

A Simple Gift

The Uniqueness of Marcellin Champagnat's Educational Charism

There are two stories that set the scene for our reflection this morning on the gift of Marcellin Champagnat to our modern Marist schools and, by extension, to Catholic education in Australia today. The first of them is about the Frenchman, Brother Ludovic Laboureyras, the man who led that band of four fresh-faced young Marist Brothers to The Rocks in Sydney in 1872.

On 22 February that year, well before dawn, he rose from his bunk and clambered up onto the deck of *The Star of Peace*, the sloop that was carrying him and his Brothers to Australia. Peering through the gloom, he was gripped by a passion to begin the work to which he now knew he was called. His first glimpse of the coastline, recounted in his diary, reveals his profound acceptance of his destiny to spread the gospel here:

"In my anxiety to see the land, I rose at 2.30 in the morning and was the first up among the passengers. My immediate feelings were those of Christopher Columbus at seeing America. I consecrated myself and my Brothers to Jesus, through Mary, for the Christian education of the children of Australia to whom we are sent. I spent the whole day admiring the beautiful scenery of the land. Already, I felt it dear to my heart." [1]

It had not always been so. On 11 October the year before, Ludovic had been shocked to learn that he had been chosen to be one of the first group of Brothers to sail to Sydney and begin a primary school for boys. Shocked because, while he was teaching in Scotland at the time, his grasp of spoken English was, to put it mildly, rudimentary. Besides, he had

never taught above the "petite classe", the one in which were found the youngest children.

His shock turned to mild panic two weeks later when a formal letter arrived not only confirming that he would be embarking for Sydney within a month, but also congratulating him on his appointment as leader of the enterprise. "Providence has chosen you as the foundation stone of this mission," the letter intoned. "The Reverend Brother Superior General is entrusting its direction to you." [2]

Ludovic was not comforted when he read on to discover the identities of his fellow pioneers: a Scot and two Irishmen. Augustine McDonald, Jarlath Finand and Peter Tennyson. No companionable Frenchman? Anyway, whose idea was it to create such a volatile mix of nationalities? And their ages! At 28, Ludovic himself would be the grand old man of the group. Jarlath and Peter were 25 and Augustine - slated to be the teacher of the school's top class - had only just turned 21.

"What an act of stupidity," summed up the rest of the Brothers when they heard the appointments. "The Superiors must be mad," one senior Brother told Ludovic to his face. [3]

Dismayed, Ludovic wrote to the Superior-General, begging to be relieved of "this burden". He was refused. In obedience, Ludovic steeled himself to migrate to the mysterious, topsy-turvy continent at the bottom of the world. [4]

But, before he left, to fortify his courage, he did four rather extraordinary things. He made a short pilgrimage across France to l'Hermitage near La Valla where he prayed at the tomb of his Founder, Marcellin Champagnat. That night, he slept in Marcellin's bed. A few days later, he walked to the village of Izieux to spend time with Brother François Rivat, Marcellin's successor as Marist leader. Finally, on 15 November, the day before he set out for London to board ship, he climbed the hill above Lyons to Mary's shrine at Fourvière to consecrate his mission in the same place where, 55 years before,[5] Marcellin and his companions had made their pledge to start the Marist movement.

What this story reveals about Ludovic and the origins of the Champagnat project in Australia - what it could reveal about us - is that he was a person with such a keen sense of mission that he could overcome the most natural fears and feelings of personal inadequacy to say "yes" to a challenge that, left to his own devices, reason would have compelled him to reject.

Four years later, delighted by the burgeoning numbers of local recruits and the expansion of Marist schools across the Pacific, the Superiors in France decided to create the new Province of Oceania, headquartered in Sydney. They appointed an Irishman, Brother John Dullea, as the first provincial leader. John was a different kettle of fish from Ludovic, more reserved, less refined, more of an ascetic, a no-nonsense leader. He was also a year older than Ludovic, and 34 when he arrived in the colony. He is the subject of our second story.

In 1874, just after he had received his appointment as Provincial, John's health collapsed. At the time he was at l'Hermitage. He was bedridden with a wasting disease that badly affected his lungs and brought on frequent hemorrhaging. His doctor advised him to give up the idea of going to Australia. He would never last the voyage. In fact, the doctor concluded, even if he stayed where he was, he could not hope to live more than a few months.

John was devastated by the news. The only thing he knew to do was to struggle out of bed and down to Marcellin's tomb. Kneeling there, in his direct way he reminded Marcellin that, if he really wanted him to serve in Sydney, he had better help him recover so that he could get on and do it!

“If you want to educate young people, first you must love them...”

Soon after, the bleeding stopped. John left for Australia, feeling as strong and healthy as he had ever been. Some years later, back in France, he went to see the doctor who once had given him six months to live. The doctor was astonished to find no traces of the fatal illness left in his body. [6]

In its own way, what each of these stories reveals is that the two Marist Brothers who formed the cornerstones of the Australian Marist project shared a deeply ingrained belief in Marcellin Champagnat and what he set out to achieve in his lifetime. True disciples, they accepted the power of his goodness to revolutionize people's lives, including their own. They were sure of the enduring relevance of his practical approach to the education of young people, especially those most in need. And they trusted in the simplicity of his spirituality that sought to follow Jesus in the way of Mary.

Both Ludovic and John, different from each other in so many ways, shared a passion to carry on the Champagnat story, to immerse themselves in its riches, to let it seep into their bones, so that everything they did as people and as educators could transform the lives of the young for the better, just as Marcellin himself had done.

In other words, they said "yes" to Marcellin's gift and, finding themselves in a geographical and social situation that was remote from anything they had ever known, they adapted the gift in a spirit of creative fidelity so that it could meet the needs of the

young people of colonial Australia as fruitfully as it had met the needs of young people forgotten in the chaos that followed the great revolution in France.

Now, 125 years later, we find ourselves being offered Marcellin's gift in a social situation that neither he, nor Francois, nor Ludovic, nor John, would ever have been able to imagine. What is this gift we, too, are being offered? Is it something distinctive, even unique, among the many gifts offered by great Founders over centuries of Catholic education?

A Unique Expression of the Gospel Let me begin to answer these questions by placing Marcellin's gift in relationship with some vision statements prepared by two of our leading diocesan authorities in Australia. These statements are designed to apply to a range of Catholic schools - primary and secondary, single-sex and co-educational, among a whole range of charismatic cultures.

Reflecting on them, we will see that there is no conflict between the diocesan visions and Marcellin's gift. Both are built on a belief in the Catholic school as "a centre of learning and a centre of evangelisation". [7] Both accept that our schools must be "founded on the person of Jesus Christ and ... enlivened by Gospel values". [8] In other words, fundamentally, the Marist dream and the vision of a diocese harmonise comfortably with one another.



The uniqueness of the Marist vision of Marcellin Champagnat - his gift - is in the "spin" or the "edge" that it puts on key elements in those statements. Today, I want

to highlight five points at which our experience in a Champagnat school should offer a unique approach to the formation of young learners in Australian Catholic education. Each dimension is modelled for us by Marcellin himself - and each remains relevant to us, even though our world is different in so many ways from the worlds of 1817 and 1872. As I speak about them, I invite you to reflect on how effectively your Marist school puts them into practice.

A Family Spirit

First, all Catholic schools, including our own Marist ones, are committed to being "faith communities" [9] characterized by "caring", [10] "hope", [11] "service", [12] "celebration" [13] and a partnership with the local Church and neighbourhood [14]. Marist schools, however, are called to become something more than communities. Marcellin wanted them to be families.

Why? Because that was his experience of life as a child in the Champagnat farmhouse at Marlhes. It was a family full of love, a love that was tested by revolutionary politics and found to be true. No wonder it appealed to Marcellin the Founder when he saw so many young people across the countryside deprived of what had been so normal for him. Later, this childhood truth would mesh with Marcellin's deepening experience of the loving faithfulness of God as father and Mary as 'good mother'.

Therefore, of the imagery that was available to him - gardens, sheep herds, business and politics, to name just a few - he instinctively chose 'family', and he urged his followers to transform their schoolrooms into places that would be recognized by all as being the same as good families: where everyone held an honoured place, where relationships among members of all ages would be warm and informal, where hospitality would be a special feature, where correction would be just and kind and forgiving, and where the relationship between teacher and pupil would be that of a big brother or sister with a little brother or sister [15].

Make no mistake: this was a radical departure from the common schools of Marcellin's France. They were usually brutal places where severe corporal punishment and personal humiliation were the typical ways to achieve control. When Ludovic and his companions came to Sydney, a similar harsh military stamp was the norm in the colony's schools - no surprise, given the history of European settlement here.

At their school in The Rocks, the Marist approach proved to be an immediate contrast. To some, the Brothers seemed slack, too easygoing to convert the rough larrikins they enrolled first at St Patrick's, then at places like Broadway, the Haymarket and Parramatta. [16]

Ludovic himself commented in his diary that people were constantly "astonished at the freedom between teachers and pupils" in the Marist schools, "at the affection, so plain to see, with which these friendly children surround us. You cannot go along the streets without seeing them running up to take our hands, receive a word or two and a sweet smile". [17] All this in spite of the fact that one of the Brothers struggled to speak English, let alone master an Australian accent!

For something charismatic was at work. Just a few months after St Patrick's opened, none other than the Church of England Defence Association - no champion of Catholic schools - noted its effect, echoing the public's delight at observing "how fine it is to see these urchins, once so scatterbrained and disorderly, going off in such perfect discipline!" [18] Just as Marcellin had once urged his teenaged Brothers to persist with Jean-Baptiste Berne, the feral kid of Les Maisonettes, [19] and win him over by gently bringing him ever closer into their Marist family life, so Ludovic and his Brothers won over the larrikins of Sydney town. "Gentleness, presence and good example should be the mark of a Marist - teacher," said Marcellin and proceeded to model it for his followers. [20]

Ludovic practised it in the rough-house world of colonial Sydney. It continues to be relevant for us in the sophisticated city Sydney has become since 1872 - a distinctive approach which highlights the gospel call in a special way. Marcellin's sense of "family" is a unique 'gift for

our Marist schools to continue to bring fully to life for the sake of both Church and society.

"He was stressing that love in a Marist school is inclusive, that it is to be extended to everyone without exception"

A Spirit of Equality

Second, as our diocesan statements remind us, all Catholic schools are called to take seriously the intrinsic sacredness of every human person [21]. We "demonstrate a special concern for, and understanding of, the uniqueness of each person" [22]. We are "sensitive and responsive to students with special needs" [23]. We celebrate "the richness of the diverse culture and background of (our) students" [24]. We "regard curricula that meet students' needs as being essential elements of pastoral care" [25].

Marist schools share these beliefs. They are in harmony with Marcellin's Golden Rule. Do you remember it? "If you want to educate young people, first you must love them ..." Love them by valuing their uniqueness, responding to their needs, celebrating their cultural diversity. But, you will recall, Marcellin's rule did not end there. It's what was added that he wanted to be distinctive about Marist schools - that the young people in them would not only be loved, but loved "equally" [26]

At first glance, it seems a bit redundant to add the word "equally" to the act of loving. But Marcellin is saying something of great significance by highlighting it.. He is stressing that love in a Marist school is inclusive, that it is to be extended to everyone without exception. In other words, it's the radical edge of loving kids. So we don't urge that the difficult ones be moved on until we know we've tried everything with them and have the most serious cause, and even then we care for their well-being [27]. We don't play favorites. We don't mock. And when we see that some

groups are unequal with others - as is always the case with those in need - we do all in our power to make them equal.

Marcellin, a loyal son of his revolutionary father, Jean-Baptiste, insisted on this equality even at the most basic levels of ruining a school. Whereas the vast majority of French schools, church and secular, arranged their pupils in social hierarchies in a classroom, Marcellin insisted that this never be the norm in a Marist school. "The only children to be isolated from the others," he once directed in his typically down-to-earth way, "should be those suffering from head lice!" [28].

Present Among Young People

Third, as again we are urged by the diocesan statements, all Catholic schools share "in the evangelizing mission of the Church" [29]. Our mission is "to make Jesus Christ known and loved", proclaim the Constitutions of the Marist Brothers, echoing Marcellin himself [30]. It's a statement to which all Catholic schools subscribe.

What is distinctive about the Champagnat approach to evangelizing the young is the way it is done. Marcellin wanted his followers to do nothing less than immerse themselves in the lives of the young - "constant presence" among them, he called it - and to show them at all times what it is to live as a good Christian and an upright citizen - "good example" was his catch phrase [31].

In this regard, it's instructive to reflect on the famous story of Brother Sylvester and the wheelbarrow. Briefly, Sylvester was a 15 year old Brother who was appointed to the school at Ampuis. Being the youngest, the practice was that he did the community cooking. The other Brothers, older and (they reckoned) wiser in the ways of the religious life, left him to it. In fact, they ignored him in favour of contemplative prayer and theological study. One day, frustrated out of his wits, Sylvester began to play games with the wheelbarrow in the garden. Racing around behind it, he skittled a couple of chooks and flattened a few carrots before racing into the house, through the classroom and up into the second floor study

where he was stopped short by the scandalized stares of his older Brothers.

The Superior took the first opportunity to report him to Marcellin. The Founder's reply was a droll one: "Didn't he make it all the way to the top floor? Oh, if only he had, I would have given him a fancy holy picture!"

But he went on with the crucial instruction for the older Brothers: "Why were you all upstairs in your study when Sylvester needed you to be with him in the kitchen? Why weren't you where your brother was?" [32]. In their pious retreat, they had thought they were showing good example. But it was an . example that was inaccessible to a normal boy like Sylvester. His Brothers needed to be immersed in his world, playing games with him, if they really wanted to change him for the better! As the story shows, the Marist educator's distinctive means of evangelising others, especially the young, is through the twin virtues of presence and example.

*"Be transparent, be people
of integrity, practise what
you preach"*

A Spirit of Simplicity

The fourth of Marcellin's gifts is one not clearly articulated in documents like diocesan vision statements. This is not surprising, for it is regarded by Brother Alexander Balko, a leading Marist historian, as the single most distinctive feature of Marcellin's approach to the formation of young people. Marcellin himself called it a virtue and named it "simplicity" [33].

By it, he meant something quite different from the understanding that prevailed in his day. He tied it with two complementary virtues, "humility" and "modesty". Don't be fooled, he warned, into thinking that to be simple, humble and modest means you must hate yourself or that, to achieve some state of perfection, you must punish yourself and others for every little fault you can find. These were fashionable

religious ideals in the nineteenth century. And they were applied to the education of children.

Marcellin believed something different: that simplicity really means accepting yourself as you are, with all your strengths and weaknesses. Be thankful for the gifts you have been given in this life. Rejoice in them. Use them for everyone's benefit. Look for the good in everyone, even the least attractive; for the God who loves us has made each of us basically good.

In other words, Marcellin wanted no dissembling. We Australians would say that he abhorred bull-dust and show. Be transparent, - be people of integrity, practise what you preach, let people - especially young people - see you just as you are. And, by the warmth of your presence and your good example, form others to be the same.

It was a revolutionary insight he shared with a few others among his contemporary founders. It was a seed planted by the Spirit among the Christian people in rare individuals like Marcellin Champagnat. It was not to come to fruition in the wider Church until the documents of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s [34].

Typically, Marcellin came upon a very down-to-earth symbol for this noble quality that we recognise as a unique feature of every Marist educator. In the summer fields around La Valla, tiny purple violets grew in the long grass. You couldn't easily see them, but you knew they were there because of their powerful fragrance. That's simplicity, humility and modesty, he insisted. You don't have to be seen to do good to do it! People will notice the enriching fragrance if you act selflessly, with integrity and generous concern, to meet the others needs.

"Mary's life would stand as a sign that the powerless were God's chosen ones"

In The Way Of Mary

Finally, as a plain coloured paper wrapped around these values of family, equality, presence and simplicity, is the gift revealed in Marcellin's choice to name his educators "Marist". He wanted them - us! - to be attached to Mary who, in the peasant tradition of his part of the world, was fondly called "our good mother". It was his own favorite phrase. Inspired by the example of his own mother, Marie-Therese, he prayed to Mary before everything he did. His prayer was like normal conversation. "Listen, Mary," he would say, "just remember that this work is not ours, but yours. Even if it fails, it's yours too!" [35].

You know the famous story of the night on which this simple trust of Marcellin's was put to its most dramatic test. It was in February 1823 when, after visiting the ailing Brother Jean-Baptiste in Bourg-Argental, he and Brother Stanislaus recklessly braved a severe snow storm to return the twelve kilometres to l'Hermitage. Stanislaus collapsed from exposure and Marcellin felt his own strength rapidly draining from him. He knew no where else to turn than to Mary, his good mother. He said the prayer that his own mother had taught him as a child, the Memorare: "Remember, most loving Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who called on you for help was abandoned ...".

Then, up on a nearby ridge, a lamp glowed faintly in the whirling snow. It was Joseph Donnet going out of his house to check the animals in his barn. What was strange was that Donnet had no reason to leave the warmth of his house; the barn adjoined it and could be entered by an internal door. But, for some reason he could never explain, in the midst of a wild storm, he went outside.

Marcellin knew his choice was no fluke. It was Mary who, through Donnet, had saved him and Stanislaus. You can easily imagine what this incident did for his trust in her protection! [36]

More than this personal piety, though, Marcellin believed that Marist schools would make a broader social difference if they followed Jesus "in the way of Mary" [37]. In

the time after the Reformation, Ignatius Loyola had founded the Society of Jesus as a way of reconverting the world to Christ's values, long obscured by empty ritual and a succession of cruel inquisitions. Marcellin and his seminary friends believed that what their time needed was a Society of Mary. Mary would be the model of how to heal a deeply wounded world by her thirst for justice, her simple neighbourliness, her compassion, her reflectiveness and her trust in the gentle power of her Son.

In the weapons factories of nearby St Etienne and the weaving mills of St Chamond, Marcellin had observed the dehumanizing effects not only of the revolution but also of the emerging industrial age. For him, in a world that treated people as economic pawns, Marcellin knew Mary would be the best possible model of one who prized each human being for their own sake. In a society that admired the wealthy and the selfish, Mary's life would stand as a sign that the powerless were God's chosen ones. In an atmosphere of narcissism, Mary would show by her humility and generosity the claims of the common good. In a world which put up and pulled down a procession of empty idols, Mary would reveal that the real God was some one with dusty feet.

This was the Mary that Marcellin revered and the one of whom Ludovic spoke when he won the hearts of the young larrikins from The Rocks at the foot of his May altar in 1872. It is the one we revere today, and the gift we hand on from Marcellin to the whole Church [38].

Marcellin Is The Key

Marcellin would be embarrassed to hear himself spoken of in the way I have here today. One characteristic he had was to deflect any attention from himself onto others, generally to Jesus or Mary. That was the simplicity of his belief in operation. That was why, for example, he refused to have any likeness of himself painted during his lifetime. Don't glorify me, he insisted, glorify those using me to do this work.

Nevertheless, all cultures need their heroes, and Marcellin is ours. If we want to enrich our schools and make them as effective as they can be in serving young people, then we have to get to know Marcellin himself better than ever. When we reflect on him in action we most clearly see what his charisma, his unique gift, is all about.

And what do we find? For me, I discover an ordinary man - in many ways, more ordinary ever than you and me. We've already talked about his simplicity, his down-to-earthness. He was a peasant, a son of the soil. He lived in a part of France that was ridiculed in the salons of the nation. He never mastered the elegance of French and preferred the patois of his own folk. He was illiterate for a third of his life and struggled ever afterwards. Even as a priest, he worked with his hands and, for his trouble, was scorned by his clerical peers and referred to demeaningly as "that fool Champagnat" [39].

His first recruits were no better. Young and illiterate themselves, they did not know how to live together and, we're told, had atrocious table manners! And yet, with nothing much to recommend them, they were enraptured by Marcellin's dream of forming other boys as uncouth as they were into good Christians and good citizens. And they did. Fifty years later, in the midst of his own misgivings, Ludovic would discover the same thing. Each day, confronted by the infinite variety of situations in a school, it happens for us, too.

There's a beautiful story about those first Brothers that reveals the power of Marcellin's charismatic personality. Let it speak to us, as well, his descendants at work at the turn of a millennium. Needing a text from which to train his lads as teachers, Marcellin naturally turned to the Brothers of Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, the great success story of post-revolutionary French-education. This text he duly advised his Brothers to follow to the letter. In it, the first quality of an effective teacher was listed as "seriousness" - a reserve, a detachment, a solemnity. This was never evident in Marcellin's Brothers. They were too lively for that. Why? Because they had picked up

that quality from Marcellin himself. The hero's actions had spoken more loudly than the revered textbook [40].

So, Marcellin himself is the key. If we want to grasp what he meant by the spirit of family, we need to look at him and the way he could win the hearts of all sorts of children. The same is true whether we want to understand what he meant by equality, presence, simplicity and bringing the Christian revelation alive in the way of Mary. We need to know the hero's story, to seize his spirituality and to share it with each other and those whom we serve. That way, we can create truly distinctive, truly unique, truly Marist, truly Catholic schools.

“If we want to enrich our schools... then we have to get to know Marcellin himself”

Marcellin's Gift in a Changing World

Just like our world, the Church to which our Marist schools belong is changing rapidly. What was a hierarchical institution just thirty years ago is beginning to learn, usually painfully, to respect the equality of all its members and to value their different, yet complementary, gifts. In our schools, laboratories of the future, we must model this now for the sake of our children. To an extent, we do it and we do it well. But there is always still a way to go. So, like Marcellin, we have to be practical about it, too. Let's make work what we can at the moment and let time ripen other opportunities in their due season.

In most ways, those cornerstones of our Australian Marist story, Ludovic and John, would not be at home in our world. They were men of their times and have played their role. But, beyond the historical limitations, their passion for all that Marcellin was remains intact and relevant. I hope that, at that most fundamental level, we will allow them to continue to inspire us!

Allow me to finish with a lovely story that I heard just the other day. In a homespun image, it captures well what I have been trying to say about the reality of Marcellin's gift to us, his heirs. It's about neither John nor Ludovic nor even Marcellin himself. It's about that 21 year old Scot, Donald McDonald, Brother Augustine, one of the pioneers.

On the voyage out to Australia, Augustine contracted a serious bout of rheumatic fever, which left him with a painful permanent disability. Greatly loved by his students at St Patrick's, they could not have suspected his intense chronic suffering. It was almost too much for him to bear and he turned to drink to ease the shooting pains. He developed alcoholism, a disease not then regarded with the understanding that it receives today.

Embarrassed, he left the Brothers for a time, returning only through the gentle urging of Brother Ange, another Frenchman who was the first great saint of the Australian Marist story [41]. In 1921, aged 72, Augustine was posted to St Joseph's at Hunters Hill. Each day, he would amble down to the mail box on Gladesville Road to post the College's letters and parcels. Most days, Tom Morgan, a small boy who lived across from the College in Mary Street, would join him and, hand in hand, they would walk along the road. When they reached the box, Augustine would lift up the boy to do the posting, always receiving a mischievous tug of his luxuriant white beard

“It is a gift that does not depend on age or wisdom, but on a daily commitment to its faithful expression”

on the way down.

It's a touching image, full of gentleness and patience and time for the least among us. It's Marcellin Champagnat in action, his gift alive. It's a gift that does not depend on age or wisdom, but on a daily commitment to its faithful expression. Now 82, Tom still lives in

Mary Street and still recalls with fondness those walks with Augustine [42].

May that be us. May the privilege of being a teacher be something we always treasure. It's our call! May the passion for forming the young people in our care into good Christians and good citizens never diminish in us. And may the way we Marists - Laity and Brothers, women and men - may the way we Marists go about it - building family, treating equally,

being present to young people, acting with simplicity and doing it all in the way of Mary - may we create schools that are faithful to Marcellin's gift and to his dream to make a difference in the lives of the young, especially those who need us most [43].

Brother Mark Farrelly fms
7 April 1997
RIP 11 July 1999

Endnotes

1. Brother Ludovic Laboureyas, Journal of the Foundation in Australia, unpublished. Sydney Province archives. St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, New South Wales.

2. Brother Ludovic Laboureyas, Annales de la Mission d'Australie, Archives of the Marist Brothers Rome, p.16.

3. Brother Alban Doyle, The Story of the Marist Brothers in Australia 1872-1972, The Marist Brothers of the Schools, Sydney 1972, p.29.

4. *ibid.*, p.29.

5. July 1816.

6. From a biography written by Br Osmund Rice in *Circulaires*, 12, 1914, pp. 402-403.

7. Parramatta Diocesan Schools Board, A Statement of Understanding of Vision for the Diocese of Parramatta, Parramatta 1990, p.3.

8. Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board, Catholic Schools: A Vision Statement for the Archdiocese of Sydney, Sydney 1988, p.5.

9. Sydney, pp.6 &

10; Parramatta, p.8

11. Parramatta, p.2.

12. Sydney, p.6.

13. Cf. Sydney, p.10.

14. Cf. Sydney, p.10.

15. See Brother Jean-Baptiste Furet, Life of Blessed Marcellin Joseph Benedict Champagnat, 1789-1840, Marist Priest, Founder of the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary, Bicentenary Edition, Rome 1989, p. 530: 'The spirit of a Brothers' school ought to be a

family spirit. Now, in a good family, a well-run family, sentiments of respect, love and mutual trust predominate, and not fear of punishments...'

16. Even though, against the tradition that came down from Champagnat, there was corporal punishment. Brother Ludovic 'repeatedly warned his young Brothers against severity in their punishments, but he reports the cane was too often used, due to their experience in English schools which promoted corporal punishment. See Brother Alban Doyle, The Story of the Marist Brothers in Australia, pp. 68-69.

17. *ibid.*, p.154.

18. *ibid.*, p.154.

19. 'Jean-Baptiste was an orphan, and lived like a young savage. Marcellin, helped by a few good people, came to help the boy's mother when she was dying in extreme want after being abandoned by the father. After the death of his mother, Jean-Baptiste was not able to live with the children of the charitable neighbours who took him in. So Marcellin turned him over to the Brothers. Br Jean-Baptiste tells us (*Life*, pp.511-513): "Used to a beggar's life and to being free to follow his bad instincts, he could not put up with the ordered life of a school ... He ran away a number of times, preferring to beg his bread and live in want rather than giving in to the discipline in a school ... The Brothers lost heart, and finally asked the Founder to send the boy away and leave him to his unhappy lot ... They said: We are wasting our time with this child, and sooner or later, we will have to send him away'. Fr Champagnat encouraged the Brothers to have patience, for a number of months. In the end, Jean-Baptiste Berne changed completely. He became well-behaved, docile, 'as pious as an angel'." After he made his first communion, he asked if he could become a Brother.' (See Brother Gabriel Michel, *Ne en 1789*, volume 2, Chapter 19). Eventually Jean-Baptiste became Brother Nilamon. He died of consumption in Marcellin's arms in 1830, aged about 21.

20. Life, p.544: 'Gentleness should be your element as teachers and should accompany all your virtues so that you can win the hearts of children; charity's gentle, kindly and compassionate'.
21. Cf. Parramatta, p.10.
22. Sydney, p.6.
23. Parramatta, p.4.
24. Parramatta, p.4.
25. Sydney, p.12
26. Life, p. 538: To educate children well, one must love them and love them all equally'.
27. Life, p. 513.
28. Life, p. 517.
29. Sydney, p.5. Cf. Parramatta, p.3.
30. Constitutions and Statutes of the Marist Brothers of the Schools or Little Brothers of Mary, Rome, 8 December 1986, #2.
31. Life, pp. M-130.
32. Life, pp. 270-271.
33. Brother Alexander Balko, 'Marcellin Champagnat, Educator', in Marist Notebooks, Fratelli Maristi, Roma June 1990, pp. 29-46.
34. See, for example, Vatican 11, Presbyterorum Ordinis, 7 December 1965, # 15.
35. Life, p. 342.
36. Life, pp. 343-344.
37. Constitutions, #3. 38. After the chaos of the first few weeks of school, the Brothers thought that they would never gain control of boys at St Patrick's. Like Jean-Baptiste Berne, many of the larrikins of The Rocks were unused to school life and found it hard to adjust. But the Brothers realised they were not bad kids, just out of control! In a simple way of which Marcellin would have approved, Ludovic talked the parish into putting on a special children's Mass on Sundays and feast days, which the brothers would help organise and promote. The numbers attending were excellent, so much so that the idea was adopted in other parts of the city. To cap it all, Ludovic urged the boys to bring flowers and gifts to help create a great May altar to Mary. Some were sceptical that this would work - larrikins wouldn't carry bunches of flowers down George Street, surely? But they did. The boys became devoted to their shrine and its unveiling came to be seen as the point from which their conduct reformed! See Brother Alban Doyle, op. cit., pp. 54-55.
39. Cf. Life, p.285.
40. Balko, op. cit., pp.35-36.
41. Brother Ange (Angel) Fraysse arrived in Sydney in March 1873 and took the "petite classe" at St Patrick's. He was the companionable Frenchman for whom Ludovic longed but he also endeared himself to all, as Brother Alban puts it. He became first Principal of Parramatta and later took over St Benedict's at Broadway when Augustine's health failed. He suffered from heart trouble throughout his time in Australia. He died, aged 37, in October 1878 and was buried in the yard of St Charles' Church, Ryde. The tributes to Ange after his death unanimously considered him to be a saint.!
42. On 9 March 1997, Brother Bede Yates of St Joseph's College recounted this story told to him by Tom Morgan.
43. Thanks to Brothers Michael Green and Graham Neist for help in the preparation of this paper.

A Simple Gift was first published in 1997 by Marist Brothers Sydney Province.
Reprinted in 2000 by Marist Brothers Melbourne Province, with permission