and your consolation, and will ensure the success of your undertakings for the glory of God and the honour of the most holy Virgin.

*Spiritual Testament. May 6, 1870*

*We strive to be faithful to the Spirit of the risen Jesus, who gives to us, as to the believers in the early Church, the grace of being one in heart and soul. As was the case with the community of the apostles gathered together on Pentecost day, we are conscious of the presence among us of Mary, Mother of the Church. She helps us to live as brothers, bringing home to us the realisation that we make up one body in Christ.*

*Marist Brothers' Constitutions nn.9,48*