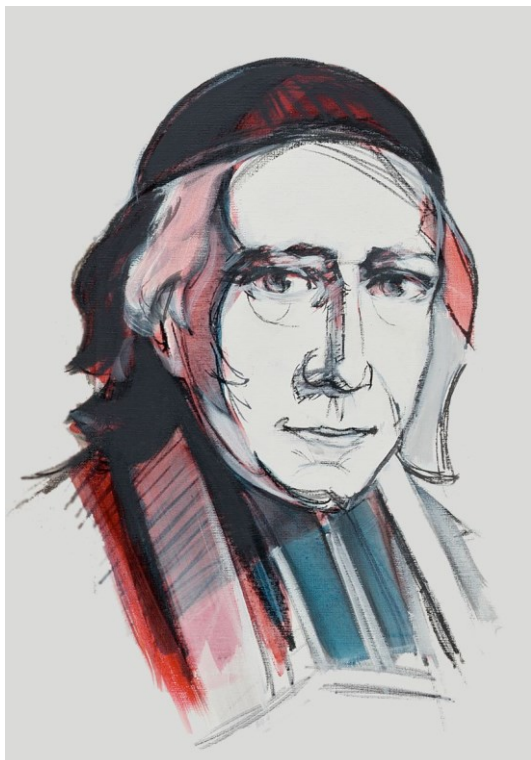


He humbled himself

It is said that humility is a minor virtue. But this is not the case. It is the quality of Christ, the Lord, who reveals that his heart is "meek and humble" and exhorts his disciples to learn from him. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents humility as the quality of the eternal Word of the Father, who has taken on the weakness of our flesh and our death (nn. 525, 559, 724, 2612). Indeed, Jesus had a humble birth and lived a simple and poor life among the peasants of Galilee. To these poor people he proclaimed the Kingdom of God, freed them from the dominion of the evil one and cured them of their diseases. In the end, he died poor and abandoned. Therefore, humility is an intrinsic quality of the disciple of Christ.

Humility consists in the self-denial of our egoistic self, centered on ourselves, clinging to the possession of material goods, power and predominance over others. In the temptations, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, "I will give you the power and the glory of all this, because it has been given to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you kneel before me, everything will be yours" (Lk 4:5-7). St. John the Baptist recognizes that "He must increase, and I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). St. Teresa of Jesus taught that humility is "walking in truth," in the truth of who we are before God. Therefore, humility is the opposite of pride, arrogance and self-sufficiency.



This small but great virtue excellently describes Father Chaminade, who acknowledged before the Bishop of Saint Claude, Msgr. de Chamon: "Do not be afraid, Monseigneur, to punish me by making your observations to me [...]. I have understood a little, it seems to me with the help of faith, these words of Our Lord: Truly I say to you, if the grain of wheat, etc. How will the Society of Mary be sustained and multiply if I do not die completely to myself, if I am not deeply humiliated and rejected as absolutely useless? May only the name of the Lord and his august Mother be glorified" (November 23, 1845).

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The Good Father was always modest and humble before God and others; he always kept a reserved silence about his own person and never wanted his apostolic works to make noise before the general public. Father Caillet explained that Chaminade "was very sober about details of his life and that he almost never spoke about it"; and Father Chevaux repeated that the Good Father used to say: "All glory to God and to us, miserable collaborators, only confusion" [Fr. Carlos Demangeon, S. M., in *Positio sobre virtudes heroicas*. 1929, p. 1006]. He did not direct the exercise of his priesthood to the search for honors. However, he was able to make an ecclesiastical career when he returned from exile in 1800 the Holy See appointed him Administrator of the diocese of Bazas; but, when Bazas was absorbed into the archdiocese of Bordeaux, Father Chaminade hastened to resign his position to the archbishop, Monsignor d'Aviau, to devote himself fully to directing the Marian Sodality. In a wonderful letter of June 19, 1802, he reveals that "about eighteen months ago the holy Archbishop of Auch [Monsignor de la Tour du Pin] forced me, in some way, to accept the administration of

this diocese. Because of the affection and respectful obedience I have for him and, even more, because of the love that God has inspired in me for his Church, I yielded to his pressing invitations and added this heavy burden to my numerous occupations that the [pastoral] situation of the city of Bordeaux and the abandonment, above all, of the youth, demanded of me."

Priest Chaminade was neither arrogant nor domineering. He never felt himself to be the owner of the institutions he had founded, but an instrument of God to found and govern them. For this reason, he is helped by his disciples. At the head of the Marian Sodality there was a lay director, even though Fr. Chaminade was the Director. He entrusted the direction of the work of the chimney cleaners – which he had created and organized – to the young sodalist and disciple Dupuch. For the drafting of the Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary (the *Institute of Mary*) it was entrusted to its secretary David Monier. He also entrusted M. Monier with examining the purchase of the large estate of Saint-Remy. Likewise, he was represented by Father Caillet in the very important negotiation with the Government for the civil approval of the Society of Mary.

Humble toward others, because he was humble with himself, he did not boast of his works or arrogate to himself the success of their works; rather, he attributes the success to God. In a letter to a relative, the Good Father lets him know that the success was not due to his personal qualities, but to the fact that he did not undertake any work without following the course of Providence, "when I can distinguish it" (April 19, 1823). Another example of his humility is given to us when, in an 1819 plea to the Holy See, Monsignor d'Aviau wrote a note of introduction, describing him as "a wise director of the Sodality." In the transcription that M. Chaminade made of the supplication, he was careful to omit the qualifier "wise" [P. Henri Rousseau, S. M., in *Positio sobre virtudes heroicas*.1929, p. 998]. With the young and somewhat vain Lalanne he has many theological discussions, in which he patiently endures the arrogances of his disciple; on November 16, 1830 he writes to him: "I am convinced that I am full of defects [...]; today I have convinced myself of it again." The same sentiment is expressed in his memoir of February 26, 1845 to His Holiness Gregory XVI, when he confesses that "it is very certain that your unworthy son is full of miseries and natural defects and that,

humanly speaking, he is unfit for the great things to which God has called him." He acknowledged to the Bishop of Saint Claude, Bishop de Chamon: "Ah, Monsignor, at the height of my years I could not do anything, and least of all at present; I have need of divine grace [...]. God has chosen the weak of the world to confound the strong" (September 25, 1847). From his words we see that he did not boast of his foundations; he considered them to be works of God and sees them as insufficient works, of little importance. He always calls the Society of Mary "la petite Société" and writes so in the first article of the Constitutions: "The little Society which under the auspices of Mary offers its short services to God and the Church". But being modest and humble, he was not faint-hearted in his actions. The Good Father used to repeat that " *courage* is not opposed to humility, nor humility to *courage*" [to Don Domingo Clouzet, July 19, 1831]. For this reason, he was determined in his undertakings: "What is it that we cannot do under the auspices of Our Great Mother and Patroness?" [Circular of January 4, 1834].



Group of Argentine pilgrims, with Monsignor Agustin Cortés, on September 4, 2000, in the atrium of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, at the end of the Thanksgiving Eucharist for the beatification of Father Chaminade.

A very sensitive soul, the priest Chaminade was well aware of his personal sins and limitations. After a life full of merits and all of it consecrated to the good of religion, he wrote in 1834 to Father Leon Meyer: "If you were to reach my years [I was 73 years

old] I hope you do not have the interior reproach that I prove of not having served God better." This feeling of personal inadequacy increased over the years; near the end of his days he went so far as to say: "What a difference between the defects of this displeased old man and the talents, vigour and poise of Messrs. Caillet, Clouzet and Roussel!" [April 9, 1847]. "Oh! -he said to Father Leon Meyer [October 12, 1844], "I have so many defects; I have committed so many infidelities; I have the eyes of my conscience so bleary! Pray for me, my dear son, [...] who have so much need to save myself."

The humility of the blessed priest is manifested in his actions; for example, Fr. Gerard Sylvain tells us that when the Good Father came to the Novitiate to give a lecture to novices and members of the communities of Bordeaux on the new drafting of the Constitutions, Fr. Collineau, in a bad mood because he had not been consulted in this work, he allowed himself to interrupt the speaker and contradict him in public. The Good Father, in a supreme exercise of humility, preserved his usual calm, without letting us guess by a single word, not by a single gesture how much he felt affected by such an inconceivable lack of respect that was due to him [don Miguel García, S. M., in *Positio sobre virtudes*. 1929, p. 993]. But the Good Father knew how to reconcile his duty as superior general with the virtue of humility. If, on the one hand, he experienced a feeling of inadequacy and personal impotence, on the other hand, he affirmed his mission and his authority as founder. "I am not a founder," he wrote on April 18, 1846, "but because I believe that Jesus Christ has asked me to do so, and I am confirmed in this persuasion by the representative of Jesus Christ on earth [the Pope]." To Father Lalanne he manifests without blushing that "I do not possess the Society except as a work of God. I believe myself the most incapable of men to govern it; but the Lord is my light and sustains me" (October 10, 1835).

The greatest testimony of humility was given during the difficulties with his Councilors after his resignation as Superior General: humiliations, bitterness, reproach, were not lacking; he was slandered before the bishops and accused of rebellion before the Holy See. However, he did not feel dejected, but retained his inner serenity and even a certain spiritual consolation, as he reveals when he writes: "If the end of the struggle comes to be humiliating for me, I will have gained, I hope, something for heaven and

for the atonement of my sins." "What goodness to die humiliated and annihilated, in the spirit of men, for love of the divine Crucified!" (September 1844). In fact, he did not make a more humble act than that of his resignation as superior general, at the request of his Councilors; and if the Good Father continued to claim his authority over the religious, it was to put an end to the abuses against the Constitutions and the misrule into which the Society fell after his resignation; and this, because of his quality as founder and guarantor of the founding spirit. For, if this conflict had been about his person, he affirms that "I would keep silent voluntarily, to resemble Jesus Christ"; but, he adds, "it is not allowed for me, founder of the Society of Mary, to give the scandal of being looked at as a rebel and to let my foundations lose." In this regard, on February 26, 1845, he wrote to the Pope: "How can it be supposed that your unworthy son, already on the verge of the grave [he was 83 years old], weary after so long of heavy burdens, which he bears only with fatigue and sorrow, still seeks them out of ambition?" And to the Archbishop of Bordeaux: "If I have said more than is necessary in my situation, I am ready to present you with my humble excuses, because I believe myself to be fallible, and perhaps more fallible than all the others" (September 24, 1844).