

1. Here is what I want

The twelve priests and seminarians who went to the shrine of Fourvière on July 23, 1816, and pledged themselves to found the congregation of Mary, considered Jean-Claude Courveille to be their leader. Courveille had been the first to bring to light the idea of a Society of Mary. Father Gabriel-Claude Mayet, the chronicler of the early Society, hands down to us Courveille's account of the inspiration in the cathedral of Le Puy that was the basis of his action as he remembered it about 40 years after the event.

DECEMBER 1853

NARRATIVE ON THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY,
BASED ON LETTERS OF DOM COURVEILLE OF 1852

In 1812, while renewing his same promise to Mary, at the foot of the same altar, "he heard, not with his bodily ears but with those of the heart, interiorly but very distinctly: Here is what I want. I have always imitated my Divine Son in everything. I followed Him to Calvary itself, standing at the foot of the Cross when He gave His life for man's salvation. Now in heaven, sharing His glory, I follow His path still, in the work He does for His Church on earth. Of this Church, I am the Protectress. I am like a powerful army, defending and saving souls. When a fearful heresy threatened to convulse the whole of Europe, my Son raised up His servant, Ignatius, to form a Society under His name, calling itself the Society of Jesus, with members called Jesuits, to fight against the hell unleashed against His Church. In the same way in this last age of impiety and unbelief, it is my wish and the wish of my Son, that there be another Society, one consecrated to me, one which will bear my name, which will call itself the Society of Mary and whose members will call themselves Marists, to battle against hell..." (words of M. Courveille).

[OM 718, 1-21]

Edwin L. Keel, s.m., A Book of Texts for the Study of Marist Spirituality,
Rome: 1993, pp. 3-4

In spite of the painful experiences the name of Jean-Claude Courveille can evoke, Marists realize that the revelation of Le Puy plays a central role at the beginnings of their Society. We are struck by the militant vocabulary that Mary uses. It alerts us to the stark reality that today we do not live in an ideal, harmonious and timeless world, but in an age of horrendous violence, injustice and greed.

