

***Mennaisian
Novena
Nº. 40***



PRESENTATION

* The year goes on fast. We have already reached the month of May, the most beautiful one, the month of flowers... at least in the North Hemisphere. This is why the Christian tradition has attributed it to Mary.

* This is also why we have chosen this theme for our monthly novena: the Virgin Mary in the writings of Jean-Marie. We are well aware that our Founder was eloquent when he was speaking of Mary. The cover of our leaflet shows the figure of Mary in a « mennaisian style ».

* We will also keep on our presentation on Br. **Gerardo Aizpuru**, a brother whom many consider as a **saint**.

* And coincidence ? In the last three months, two *biographies of Jean-Marie de La Mennais* have been published... We have already introduced one in a previous issue of the novena, you will find the other one in this issue: it has the taste of youth, of dream, of hope...

* A novelty? We receive a letter from an authentic mennaisian teacher, who joined the mennaisian contest with perseverance and enthusiasm. We got also other letters, some from young children but they will be published later... be patient!

* * * * *

Rome, May 1, 2012
Br. Delfín López, Postulator

Prayer for the beatification of John Mary de la Mennais

O God our Father, you have given
John -Mary de la Mennais,
a generous heart and untiring zeal
to make your Son Jesus Christ
known and loved especially by the children and
youth.

As we venerate him as the Founder
of two religious congregations
devoted to Christian education,
we pray to you that he may soon
be recognized as Blessed.

Help us follow his example
at the service of truth,
and grant us through his intercession,
the favours we are now asking...

(silent pause)

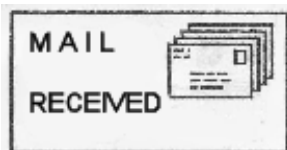
Through Jesus-Christ our Lord

O Lord Jesus, glorify your servant,
Venerable Jean-Marie de la Mennais

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A Letter from a Mennaisian Educator




How are you, brother? Here we have just finished the ourselves with much enthusiasm for our recollection that will be held at Potrerillos. It is normal to feel a certain tiredness at the end of a school year, but however I spent that year in great joy in our school which I like so much.

In our school, we reflect often on our particular vocation, and I want to thank you for having been an instrument of God to awake me to my vocation as an educator at school. Sometimes, and even often, I feel sad and doubtful about the way I live my mission at school, about my attitudes and words: are they really a witness to God's love? But my joy comes back when I realize that the Lord can achieve great things in spite of my limits and smallness.

This year, I was involved in catechesis at first level. It was a new experience for me. I say 'involved' because we have worked on the theme of 'holiness': how to live it in our daily life, in our family, etc, while being true sowers of holiness: how to live our ordinary lives in an extraordinary way? I enjoyed working on that theme, but I also found it quite demanding by the amount of things to do, to actualize: schedules, play roles, doubts, violence, shyness...etc.

But it is nice to realize that every day we can become a better person, get closer and closer to Him through what we are doing.

The other day, I read the testimony of a Saint who experienced visions of hell and its eternal suffering, and I discovered how difficult it is for me to win over souls for heaven, that not a single one be lost, that all souls be able to encounter God... In my times of spiritual dryness and desolation, I feel powerless to fulfill my mission as an educator but then I come out of that feeling of distress, and I am able again to see His Face and touch His Hands... More than ever I believe in the Love the Lord has for us, sinners. In that do I find my assurance and my unique rest.

Such is my life! I am still living with my parents, brothers and sisters. Next year will mark my 10th anniversary of being a teacher in that school: what a joy I feel deeply every day to work in such a place, to discover the Lord through the mennaisian spirituality that transforms my heart little by little. In this letter, I wanted to greet you because we are about to begin the Christmas Novena, and I wanted to be united in prayer, so that we may prepare in our hearts the manger where the Child Jesus will come to rest. V. E. F. 

Novena to Jean-Marie: how to do it?

A remark: It is important to put ourselves in the proper spirit and enter into the suggested theme, as explained on p. 5- 6 of this leaflet: the meaning of the theme and how it was reflected in the life, words and actions of Jean-Marie.

This is only a suggestion. There are other ways to make the novena: For example:

Steps:

- a) We start with the sign of the Cross
- b) We mention our prayer intentions (p. 7)
- c) We read the 2 daily thoughts of Jean-Marie (p. 8 - 9).
- d) We recite the prayer for his beatification (p. 15)
- e) We end with the sign of the Cross.

This method is simple, and can last from 3 minutes to... 15 minutes, if you want!

We can also use profitably the suggested reflection on p. 14, reflecting upon one specific question every day, and then choose one to reflect in group and to share with others.

The rest of this leaflet is to deepen your knowledge of Jean-Marie and of the Congregation.

Our double cover page

It represents figures made by a teacher from Buenos Aires: Hector Freire. He made a serious effort to send these drawings to me in time for the novena.

Thank you very much, dear friend Freire!

The two covers show the Virgin Mary. The month of May is dedicated to her in the North Hemisphere. I am sure that our mennaisian friends of the South Hemisphere will join us this month to honour our dear Mother.

On the front page, Jean-Marie seems to invite us to go to Mary, *our mother in Heaven!* And the children run towards her with joy! And Mary has her arms open to welcome them all, saying: *Come with me, and I will lead you to my Son, your Brother Jesus. And you know:*

We are waiting for you in Heaven!



Short text to meditate ... Me, a saint ?

To be saints !

... There is a phrase that we find often in the Old Testament : *“Be holy, as I the Lord am holy !”*

And in the New Testament, Paul reminded the first Christians : *“Paul and Timothy... greet the saints in Colossus, their faithful brothers in Christ”* (Col. 1, 1-2)

In fact, holiness is a typical mark of the Church : **« the Church is holy »**. The saints are the counterweight of those who fall into sin. Sometimes scandals and deviations mar the beauty of the Church, but in opposite we can see the beauty of those who live their Christian life with simplicity and total trust in God, **walking on the footsteps of the slain Lamb, Jesus** : he who has offered his life for our salvation, so that at the end, we may all reach the goal of holiness in heaven.

For sure we deeply desire that, but maybe we harbour a certain doubt . Jean-Marie de la Mennais wrote to his friend Querret : *“I do not know why we are almost afraid of being called saints on earth, even though we have indeed to be saints on earth if we want to live in heaven afterwards.”*

...Maybe we have a wrong idea of what holiness is, considering saints only those with « aureole » ! The others – the non-canonized – form a majority ! Surely you have recognized some among your elders, even among those with whom we have spent some years.

To be a ‘saint’ does not mean to be a superman, nor reaching high spheres of perfection. A saint is a « real person », who, in obedience to God’s will, tries to live out his vocation, the ideal for which he has been created...

How to become a saint ? Just through following Jesus, and like Him, obeying the will of the Father **in our daily life**. Jean-Marie de La Mennais wrote to the Brothers:

“Become saints and you will make others saints, and your heaven will be richer and more beautiful ; you will go to heaven, and so will also the children entrusted to you, and share it with you.”

6.- *Some time ago, we heard about a miraculous favour obtained by a member of your group, through the intercession of Jean-Marie. Can you tell us a little more about it ?* All around our community, the knowledge and the devotion to Jean-Marie are increasing. We pray him often. Many think that the unexpected healing of a child who was supposed to be born with serious infirmities is due to his intercession. The child, against all hopes, was born healthy and is growing very well now. His name is Cristiano María.

7.- *After the novena of 2011, the office of the Postulator received several mennaisian pictures and drawings. What do they mean, and what about the Novena itself ?* At school, every morning, I tell to the children of my class, a story taken from the Gospel, the Bible, the life of the saints... During the last month, I told them the story of Jean-Marie, selecting for every day an interesting episode for the children. For that purpose, we have drawn some thirty pictures, simple but meaningful, adapted to children and even to all of us.

8.- *We know that in your “Casa de María” (Mary’s House) and in your Paul VJ school, you do the Novena every month : how do you do it, and how many participate in that novena of prayer ?*

Considering the interest in Jean-Marie, I proposed the novena to my school children first, then to their families and to the families of Mary’s House. For the small children it is a little difficult, but for the adults and families, it is an excellent way to make known the mennaisian spirituality and to recommend to our Founder all our intentions of prayer.

9. – *Would you like to add something ?* I only hope that my book will contribute a little to speed up the Cause of beatification of Jean-Marie, by making him better known to the Italian public and the local Church. At the end of my book, I specifically inserted the addresses of our main residences, for that very reason.

I would like to add that the editors were very satisfied with the serious and precise work they were offered. For a month, I received almost daily some requests for small precisions and clarifications from the editor in charge of the book. He studied it line by line. The actual presentation is very nice, the book itself is not so thick (many people are afraid to read thick books !). A few well-chosen photos give a good idea of the life of Jean-Marie and of the Congregation today.



Jean Marie de La Mennais

"Educator for a new Christian society"

N. B. This is an interview with Br. Dino de Carolis, author of a new biography on Jean-Marie de La Mennais. The book has 150 pages, divided into three parts and 28 small chapters. The style is brisk, young, optimistic, deep. It is the fruit of a serious research and of a great love for Jean-Marie.

1.- *What led you to write this book on Jean-*

Marie ?

I have published several books on young saints. I thought it would be nice to offer a biography on our Founder, written in a simple and popular style.

2.- *What was your objective ?* I wanted to make Father de la Mennais better known to the Italian public. He is not so well known at the moment. I wrote in a simple manner, easy to read, though based on a serious research, the beautiful story of that great man and educator. I am particularly targeting children, that they may find this book an easy and interesting reading.

3.- *In Italy where the Mennaisian Brothers have a very reduced presence, how do you think this book will be received ?* It is too early to tell but the first critics expressed a happy surprise and a wonder why such an important figure in the Church had not been known until now. I hope that the interest in the book will grow even more.

4.- *How did you feel when you were writing it ?* To write a biography of our Father has been for me the occasion to deepen my knowledge of my mennaisian family and to increase my pride of belonging to it. When I was writing my other books, I felt more like a « fan », a « supporter ».

5.- *The writing on Jean-Marie entailed a deep knowledge : how do you see Jean-Marie now ?* Of course, I already knew much about our Founder, his life has always fascinated me, his writings, particularly the passages on our mission some other Brothers have recently presented, have helped me much in my own life. I also consulted other biographies, trying to reveal Jean-Marie's great mission and the depth of his thoughts.



What a Joy Mary is our Mother !

From the writings of Jean-Marie de La Mennais

... We mentioned that the amount of Jean-Marie's writings on Mary is considerable and his marian devotion unsurpassable. There is a reason for that : he has inherited that, mostly from his

family !

His mother Gracienne J. Lorrin was a very pious person. She added the name « Mary » to the one of Jean. Was it a pure coincidence ? Jean-Marie was born on September 8, day the Christians celebrate the Virgin Mary's birth. And Father de la Mennais liked to recall every year the coincidence of these two dates. He always reminded the Brothers and particularly the children that they were celebrating his birthday with him. The only woman in the family was named Mary.

... But there is more ! Jean-Marie was proud to show to some of his most intimate friends a very precious paper : a commentary written by his mother on the Magnificat of the Virgin. He had found it in the family papers and kept it as a treasure.

That may explain the familiarity with which he prayed to the Virgin. And not only himself, but he also invited the children to use the same direct language when praying the Virgin Mary. Throughout the history of the congregation, many texts of Jean-Marie on Mary have been quoted, especially his sermons to the brothers. We will introduce to you some of these texts, taken particularly from his homelies, sermons and talks to the Brothers on the occasion of the annual retreat or a marian feast. Bro. Miguel Merino selected them and we will publish them for this novena, and more later on, if we have time.

Here is an example :

"Oh Mary! Virgin Mother of the incarnated Word, remember that you are also the mother of those He has called his brothers ; hold out to them your hand of love and mercy."



Thank you, Jean-Marie !

Introduction.- I am honoured to present to you the story of a favour obtained by a companion of my Novitiate. Maybe later on, he will tell you more stories, even more important favours he has obtained. (From the Editor)

The bursar of my school had tons of bills and non classified documents. One day he asked me to start ordering and classifying that huge amount of paper. I started ! Several weeks passed on while I was absorbed in that task. In a time of pause, my attention was drawn to a small box that has been used in that school for many years : it was embedded in the wall. As the key was just on the box, I was pushed by curiosity to look at what it contained. Nothing important, I believed! And the key was just there....

I inserted the key and turned it but the door did not open. I tried various letters without results, then I tried the initials of the last four superiors who had lived in that school, but no way ! I gave up, because I did not attach much importance to that box... a simple curiosity, after all !

Meal time arrived and the bursar asked me: "Did you touch the key of the safe box ? Yes, I answered. And he said with tears: "All the school money is in that safe and I have to pay the salaries of the teachers I do not know what to do!"

At the end of meal, I decided to pray our Father, then I took the phone to ask all the previous bursars and directors that had worked in that school, some were still alive. But in the whole region, nobody knew the formula to open the box.

I went to bed but I could not sleep. I was too nervous. I was seeing myself as a blacksmith working on the safe with a blowtorch !

So I got up and prayed our Venerable Founder again, and went back to school and took the key and put it in the lock again. I knew I would not succeed but...

In the morning I met the bursar and he told me : "With the key you have put in the lock, I was able to open it. How did you put it there ?" In my heart, I thanked Father de la Mennais for having suggested to me to insert the key in the safe, without even trying to open it. It was not enough to insert the key and turn it. One had also to touch a little valve that made the springs inside the safe move. And that, I did not know ! I did not say anything to the bursar, but I was full of joy and gratitude to our Father: once more, as in many other occasions, he had come to my help.

Thanks, Father de la Mennais !

Br. C. G.

For his part, Br. Gerardo was considering the Chaplain as his community superior: he opened himself to him, telling him how he used his time, etc. Gerardo was also an example for the other soldiers, whom he always related to with a great smile. For sure he had to face some problems but he faced them with serenity. In his letters he wrote about the exemplary behavior of some of his companions, soldiers like him.

* ***The chalice of sickness.*** After two years in Africa, Br. Gerardo came back in 1947, to Nanclares de la Oca, to the Novitiate and Scholasticate. But within a year, he had to accept the "chalice" of suffering, as Jesus had foreseen for the two Zebedee's sons. When someone is still young, strong, full of natural hopes, including apostolic hopes, it is very difficult to see oneself nailed down to a bed. With periods of ups and downs, he spent a decade 1947-1957 in great pain. During the last years of his life, he seemed to have recovered a little and he was appointed secretary to the Provincial, but he could never go back to teaching. The infirmary where he lived was part of a former spa station. It was deserted at that time, to avoid any risk of contagion. Which means that he spent most of his time in an almost total isolation.

* ***In the Joy of the Lord.*** At some times, he seemed to have recovered a little. He used these moments to go out and accompany the Provincial in his visits of schools. He even went to Lourdes in February 1957. In a letter to a friend, he said that he felt much better. But a month later, on March 26, he had a serious attack, from which he never recovered. His death was sudden, though not unforeseen. He could then taste the joy of the Lord, free of his pains.

* ***The good fragrance of Christ.*** - Br. Gerardo had wanted to live his religious life unnoticed. His short existence has been like the flight of sparrows, on light white wings. After his passing away, the fragrance of his holiness and the memory of his virtues spread out, wide and strong, as the "good fragrance of Christ".

(To be continued)



Our "holy" brothers ?



Brother Gerardo Aizpuru

*"A joyful and pure life :
Like that of the sparrows."*

In summary of his formation years, one of his formators at Nanclares de la Oca said : 'He never half done his work'. So it is not surprising that among his classmates, the rumor had already started that he was a « saint ».

Christian Educator.- On August 20, 1941, he began his career of educator with a small group of 18 children, for summer classes at Berrio-Otxoa (Bilbao-Spain). Today that school is one of the most famous in the congregation. Gerardo's poverty and small size earned him the nickname of "Chami". But what a joy for Gerardo to be among his pupils and teach them! Full of joy he wrote to his parents something that must have been repeated in all his classes later on : *"My pupils are very good and pious... For sure they have their flaws... Some go to Mass every day. I try to teach them how to pray with the heart. If today they are good, what will they become tomorrow ?"*

Such was the colour of all his years of teaching, not so many at Bilbao, Reinosa, Nanclares de la Oca. Always working with kindness, humbly, in fidelity to the Lord and to the Rule of Life of the Brothers. He had an excellent spiritual guide : « I entrusted my problem to the Virgin, then I went to meet a priest, and everything turned out successful.

"Military life in a Moroccan djellaba. Upon his superiors' decision and considering the particular situation of his family, he had to enroll for military service in Morocco : first at Xauen, then later at Ceuta. Alternately he was wearing his military uniform and his cassock. Sometimes he had on a dgellaba, a Moroccan cape with a hood, adopted as military uniform in those days.

From the start, he offered his services to the military chaplains. The one of Ceuta particularly noticed right away this young exceptional religious and extended his friendship to him, which helped Br. Gerardo live his religious life throughout his military training.

RECOMMENDED INTENTIONS

* **That at the example of Jean Marie de la Mennais and faithful to his words, we may accept the difficulties of life and overcome them.**

* For the young people who feel called to follow Jesus as Mennaisian Brothers.

* **For the sick people asking for our prayers :**

- * Fernando Nogales : malignant tumor.- San Borja (Bolivia).
- * Mr. Godin, requested by Br. Albert Côté (Canada).
- * Natalie Cubillo, with cancer (Madrid - Spain).
- Patrick Lebeau, tumour in the esophagus (France).
- * Olivier Meunier (12 y. old): spinal amyotrophy (Canada).
- José A. García Martínez, multiple sclerosis- Bilbao (Spain) .
- * Guadalupe Morales, congenital arthrogripale infection - Luján de Cuyo (Argentina)
- Bro. Louis Le Guichet, spinal problems - Nantes (France)
- * Clara García Roig, a special intention.- Buenos Aires (Argentina)
- Br. Pierre Tousignant, a serious cancer - Canada.
- * Mercedes A. Alvarez, advanced cancer.- Luján de Cuyo - Mendoza (A)
- Jeannine Robert, sister of Br. Jean Malo: deforming arthritis- France.
- * Lesage Dessalines, in a coma, nephew of Bro. Lamy D. (Haiti)
- Giorgio Mucci: cerebral thrombosis - Roma (Italy)
- * Michael, child of 5 y. old, sick at Santa Fe (Argentina).
- Rafael Gómez: 10 y. old, lymphatic cancer
- * Julián Castro, child with spinal problems, Luján de Cuyo (Argentina)
- Khalid Sid Imorou: brain tumor.- Parakou- Benin (Africa).
- * Romina Campostrini, lung problems - Villa Gdor.Gálvez (Argentina).
- Pía Martina, child near death - Villa Gdor Gálvez (Argentina).
- * Br. Andrés Pérez, complex cancer (Bolivia)
- Grace Nabagala, breast cancer, Masaka (Uganda).
- * Scholastica Bonabaana, heart problems - Fort-Portal (Uganda)
- Br. Benedicto de Francisco: stomach cancer - Bilbao (Spain)
- John Paul LUWAGA: for success in his studies.- Uganda
- * Stephen Louis KABITO, deaf and mute child .- Uganda
- * Shelbie Civil : 16 ans, malignant tumour.- La Vallée (Haïti).
- David Hillbom,- progressive ALS, Regina, Sask. (Canada)

* **... And the intentions placed on the tomb of the Father at Ploërmel... and those particular to each location.**

What a Joy ! Mary is our « Mother »

Words of

JEAN-MARIE de la MENNAIS



✘ May 18

* When on the Cross Jesus gave us his mother and wanted us to become her children, he made us a gift that is beyond all expectations of our gratitude.

- Let us note first of all that, to make us better feel the immensity of this gift, he chose the disciple that he loved to be the first depository: "Woman, there is your son; disciple, there is your mother." Touching words of consolation and of joy! Words that reverberate in the depth of the heart as an accent of love and the voice of mercy!

✘ May 19

* Rejoice, you happy children ! From her radiant throne of love and glory, this august Queen is looking at you, with eyes of kindness.

- Yes, she is looking at you with kindness, always ready to welcome with infinite love the humble homage of your fidelity and perseverance that you put at her feet.

✘ May 20

* How dear must such commitments be to you, brothers ! They are the source of many graces if you remain generously always faithful to them !

- Oh! How I would like to make you realize the extent of your happiness ! Once we have met a true friend who partakes our sorrows and our needs, who can alleviate them, we find ourselves much richer than if we had found a treasure.

✘ May 21

* How great must be our joy when we consider that God's mother will become our own, and that she will always be our protector and our advocate !

- Jesus, whom Mary has carried in her arms, warmed on her bosom, nourished at her breasts, assisted in his sufferings, how could he refuse her anything ?

✘ May 22

* No, my children, he agreed to obtain all that she asks and accomplish all that she wants. In some way, he delivered the keys of the heavenly kingdom into her hands.

- All those who will have imitated her virtues here below, can be assured that she will never permit them to perish, but will lead them through the waves of life to the port of immortal happiness.

✘ May 23

* When I consider the brilliancy of her holiness, when I think of the ineffable perfection with which she was adorned, I stop being surprised that she enjoys such immense power, that she is before her Son the mistress of all creatures...

- To have an idea of her dignity and grandeur, it suffices to recall that she was distinguished by a particular benediction among all the women that the Lord has blessed.

✘ May 24

* God the Father, with an infinite love for his Son, has deployed all the magnificence of his treasures to prepare for his beloved Son an abode worthy of him in this world: *elegit et praelegit eam.*

- In this way all human beings are children of God in Jesus Christ, but Mary is his daughter in a special way and much higher since he chose her from all eternity to carry in her virginal womb his Word, his Wisdom, the substantial Word.

✘ May 25

* Oh Mary ! Virgin Mother of the incarnated Word, remember that you are also the mother of those He has called his brothers ; hold out to them your hand of love and mercy.

- Listen to the cries of these poor exiles, weeping in this valley of tears, and after this exile, show them Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb. Oh dement, oh sweet virgin Mary.

✘ May 26

* Mother of my God, it is true then that you are also my mother! Ah, since it is so, I will approach you with confidence and show myself to you as I am: weak, miserable, sinful, worthy as such of all the mercy of your maternal heart.

- I will say to my mother: O Mother, here is your son; do not turn away your face from him, but rather let fall on your child one of your tears of commiseration and tenderness that will renew his heart and restore the peace taken away by the sentiment of his faults!