

Novena of December 2016:

"The little brothers"

Introduction

Jean-Marie was one of the eminent personalities of the Church of France in the nineteenth century. He dealt with important matters. He was often in touch with Prelates, Bishops, and Ministers. The Congregation of Saint Peter put him in contact with the most eminent intellectuals of the French Catholicism. But all this did not prevent him from being also in contact with the little ones: "his" Brothers, almost all Primary School teachers, the poor and the sick who were "sacred" to him, and, above all, those of "his" schools. He loved them, and he delighted in being in their midst, as if he was touching in them the living material of his schools, the recipients of his mission. He saw in them the very presence of Jesus. They were his smallest brothers, those with whom Jesus identified himself. "Whatever you did to one of these little ones, you did it to me." For this, in his many occupations, he took the time to meet these little children and he treated them like a real father.

Sunday 18th December 2016

Jean-Marie did not limit himself to directing the Brothers from afar with instructions, exhortations, letters ... but he sought to be closer to them, in spite of his innumerable occupations. Direct contact with them was essential to him.

He sometimes arrived unexpectedly, inquired from the Parish Priest about the progress of the school, the regularity and the fervour of the Brother. He then judiciously gave a reprimand or a word of encouragement, but always in such a paternal manner that one would be received with submission and the other with joy. He entered into the most minute details, encouraged the Brothers with his counsels, and taught them

the art so difficult of putting themselves at the level of a child. (Anecdotal life of JMLM)

Help us, Lord, to seek closeness
and living contact with people,
as you have done, you,
by making yourself one of us.

Monday 19th December 2016

Jean-Marie had the gift and the ability to get to the level of the little ones. To speak their language, to be very close to them; he made them little reproaches and filled them with kindness, and gave them little presents, as a papa does.

In class, he addressed to the little pupils short exhortations adapted to their age; he spoke to them about Our Lord or the good Mother of Heaven; he kept them attentive and moved them deeply. Virtue always has the gift of attracting hearts. When Father Jean Marie de la Mennais would finish his little sermon, he would embrace the wisest pupils, gently rebuked those who did not follow the catechism or the reading, open for all of them a box of sugared almonds which was emptied as if by magic. At the beginning or end of his visit, he put his whole world in good humour by some original trick. (Anecdotal life of JMLM)

Jesus, help us to become like little children,
to lower ourselves in simplicity and kindness
towards the little ones.

Tuesday 20th December 2016

The disciples did not accept the noisy and somewhat turbulent presence of the little children. But Jesus told them to let them come to him and embrace them. Thus did Jean-Marie passing through ranks with a paternal attitude.

In a prize-giving speech at Vitré, Father de la Borderie, a former pupil of the school, said of Father de la Mennais, who had visited his class, "I see him pass through our ranks, kissing affectionately the little ones, who blushed with pleasure, although they were a bit intimidated by his prominent nose..., all smeared with tobacco, but he knew it was in this smiling and patriarchal countenance that this great Servant of God and men has remained in my memory." (Anecdotal Life of JMLM)

Jesus, help us to be welcoming
vis-à-vis the whole world,
and in particular with the little ones,
by remaining at their side, and
by making concrete gestures of benevolence.

Wednesday 21st December 2016

Enthusiasm and joy are the great motor of confidence and communion. Jean-Marie was very happy and knew how to make everybody happy, because his heart was full of joy in the joy God, he knew he was in the hands of Providence.

Father de la Mennais, when entering a classroom did not always find a nail to hang his large hat, he graciously put it on the first head of a cherub with a pink and delighted face that he perceived near him.

Good morning, "Monsieur le Curé!" he then said to the child. And this one, solemn like an emperor, was lounging before the whole class, with that clerical headdress which fell over his eyes. The Brother did not take long to remove the hat; for, without that precaution, he would have passed by turns on the heads of each of the toddlers, proud of that honour. The good Father had already conquered all his battalion. Then the lesson of catechism would begin. (Anecdotal life of JMLM)

Jesus, help us to live in joy,
to overcome sadness
with confidence in you, and to testify to all
that your love is stronger
than any proof of love.

Thursday 22nd December 2016

Always cheerful, Jean-Marie had fun with the little children, joking with them: his educational method was that of a father who arouses joy and confidence of his children.

Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais sat enthroned with ease among the young. Joy would be read on his face. To question the children, he took their naive manners and made use of their own language. After answering him in a satisfactory manner, he would invite them to question him, being careful to answer wrongly, so as to be corrected by the most intelligent, as we have already seen, during one of his visits in a School of the Daughters of Providence. (Anecdotal life of JMLM)

Lord, make us joyful.
Remove sadness and bitterness from us.
Make our testimony of faith
be accompanied with a smile and joy.

Friday 23rd December 2016

Jean-Marie's relationships with the young people were very personalised; he did not address himself to them in a general way, but reached the heart of everyone, and each one felt loved, considered in a personal way and thus encouraged to live his own vocation.

One day Father de la Mennais visits a school; He laughs, he amuses himself for a moment, looking at the countenances, telling stories, and suddenly throws a prophetic word to a child: "You will be a parish priest." The

child becomes one day. To another: "You will be a Brother." And the second prediction is realised like the first. (Anecdotal life of JMLM)

Lord, help us
to get in touch with each person
and every young person we meet.
Let us look at each of them,
as you did and as you do for us.

Saturday 24th December 2016

Jesus' preference brought him to the smallest and the 'abandoned'. In the same way Jean-Marie: his gaze, his heart, his hands oriented him almost instinctively towards the one who needed the most love and help.

"He loved and caressed the children", Brother Jerome said, "so as to soften their hearts. During a visit he made to the classes of Paimpol, I saw him take a little schoolboy on his knees, and kiss him tenderly, though that child had his head covered with purulent crusts." (Anecdotal life of JMLM)

Jesus, help us to love
and to help those most in need
and whom you have put next to us.
Make us compassionate and merciful.

Sunday 25th December 2016

At the end of the Holy Year of Mercy, the icon of the Good Samaritan helps us to fill our hearts with kindness. Jean-Marie was for everyone, especially the little ones, the image of the good Samaritan

One day, in the House of Providence at St. Briec, Jean-Marie de la Mennais entered a classroom in a day school. There was a little girl, whose disease had isolated her from the others and caused her to fear to be in their

company so as not to contaminate them with her miseries too visible and repugnant. The Venerable narrates many stories that amuse children; bursts of laughter spread everywhere in the classroom. Suddenly he goes to the sick child, quite confused in her corner. He kisses her tenderly, blesses her and retires.

The girl returns home in the evening, and the mother exclaims:

"What doctor healed you at the convent this afternoon?"

"None, but a priest visiting the class made the students laugh a lot, then he came to me, kissed me on the forehead, and from that moment I no longer suffer."

The child was cured. (De la Villerabel)

Help us, Jesus, to be sensitive
and attentive to the sick,
to the isolated, to the "invisible",
especially those who are close to us on a
daily basis:
in the family, at school, at work and in the
Community.

Monday 26th December 2016

The 26th of December reminds us of the death anniversary of our Father. He gave his whole life for the children and the young people. Today the new generations experience a lot of things, but often they lack guidance, the education and the personal relationships that make them grow. Let us entrust them to the protection of Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

The word of God

At that very hour Jesus trembled with joy under the action of the Holy Spirit, and said: «I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, thou hast hidden these things from the learned and the wise and revealed them to the little ones. Yes, Father, because such was thy good pleasure. (Luke 10:21).

The word of the Church

The Synod Fathers also wished to emphasise that “one of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today’s cultural reality and the powerful influence of the media”. “The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian initiation, through welcoming communities”. At the same time I feel it important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a “most serious duty” and at the same time a “primary right” of parents. This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them. The State offers educational programmes in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. Schools do not replace parents, but complement them. This is a basic principle: “all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorisation”. Still, “a rift has opened up between the family and society, between family and the school; the educational pact today has been broken and thus the educational alliance between society and the family is in crisis”. *Amoris laetitia, n° 84*

The word of Jean-Marie

"During the five days that his body was exposed in the great Community Hall, transformed into a fiery Chapel, after being subjected to the embalming, a considerable affluence never ceased to venerate his coffin; It was a continual procession. The whole town of Ploërmel, and the neighboring countryside, hastened to it. There was, as it were, the stamp of his life, an extraordinary crowd of

little children, all of whom seemed to have lost their father. (Ropartz, 481)

- Choose a suitable song for each day
- We pray for the sick, those in difficulty, and for the following intentions (we can say them out loudly)

Prayer for the Beatification of Jean-Marie de la Mennais

God our Father,
you gave Jean-Marie de la Mennais,
a generous heart and an unwavering zeal
to make known and loved your Son Jesus
and his Gospel.

Grant us to follow his example.
Give us to build united and fraternal Communities.
Help us to proclaim your Gospel to the youth of
today.
For the glory of your Name, grant that the holiness
of Jean-Marie de la Mennais
may soon be recognised and proclaimed by the
Church.
Deign to grant us, O Lord, through his intercession,
the healing of the persons recommended...
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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