

MENNAISIAN NOVENA

April 2019

HOLY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Jean-Marie wrote this to the Brothers: "*You will sanctify yourselves by making your pupils saints*". This is the main goal of all apostolic action and the many and laborious activities of the Brothers.

In the time of the Founders, life was simple and permeated with a religious spirit. The Brothers could act in a welcoming context, despite the attacks of an ever more secularized society, especially in France. The Brothers and Sisters worked on the construction of a civilization whose faith was the foundation and horizon of all human activity.

The life of the school was in keeping with the liturgical calendar of the Church, with the great religious holidays marking the times of the school year. Prayer was frequent, simple and short, but regular, like the "*hour prayer*", the grace before the meals and prayers before the beginning and the end of the school activities. The catechism was studied, especially its narrative part, by telling and explaining the most striking facts of the Old and the New Testaments. This announcement of the Gospel, schematized in the catechism, was updated and illustrated by the stories of the life of the Saints, in a style perhaps a little ingenuous.

And this announcement of the Christian faith was confirmed and made alive thanks to the example of the Brothers. The very life of the Brothers and Sisters that the students had before their eyes permanently was a continual catechesis. Their continuous service, their often heroic generosity in their "work", the humility of a work whose fruits would be seen much later, the patience to begin over every day, the discreet but effective affection towards the students, the example of their prayer life ... were all aspects of a living Gospel, witnessed by countless groups of students, of holy Brothers and Sisters.

Beyond this direct missionary work, the Brothers in their schools formed their pupils in a culture imbued with faith. Their vision of Christian life, the goal of participating in a just and fraternal society, education in the sense of duty and responsibility, were the horizon on which the future of the lay Christians was to be built.

The work of Christian schools was not limited to the school setting, but extended to the entire parish community. From the beginnings of the foundation the tradition was well established to collaborate with the parishes and the clergy of the towns and villages. This collaboration was in fact a natural extension: catechism in preparation for the sacraments, preparation of liturgical songs, animation of the liturgy and the feasts ... There was a continual and fruitful sharing between the Brothers and the Sisters, and the priests of the parishes.

Another means of evangelization, and not the only one, was the participation in the ecclesial movements and associations of children and young people, the Brothers' commitment to the Marian Congregations, the Youth Eucharistic Movement, in the various branches of Catholic Action and in the Congregation associations.

In these associations and groups, one could - and still can - realize an admirable and profound work for the spiritual and human growth of young people and children in search of their own Christian vocation.

The field of missionary proclamation of the Gospel has always been the first work of the Brothers, the main purpose of the Founders and the true *raison d'être* of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, yesterday and today.