

**150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MARIST BROTHERS IN
GLASGOW
AND THE OPENING OF ST MUNGO'S ACADEMY, GLASGOW**

CHURCH OF ST MUNGO, GLASGOW

ADDRESS BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

MONDAY 25 AUGUST 2008

Introduction:

It is indeed a very great pleasure and a privilege for me to be here with you this evening.

I cannot admit to having been taught by the Marist Brothers – rather, I am a product of the Cross and Passion Sisters, having had my initial schooling from them in Ballycastle, Co Antrim. However, over the years, I have had many friends who are Marist Brothers and indeed through my work as priest, Bishop and Cardinal, I have benefited from the education which they have handed on to so many thousands of their pupils over the years.

St Marcellin Champagnat:

My words would be lacking if I did not make initial mention of the Founder of the Marist Brothers, St Marcellin Champagnat.

We know that he was a priest of the Society of Mary, and a founder of its Little Brothers of Mary, recognised worldwide today as the Institute of the Marist Brothers.

He was a young man in the diocesan priesthood who was very determined to do God's will and to find out what that will was through the intercession of Our Blessed Lady.

We are told of his love and respect for young people and of the elements which shaped his spirituality in very difficult times in France: an awareness of God's presence; an unwavering confidence in Mary and her protection; and the two uncomplicated virtues of simplicity and humility.

It was with these inspirations that Marcellin invited his first two recruits to join him when he himself was just 27 years of age. The mission of himself and his brothers was quite simply to proclaim the Word of God directly to the young and among them, particularly to the most neglected. Marcellin knew that to teach young people you had to love them first – this guided his life and also guided the apostolate of his brothers through the past 150 years.

Application to ourselves today:

I know that during the course of the various celebrations which have taken place throughout the world and indeed here in Scotland, those involved have not just wanted an empty celebration of the past, but rather a guide and pointer to the ways which lie ahead.

I think we can do no better than consider at this present time leadership in our schools and especially in our Catholic schools – that leadership provided in so many ways by our dedicated lay women and laymen, following in the footsteps of our Marist Brothers.

Pope Benedict XVI was recently speaking in America with regard to Catholic Education and presented his own high ideals. Let me quote from his address:

“Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the good news. Set against personal struggles, moral confusion and fragmentation of knowledge, the noble goals of scholarship and education, founded in the unity of truth and in service of the person and of the community, become an especially powerful instrument of hope”.

The Pope does indeed present education in a very wonderful position in our Church, indicating that it is integral in our mission of proclaiming the Good News and equally important is the leadership provided in our schools at this present time. One hundred and fifty years ago, here in Glasgow and in so many other towns and cities throughout the world, there were those ‘personal struggles, moral confusion, and fragmentation of knowledge’. Can we not say the very same in the society of today! There is ever more need of the Scholarship but especially of the moral standards imparted in our Catholic schools

Conclusion:

In my own remarks at the end of this time of celebration, I simply commend you all to the ongoing intercession of St Marcellin Champagnat.

He himself was a brave and outstanding leader, who was convinced of the value of his own apostolate and loved those to whom he was handing on something of his knowledge and love of Christ and his Church.

It is similar leaders who are needed at this present time. I take this opportunity of thanking the Marist Brothers, especially here in Glasgow, for the ways in which they have followed in the footsteps of their founder – and I pray that there may be similar women and men inspired as was St Marcellin Champagnat to hand on the teaching and the love of Jesus Christ to our young people who so often are looking for Christ-like leadership in their homes, in their schools and in their parishes. It is reassuring that the influence of the Marist Brothers is such that former pupils gather together each month here in St Mungo’s for a monthly Mass and get-together – no doubt thinking about the old days, but also thinking as to how best they can consider their own influence in the Church and in the world of today.

May God indeed bless you all gathered here this evening and help us all in our mission of being Christ-like leaders.

As I bless and dedicate this icon of St Marcellin Champagnat here in the sanctuary of this magnificent church, I ask his intercession on all of us that we may remain true to his ideals through the lives that we live at this present time.