

"Consider the rock . . .

When Isaiah preached to the People of God to give them hope, he encouraged them to remember their origins: "Consider the rock you were hewn from, the quarry from which you were cut."... Remember Abraham and Sarah, a most unlikely couple; remember what was done in them, by them, and through them. And remember that you are their heirs....

If there's anything we can be sure of, it is that the pioneers of the Marist project were men and women of rock. Champagnat, gifted by nature and grace to turn even the harshest realities to his own use; Colin, limited by nature but transformed through the graces of Cerdon to be a man of toughness; Chavoin, willing to struggle even with Colin to ensure that the original idea was lived to its fullest possibility. They were a curious blend of ruggedness and gentleness, of idealism and practicality; people drawn by an idea, who were at the same time able to catch the changing winds of the Spirit. Their energy didn't come just from dreams and ideas, nor was it channelled simply into restless activity. They were people of concrete action because of a certain idea....

...and the quarry."

The "certain idea" came from a person; the quarry from which the idea was cut was the person of Mary in the early Church. What fired the first group was the conviction that they had been chosen personally by Mary, that they were being instructed by her, and that they were being formed and transformed by her to discover the Gospel and to live it as she did.

If the decision of Rome made it impossible for the original plan to take shape, and if the course of history has meant that each of the congregations has developed its own particular style, personality, characteristics and spirit, it is nonetheless true that their common origins lie here in this quarry, and among these "unpolished stones scattered at the bottom of the foundation."



Some... are bent on finding something miraculous in the beginning and the origin of the Society. The miracle is that God was willing to use such instruments for His work... We who are at the beginning are like rough stones that you throw to the bottom of the foundation. You don't use polished stones for that.

Marcellin Champagnat



I especially want there to be in the Society some record of our beginnings, not just so that we shall be talked about... but so that in the future people will conform to our way of acting and imitate the simplicity that God blessed.... Never were we so joyous. Never did we laugh with such good heart. I've always been nostalgic for that period.

Jean-Claude Colin



We were hard up in our early days. But how happy we were! At that time we were light-hearted and simple as children, and no sullen faces were ever seen about the house.... Such happy times do not recur; they are blessings attached to the poverty of beginnings.

Jeanne-Marie Chavoin

Hidden life

In their haste to reach
Michelangelo's statue of David,
tourists in Florence are often inclined to overlook
the unfinished sculptures in the hallways
leading to the room where "David" stands.

These pieces of sculpture
have been called "The Prisoners",
and they reveal what can happen
to an ordinary piece of stone
when the craftsmanship of a genius
draws from inside it
a perfection and form that others
would never have thought possible.

If a human genius can look at a piece of stone
and see possibilities that others cannot see,
what possibilities might God see
in human beings?

What "prisoner" inside each of us unlikely people is waiting
to be released?

And what might happen if people allowed Mary
– often referred to by the Scriptural title of "wisdom"
and "artisan" –
to shape and form and draw forth
from the depths of their being
a particular image of the disciple of Jesus?

And what might happen
if these disciples of Jesus
– men, women, children, priests, sisters,
brothers, lay people –
gathered together to rebuild the church?

That was the dream of those pioneers
of the Marist project,
and they promised God
they would go anywhere in the world for it.

