



MSFS

Live your charism

I have chosen you. Jn 15:16

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MONTHLY RECOLLECTION

In preparation for the Celebration
of the General Chapter 2025

Recollection 1/12. November 2023

THEME:

Gratitude

Recalling the Past;
Remembering the departed ones.

WORD OF GOD

- Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. (Psalm 100:4)
- Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)
- And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)
- Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

LESSONS FROM ST. FRANCIS DE SALES / FR. MERMIER / OTHERS

- Our gratitude for all that God gives us should spill over into our relationships with one another. What better way to show our gratitude to God than by being generous to one another? Francis de Sales.
- “Who are you, O God? And who am I?” One of the daily prayers of St. Francis de Sales.
- It is beneficial to meditate on the virtue of gratitude in Mother Mary: Fr. Peter Mermier Magnificat is a clear example of the grateful heart of Mother Mary.
- Fr. Mermier felt deeply grateful to those who visited him during his last days of illness. His humility made it difficult for him to understand how others especially the authorities deigned to occupy themselves with a poor person like him whom he considered “no longer good for anything”.
- Young religious must know the history of their religious institutes and that would make them grateful to those who struggles to establish things: Pope Francis
- I AM because We ARE. John Samuel Mbiti (1931–2019) African Philosopher.

GENERAL REFLECTIONS

From 1838 to 2023 it is 185 years! During these years around 700 confreres were called to eternal life, and they have gone before us. Among them were young ones, aged members, bishops, priests, brothers, scholastics, novices and even some diocesan clergy who shared our life and mission. Among them, one whose name we pronounce very often is our founder himself Servant of God Father Peter Marie Mermier.

Today as a confrere when I place the letters MSFS after my name, it is because someone has given it to me. The letters MSFS speak not only of my membership in this religious family but it also reminds me of the treasure of the great heritage entrusted to my care.

During the last 50 years more than one hundred religious institutes came to a natural death. Besides there are a few who were suppressed by the ecclesiastical authorities. Some got amalgamated with other congregations. Some of those congregations were existing for than 100 years and some had only a few decades of life span.

When we analyse the origin and developments of those congregations, a truth that is revealed is that most of them were established to address some social needs such as education, health care, political stability, economic development, women empowerment etc. The members focussed on the activities to alleviate the social sufferings.

In many cases, there was no solid spiritual backing. They did not feel the need for it either. In other words, most of these congregations functioned as Corporates/NGOs. Congregations become merely a juridical entity rather than a spiritual reality. In such a scenario, where is the aspect of faith? Where is the necessity for the observation of the evangelical counsels? Faith is not a must. Consecration for God is nowhere in the scene.

What is needed: Managerial skills, communication skill, IT and Accounting skills, basic interpersonal relationship skills and above all enough of material support etc. Many lay charitable organizations do what we do today.

Our beloved religious family of MSFS is still alive... It is in our hands.... It is our heritage. Can we hand it over the next generation in good condition, or in a better condition than we received? At times do we operate and behave like managers and members of a corporate? Let us be glad that our Congregation is still alive; it is still growing because we allow the Holy Spirit to be at work with us. Real gratitude begins with the acknowledgement of goodness in one's life.

Today we feel great! We are great... We produce the fruits, or rather we ourselves are the fruits. If so do we remember with gratitude the roots and the tree? Let us look at these examples.

- Imagine an apple proudly hanging on the branch. Beautiful, appreciated by all who pass by, desired by many..... When the apple looks around, there is nothing similar to the apple on the tree.... The bark is rough, leaves are not very colourful and juicy. The roots are in the dirty mud. In what way can the fruit/ the apple take pride in what it is? The very existence is dependent on the tree. The fruit got the name apple, only because it was born on an apple tree.
- In a relay race when the last participant reaches first, it is not she or he who wins but the entire team. What if he or she takes the credit for oneself?
- When we look at the awe- inspiring structure of a storey building, do we ever think of that part of the building that is beneath the ground level, the foundation? We take photos in front of such great edifices, we post the photos on social media. What about the hidden part of the building? In fact, without those hidden parts/ the foundation, the building has no existence.

Today we are the visible faces of the congregation. What we are and what we do contributes to the profile of our congregation. There are times we are like the fine apple shining on the tree, we are like the last leg in a relay race, victorious, we are like the tall storey building standing proudly high.

In our existence today as members of this congregation there are many who play the role of roots, the trunk the branches of the apple tree. There are many who carry the baton to us for last leg of the race. There are many who exercise their hidden presence by being the foundation for our lives.

In our glorious moments:

- Do we always feel grateful to the departed confreres?
- As priests do we fulfil our obligation to offer Holy Masses for the departed confreres?
- Do we really understand the struggles of the pioneers?
- Do we duly acknowledge the role of those who assist us in different ways?
- Have we duly acknowledged the role of our formators in our priestly and religious formation?
- Do we gratefully remember our parents / grandparents/ siblings and others who played a vital role in our life and growth ?
- Do we feel connected to and grateful to the Mother Church who provides us identity as priests and religious?

Gratitude is the ability to experience life as a gift. Benefits of gratitude include feeling more generous and compassionate toward others, being more forgiving, more outgoing and feeling less lonely and isolated. Gratitude helps us to focus on the positive aspects of our life. Gratitude can help build and maintain relationships with others, resulting in hope, life satisfaction, and more proactive behaviours toward others.

REFLECTIONS / EXCERPTS FROM THE SOURCE BOOK

During the month of November, December and January we will be focussing on the first study paper in preparation for the General Chapter. (Our sincere thanks to our confreres who were instrumental in the preparation of the Source book.)

Based on the chronology of events in the life of Fr Mermier, the first part of this first Chapter highlights twelve experiences of Fr Mermier - the milestones that shaped his vision for the Congregation. These twelve experiences constitute the core of the chapter because, the life of Fr Mermier and the initial growth of the Congregation are inseparable. Fr. Mermier considered every moment as a blessing. The 12 experiences mentioned in the first Chapter of the study paper, reflect the attitude of Fr Mermier – an attitude of gratitude. Let's closely look at the first four experiences mentioned in the document.



THE FIRST EXPERIENCE: The Childhood Experience of his Mother Madame Antoinette Bastian (1790-1813)

In this experience we see a woman faith in the person of Madame Antoinette Bastian the mother of Fr. Peter Mermier. Fr Peter Mermier was born on 28 August 1790 in Savoy. It was a time of social, religious and political turmoil after the French Revolution. The priests and religious had to go underground; they had to flee to other countries. The people became indifferent to religious practices for they were like sheep without shepherd.

The mother of Fr Mermier, brought up in the school of the Visitation suffused with the spirit and spirituality of St Francis de Sales, reached out to the underground priests by providing to them clandestinely the house barn to celebrate the Eucharist. Besides, on her own initiative, she would gather the children and teach them catechism, as a way of carrying on the mission of the pastors to the uncared flock. Fr Mermier as a child watched carefully the social and religious situations in Savoy. Besides, he admired his mother's courage, confidence and service to the people in that situation. The seed of vocation was already sown.

As a priest, when he looked for ways to revive the faith of the people in his parishes, we can safely conclude that the inspiration of his mother must have surely influenced him to commit himself to the preaching of parish missions. Fr Mermier regretted that he did not speak sufficiently of his mother. He says: "I regret for not having written anything of my mother. My God, how much I owe her. No, no, she was not an ordinary woman." She had shown him extraordinary and creative ways to do something for the renewal of faith.

Fr. Mermier says, I regret for not speaking sufficiently of this mother. This is the experience of many of us.

- When our dear ones are alive and when they are around us, we do not feel their worth. We take people for granted.
- At times some of us feel, if only I had spent a little more time with my parents! If only I could pay a visit to that priest before he died!
- The greatest reality about each one of us is that we are still alive. Let us learn to express gratitude to all. The faith of the mother of Fr. Mermier communicated to him generates the fruits in the form of the MSFS Congregation and in the form of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod. We are all part of that fruit.
- We all form parts of the fruits borne by Faith of Fr. Mermier. Every fruit contains seeds. That is the mechanism of the nature.
- Are we ready to discover what lies within us and allow the seeds of faith to germinate and bear fruit for the coming generation?

THE SECOND EXPERIENCE: The Magland Experience of the New Priest (1813-1816)

Fr. Mermier as a young priest knew well the importance of spiritual accompaniment – a thing which was also emphasized by our patron St. Francis de Sales. The most important thing in spiritual direction is to have the right choice of person to be the director.

In 1813, Fr Mermier was ordained a priest and his first appointment was as the Assistant Pastor at Magland. Here he obtained a valuable spiritual guide in Fr Desjacques, the Parish Priest of Magland. Even after Fr Desjacques retired, Fr Mermier could seek his valuable advice. Fr Mermier confided to him his fears as well as his plans. In his first appointment, Fr Mermier learnt the value of a spiritual guide, how to temper zeal and to have a personal rule of life and discipline.

Even later at Melan he seeks the guidance of Fr Desjacques to discern his vocation to be a missionary and religious. Fr Desjacques asks him to test the inspiration and get clarity before he makes his decision.

When we were young, especially during the initial formation, some persons accompanied us spiritual guide.

- Do we gratefully remember our spiritual guides and confessors?
- Do we know who baptized us, those who prepared us for the first communion?
- Those of us who are priests, do we remember the bishop who ordained us?
- If they are no more alive, do we include them when we pray for the departed souls?

THE THIRD EXPERIENCE: The Melan Experience of a Teacher and Disciplinarian (1816-1819)

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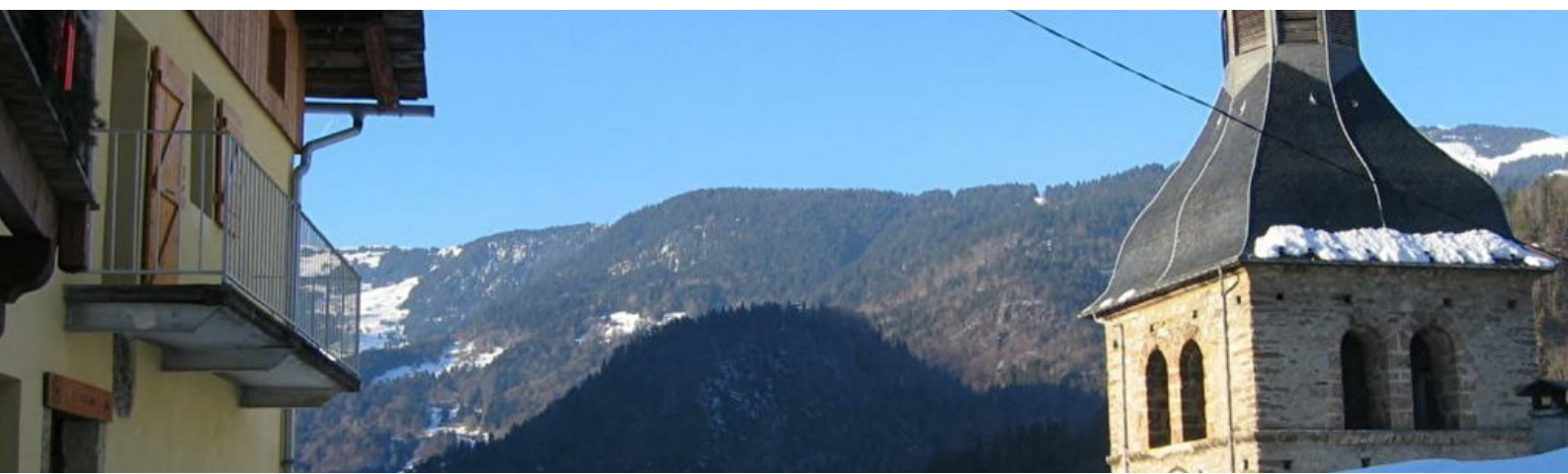
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THE FOURTH EXPERIENCE: Le Chatelard, the First Parish Mission Preaching (1819-1822)

Appointed as parish priest of Le Chatelard parish, Fr Mermier finds the people in a most pathetic state of indifference and ignorance of faith, although sufficiently wealthy.

With the help of Fr Joseph Marie Favre, a famous mission preacher of those days, Fr Mermier conducted missions to revive the parishes. Although it was very challenging in the beginning, when they approached the situation prayerfully, it began to bear fruit. When we analyze the entire process, the truth that is revealed to us is that it is not mere preaching alone, nor prayer alone that can change people. Both the preaching and the prayer are equally important. Missions must be preceded by and accompanied by adequate prayerful preparations and intercessions.

- How do we prepare ourselves for the administration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharistic celebration?
- Is the holy Mass for me a mere ritual which I need to perform every day?
- Is the Salvation of the soul, something important for me?
- How do I prepare my homilies and instructions?
- Do I take interest in catechizing the people?
- Do I feel for the one that is lost? Or am I happy to remain in the comfort zone of remaining with the 99?
- Do we organize/ take up Parish Mission Preaching for the renewal of the entire parish?
- What is the quality of my personal life?
- Am I able to be part of a team?



Anecdotes / Quotes / Notes

A man used to buy every time six loaves of bread. Also whatever he used to buy from that shop he used to buy in six pieces. One day the shop keeper asked him. Why do you buy all the time things in six pieces?

The man replied:

2 for consumption

2 for paying back

2 for investment.

The shop keeper did not understand anything. The man continued. The two loaves for consumption are for me and my wife. Two are for our parents. When I give two loaves to our parents, we are paying back what they invested in us when we depended on them as kids. The last two loaves are for our two kids. When we feed them, it is like investing for the future with the hope that in our old age, they will pay us back.

Today what is our obligation as MSFS to pay back and to invest ?

Prayer

Eternal and ever living God, we thank you for calling us to life and to the Catholic faith. We thank you for our vocation to be religious in the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. We thank you for the inspiration given to Fr. Peter Marie Mermier to found our Congregation. We thank you for all those who have guided the destiny of our congregation to this day.

With sincere gratitude we remember all our departed confreres. Pardon their sins and failures. May they enjoy the eternal peace according to your holy will. Help us to keep alive the missionary legacy handed over to us. Give us the wisdom, courage and good will to preserve, nurture and communicate our heritage to coming generation. May your Holy Spirit help us to live our charism to the full that all may have life in abundance, through Christ our Lord.

St. Francis de Sales, Pray for us

Mother of Compassion, Pray for us

Servant of God Fr. Peter Mermier, Pray for us.

We must never undervalue any person. The workman loves not that his work should be despised in his presence. Now God is present everywhere, and every person is His work. St. Francis de Sales

Prepared by

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