

Marcellin Joseph Benedict Champagnat was born at Le Rosey, a hamlet near St Etienne in France on 20 May 1789, the same year as the French Revolution. He grew up on a small farm with his parents, four brothers and four sisters.

During the religious persecutions of the French Revolution, many priests were killed and as a result, Catholic Church Leaders were anxious to find men willing to become priests. Marcellin hearing the call, decided to join the Seminary. As he had little formal education, he found the other students were far more advanced than him. At the end of his first year, he was asked to go home and think about his future. After talking to his family and praying about his difficulties, he decided to return to the Seminary. The priests who ran the Seminary were very impressed with his new enthusiasm and dedication to study.

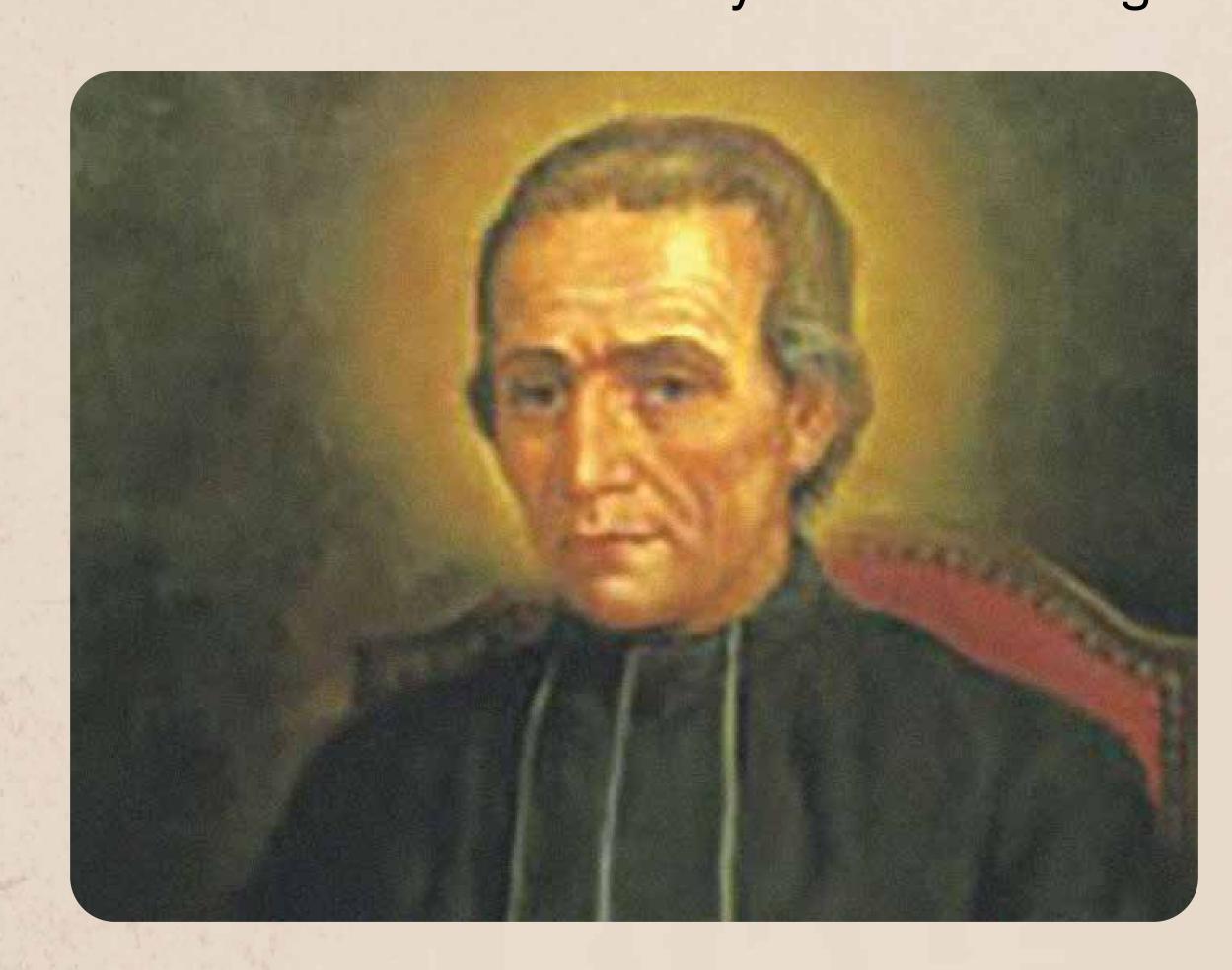
He was ordained on 22 July 1816. His first appointment was to the parish of La Valla. His catechism classes soon became crowded with eager children, and adults flocked to the church every time he gave a sermon.

Marcellin firmly believed in the idea of founding an Order of Brothers and when two young men volunteered to join him, Marcellin bought a little house near his presbytery. The two young men moved in on 2 January 1817 and so was born the Marist Brothers' Order.

Their work consisted of making iron nails to earn themselves a living.

As the community continued to grow, Brother John Granjon was elected as Brother Superior. Champagnat then hired a school teacher who lived with the Brothers, taught the children of La Valla and instructed the Brothers in the methods of teaching. The Brothers began to teach in the villages around La Valla. This was well received by the parents in the region.

With the arrival of a new group of young men, the house at La Valla became too small, and the Brothers began building a new house. It was a difficult task as they had to quarry out a solid rock face to make their bricks. Confident that the Brothers numbers would grow, Champagnat designed a large building which became known as Our Lady of the Hermitage.





Many people doubted the wisdom of Marcellin's foundation of the Brothers and these attitudes worsened during the building of the Hermitage. He was laughed at and ridiculed by many people. The success of Marcellin's venture, despite opposition, highlights his faith, tenacity and courage.

In 1836 and 1838 Father Champagnat attempted to have the Brothers' Order officially recognised by the French Government, however, he was unsuccessful. Soon after this, his health began to deteriorate, and he decided that a leader would have to be elected from among the Brothers. On 12 October 1839, Brother François was elected as the Brothers' first Superior General. Marcellin's health continued to worsen and on the morning of 6 June 1840 he passed away.



Marcellin Champagnat was declared Venerable in 1920 by Pope Benedict XV, beatified by Pope Pius XII on 29 May 1955 and canonised by Pope John-Paul II on 18 April 1999. His feast day is observed on 6 June.



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