

## The "Good" Father Chaminade

We are all familiar with the account of Creation in Genesis 1 with the refrain "and God saw that it was good" and at the end of the sixth day: "Behold, it was very good."

We see this goodness of God manifested in the creation that we must take care of, but even more so in the love that Christ showed us in his abasement, even to the point of dying on the cross for our salvation (cf. the hymn in Philippians). This goodness, this love, this mercy are a permanent gift: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). It is our turn to be witnesses of this goodness of God and to live by it.

Father Chaminade drew his goodness from the living source that is the Heart of Christ and that of Mary. Cultivating this virtue in humility, William Joseph became the image of what he contemplated and he touched hearts by what he was in the depths of his being.

He made this goodness a means of evangelization: "We must attract people, and especially the youth [...] by our mild, amicable, patient manners. (to Father Caillet, June 16, 1825).

"How he captivated souls in order to win them to Jesus and Mary! All those who were fortunate enough to live with him, or to know him closely agree in declaring that he won hearts, and, according to one of his disciples, he fascinated them by his zeal overflowing with meekness, delicacy, attention, mercy, and loving civility. He has given us most valuable recommendations upon this subject; he tells us that meekness founded on faith ought to act as an unction or a perfume upon the interactions of the religious of Mary among each other, with their pupils and seculars." (*The Spirit of Our Foundation*, I, p.85).

The system he established in the Marian congregation of Bordeaux responded to the precept of Jesus: "that no one should be lost" (cf. Jn 6:39). "To win Aspirants it will not suffice merely to have the spirit of faith and the love of virtue; over and above sweetness, amenity, kind attention, undaunted and unruffled charity are necessary. [...] We must watch over him as over a tender pet bird [...]: he is free in this that he is forced to nothing, and he is not because we overwhelm him with kindness, goodness, and nourishment." (*The Spirit of Our Foundation*, I, p. 86).

It is in these same sentiments that he recommends to teachers and principals:...to imbue themselves for their pupils "with all the sentiments of the Saviour and all the tenderness of Mary." He invites students who encounter difficulties to share among themselves: "Those who are more responsible for them, to pray for them, ask for their conversion, invoke the lights of the Holy Spirit to direct their conduct."

But "no success can be expected with a pupil unless he has first been won over and, up to a certain point, esteemed and loved." (Letter to Father Chevaux, February 7, 1834, points 6-7).



**Mrs. Elena Otero (Argentina), cured of a tumor through the intercession of Father Chaminade**

Father Chaminade "is a father, and a good father, for this name has sprung spontaneously, from the beginning, from the hearts of his children' They all call me their father, which I am in fact in the supernatural order; to the name of father, they usually add that of good, although they know that at times I am quite severe towards some: this is because they well know that the love and even the natural tenderness which I have for them comes only from above, from the spiritual paternity with which God has vested me" (to Father Caillet, September 10, 1844). "Receive for yourself, and for all

my dear children of Saint-Remy," he wrote to Brother Clouzet, "the blessing of the Father whom God has given you upon this earth, and who, all unworthy as he is, participates in the love which the heavenly Father has for you. (April 5, 1824). To Father Meyer: "I shall never lose sight of your spiritual needs for I feel that I am your father and that you are my son. I wish to return you to Jesus and Mary in a condition worthy of them" (October 29, 1832).

This constant attention, this concern for his children, was not only spiritual, it was also concrete: when the first brothers left for Saint-Remy from Bordeaux, he made sure that they had everything they needed, money, linen...

We know the crises that Good Father Chaminade went through: tensions with David Monier, with Father Lalanne, with his assistants during his last years: he always remained amiable. He sought to save everyone, including Narcisse Roussel, while keeping his eyes fixed on the objective lived in faith of not deviating from the inspiration he had received from God.

Let us not think that the paternal kindness of Father Chaminade is an outdated attitude, made for another time; we have undoubtedly experienced encounters with radiant people, Brother Roger of Taizé, for example, or the reflection of a strong paternal image such as Raymond Halter S..M. We find this invitation to living goodness today expressed in these few lines from Madeleine Delbrel (born in Mussidan, 1904-1964): "The goodness of heart from Christ, given by him, is to the unbelieving heart a presentiment of God himself. She has, for the unbelieving heart, a taste unknown to God and she makes it aware of his encounter. It is, for the unbeliever, unusual, linked to this absolute unusualness that God is for him. It awakens, questions the slumbering forces of his heart, forces unknown to him whose living reality he sees in him. It sympathizes with that which in the heart of the unbeliever is both the most solitary and the most apt to turn inwardly, secretly, to God as a possibility. " (*Atheisms and Evangelization, Volume VIII of the Complete Works*, Nouvelle Cité 2010, p. 150).

On this same theme, we could also let ourselves be challenged by the "epiphany of the face" of the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas.

Chaminade is more "modern" than we think. We will only be able to truly understand him through one prism: that of faith. All his life he acted by faith, that's the key, let's read him again with this key, otherwise we won't be able to understand him.

