

The Human and Spiritual Personality of Blessed Chaminade

During the 2025-2026 academic year, the Marianist Family is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the beatification of Father Chaminade by Pope St. John Paul II on September 3, 2000, in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. During this academic year we will dedicate the *Marianist Holiness section* of the bulletin *Via Latina* 22 to the detailed study of the human and spiritual personality of Blessed Chaminade. We know a lot about his Marian doctrine, his thoughts on faith and prayer, his missionary project..., but what was Chaminade like? Who was the man and priest William Joseph Chaminade? Above all, Chaminade was a "man of God": a priest who consecrated his life to God, in order to evangelize the new generations and rebuild the French Church, destroyed by the revolutionary storm.

"Man of God" is how Fr. Jean-Baptiste Lalanne described Father Chaminade in his speech at the inauguration of the Founder's funeral monument in the Carthusian cemetery of Bordeaux, on November 14, 1871. For, as Saint Paul exhorts his disciple Timothy: "You, man of God, practice justice, piety, faith, love, patience, gentleness while continuing to fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:11-16). In Father Chaminade shone the virtues of faith, devotion to Mary, apostolic zeal and missionary zeal; virtues lived in perfect harmony with his personality, characterized by an "imperturbable serenity". The three qualities of his character were constancy, fortitude, and kindness.

The perseverance and fortitude that he demonstrated with heroic courage during the years of the Terror are the reasons why his contemporaries came to call him "confessor of the faith." Later, from 1800 to 1820, he supported the foundation of his numerous apostolic works with "untiring perseverance." However, this strength and determination was not the fruit of a rigid spirit but sprang from a human and spiritual background full of wisdom. In all matters, including his business dealings, he behaved with moderation and self-control, with admirable calmness. As he himself used to repeat: "The Spirit of God is very active, but he is not rash." When he needed to make a decision on a matter, he went to the chapel of the Madeleine to prostrate himself before the Blessed Sacrament; once he was sure of knowing God's will, nothing could dissuade him from executing the decision made.



Decree of a miracle by Father Chaminade, on December 20, 1999, in the presence of Pope Saint John Paul II at the Apostolic Palace (Vatican). From left to right: Fr. Enrique Torres, S.M., Postulator; Fr. David Fleming, S.M., Superior General; and Sr. Blanca Jamar, FMI, Superior General.

Chaminade brought together apparently opposing qualities: sweetness and paternal tenderness with the most energetic firmness; courage and holy audacity, together with the sincerest humility; prudence with simplicity; austerity with kindness; discretion together with a frank openness of his soul to his collaborators. He was distinguished by his moderation: he was austere in his eating, moderate in his dress and in his room, but always clean and neat.

He was a very significant priest in the city of Bordeaux; even though he did not possess great gifts as an orator, for his speech was slow and rather awkward ["embarrassée"], with a somewhat monotonous tone. He did not like to act in public and yet he was a great director of men. He attracted the faithful by "the charm of his charity," says Father William Bel, and Father Demangeon calls him a "charmeur d'âmes" (enchanter of souls), thanks to his heart full of goodness and the unalterable serenity of his affable and welcoming character. A kindness that he displayed, above all, with the humblest

people (servants, subordinates, poor...) and the most abandoned souls in the world, as was seen in his concern to save young women fallen into the social scourge of prostitution.

Blessed Chaminade possessed an intense interior life and a profound religious spirit, expressed in abundant personal devotions learned in the Rules of the Congregation of Priests of St. Charles in Mussidan: visits to the Blessed Sacrament, to the altar of the Blessed Virgin, the recitation of the Creed, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to the Passion of Our Lord, which did not separate from the Compassion of Mary; Saint Joseph and the Holy Family. That is why he wanted St. Joseph to be his Patron and on the day of his confirmation he added "Joseph" as his confirmation name. Also, the devotion to the Apostle St. John, the Virgin's favorite son. Other devotions were the feast of All Saints and of the Guardian Angels.

The priest William Joseph Chaminade lived in a state of habitual union with God and of continuous prayer. Don Eugenio Canette said that he had "the joy of accompanying Good Father Chaminade on Thursdays, as he returned from the Novitiate of San Lorenzo to the Oratory of the Madeleine; I brought him the breviary, while he did not cease to recite the rosary and other prayers."

The inner beauty of his soul was reflected in the attractiveness of his features. His facial features, already distinguished, possessed a serene beauty and a venerable appearance, reinforced by his gentle character and outward modesty, which inspired respect and confidence in all who approached him. The Marianist Joseph Fabriès affirms that Father Chaminade "had a friendly exterior, a sympathetic physiognomy, a permanent sweetness, distinguished and simple manners at the same time, of such a benevolent welcome that it opened hearts to him and disposed them to receive the influence of grace; I was completely fascinated."

In 1835, at the age of 74, his passport said that he had graying hair and that he was one meter, sixty-eight centimeters tall. His features were pleasant, with a high and clear forehead, gray eyebrows, light-gray eyes, a medium-sized nose and mouth and a round and slightly raised chin and the complexion as a whole was fair.