



## OUR FOUNDER TODAY



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### ON PILGRIMAGE TO FOURVIÈRE

Dear Confrere,

For the 159<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of SMA, next December 8<sup>th</sup>, I invite you to climb to Fourvière with Bishop de Brésillac and his companions during their pilgrimage of 1856. It was the day of the patronal feast of the shrine and of the city of Lyon. Our Founder celebrated the 8:00 mass and then, before the statue of Mary, he offered *"our enterprise to Mary"* and renewed the resolution *"to dedicate ourselves to the work of the African Missions"*. Thirty-four years later, Fr. Planque would say on this subject, *"The event was great primarily due to the faith and the confidence of our venerated founder"* (Sermon for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1890. AMA 2 B 20).

In the Mass celebrated by de Brésillac on this day, as in any Eucharist, Christ renewed a past (his life, his death and his resurrection) which became a "today" of grace for a future according to God's plan. Likewise, the act of foundation accomplished on this occasion by de Brésillac was neither improvised nor an isolated gesture: it was the culmination and the fruit of a past rich in sacrifices and grace for a present and a future of service in mission to Africans.

Dear confrere, in your spiritual pilgrimage to Fourvière, you are invited to live a "today" of grace by the presence of your past missionary life and of your present one, where you renew the offering of your life to the Lord through the Virgin Mary for a future according to what God wants of you. You are called to continue the founding of SMA. Nothing grandiose: you only need to have faith and confidence in He who has called you and to be convinced that he is with you every day of your journey in his service.

One doesn't become a founder from one day to the next. The Lord is the best trainer for us. Before calling someone to mission, He prepares the person. He sometimes puts the one to be called into difficult conditions, or even has the person experience failures, all so that the person will learn not to rely upon his own strengths, but only on His divine grace. He develops the person's natural abilities for service that is well done and according to His logic, which is not that of the world but that of the Paschal mystery which has been given to us.

One of the things I greatly admire in the life of our Founder is his daily commitment to service that is well done. This can be observed from when he was Vicar in Castelnaudary, during his formation as a missionary in Paris and his training in Pondicherry, in mission at Salem, as the Superior of the seminary of Pondicherry, as the Bishop of Coimbatore, through his relations with the Holy See, as the Founder of SMA and the Apostolic Vicar in Sierra Leone.

To the missionaries in Pondicherry he said, *"We are not free. We who are missionaries must be continually at the work of God. [...] It is necessary that we be in the work of God, that we be completely in that work, immersed in it, identified with it, engulfed in its accomplishment; it is essential that this work be our life, our raison d'être"* (Retreat to missionaries, p. 38-39).

Everywhere and always, de Brésillac searched not only to work, but to work well, that is to say, in what is required for "the work of God". Actually, this refers to work that needs a special, unique ability: that of being, above all else, intimately united with Christ, the missionary of the

Father, the Alpha and the Omega of all mission in His name. It is He who each day sends us out and guides us. With His Spirit, He teaches us to recognize this work in His presence and His message in the Word Incarnate as it pertains to the life of the world and the goal of a new creation. Therefore, we find in Him the choices for a mission capable of responding, in an appropriate manner, to the challenges of our world and to the signs of our times, which are rapidly changing.

This spiritual competence is also the first condition for any foundation. It makes it possible for us to vigorously and courageously progress in response to the call of the Lord, of his Church and of humanity which, at every moment, presents us with its dramas. At the same time, it prevents us from falling victim to mediocrity, compromises, the occasionally anguishing search for human and material security, the cult of personality, the various pleasures the world offers and, finally, of precious time that is lost. These "diseases" make any foundation futile.

Finally, it is said that in today's world there is very little consideration for the past. We live practically running through the present, and the future is always arriving more rapidly. For us, then, it is even more necessary to be a group well-founded, with a precise identity, clear, truly united in Jesus Christ and able to live and walk "*absolutely as the apostles*" according to the words and the spirit of our Founder.

Dear confrere, wishing you a good pilgrimage to Fourvière and a good celebration!

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