

Returning to Our Roots to Remember Why We Said Yes



There are places that we simply visit, and there are places that, in some way, become part of us.

La Neylière is one of them.

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During this month of August, the five of us from Casa di Maria in Rome - Hansford, Manuele, David, Joseph, and I, Eduardo - have been preparing to make our perpetual vows in the Society of Mary. During these days, we have had the opportunity to live an experience that goes far beyond visiting some of the places where our story began.

We came to France to discover our roots. But little by little, we have realized that returning to our roots also means asking ourselves again who we are and, above all, why one day we said yes to God in the Society of Mary.

From La Neylière, we have visited several places that preserve the memory of our beginnings. Each of them has helped us to come closer to the story of our first brothers and, at the same time, to look at our own vocation with new eyes. In Saint-Bonnet-le-Troncy and La Barbery, we began to understand that our history is not found only in books. It is also found in places, faces, and people who still keep the



memory of Fr. Colin alive. One of the moments that touched me most was seeing how carefully this memory is preserved by the community. After celebrating the Eucharist with them, we shared coffee and some pastries that they had prepared for us.

It may seem like a small detail, but for me it had a special meaning. What makes a community, after so many years, continue to open its doors and prepare a table for people who have come to remember a story that began more than two centuries ago?

Perhaps one of the most beautiful ways to keep a story alive is simply to share it around a table. At that moment, I understood that our story is more than something that happened in the past. It is still alive in the people who remember it, tell it, celebrate it, and pass it on. In this way, memory also becomes a form of hospitality.

We also had the opportunity to visit Coutouvre and Jarnosse, two places connected to the story of Jeanne Marie Chavoin. Being in Jarnosse helped me understand why Nazareth meant much more to Jeanne-Marie than simply being the place where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived. Nazareth was also about everyday life, community, relationships, simple work, and the possibility of growing together.

“*Fourvière was, without a doubt, one of the most moving experiences. Entering the basilica and seeing its rich Marian character was beyond a spiritual experience for us.*”





It was also a theological and deeply human experience. But our experience at Fourvière didn't end with the visit to the basilica. We also had the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist in the small chapel where the **Fourvière Pledge** took place.

During the **Eucharist**, we placed our names on the altar, alongside the names of the missionaries who came before us. We also repeated the words of the Pledge that those first Marists pronounced before Mary. Through this simple gesture, we felt that **our story was becoming part of theirs**. What began with twelve young men almost two centuries ago was now finding a place in our own lives.

Those twelve young men once looked toward the future without knowing how far their dream would go. Almost two centuries later, we were there, saying that Pledge again and preparing ourselves to live the mission of the Society of Mary. It was a very special moment. We were no longer simply remembering the story of our first brothers. We were recognizing ourselves as part of that story and accepting, through our own lives, the mission they began.

After Fourvière, we had the joy of meeting our dear SMSM sisters. We shared a meal, many laughs, and many conversations. We also had the opportunity to learn more about their history in France through the presentations given by Sisters Alegría and Marie-Claude. Their passion for history and mission reminded us that the Society of Mary is not an individual story. It is a shared story: one family that has found different ways of responding to the mission it has received.

In **Le Puy**, we experienced in a different way what it means to bear the name of Mary.

“*To say “Society of Mary” is beyond to carry the name of someone we love. It also means accepting a responsibility. It means asking ourselves what it means to look at the world with Mary’s eyes, to be available as she was, to learn from her simplicity, and to trust in God even when we don’t fully know the way ahead. Bearing the name of Mary also means asking ourselves what we want people to find when they meet us.*”

But perhaps one of the greatest gifts of these days hasn't been only the places we have visited. It has also been **the people with whom we have shared this experience**. It has been a great joy to meet up Faustino again. He has shared some classes with us with great passion and care. Jean-Marie has always been attentive to what we need and has become a special guide for us, someone who seems to know many of the stories and secrets of the Society of Mary.

Raymond has helped us to live this experience with joy and spontaneity. He has shared many everyday moments with us and has always been attentive to us. It has also been a joy to spend time with Fr. George. Our French is still not exactly our strongest skill when it comes to having long conversations, but that hasn't stopped us from meeting each morning with joy. Sometimes, we don't need many words to feel welcomed.

Through all these people, we have discovered something simple but important: the history of the Society of Mary is not found only in the **places** we visit. It is also found in the **people** we meet. Through the way they welcome us, accompany us, teach us, and share their lives with us, they become part of the same story that we are **rediscovering**.



After each visit, we returned to La Neylière. And it is here that we have thought most about Fr. Colin. In this house, where he walked, prayed, thought, and dreamed so many times, we have also found ourselves imagining what his life might have been like.

We wonder what he would talk about, what would concern him, what he would dream about, and, above all, how he would see the Society of Mary today. Sometimes our imagination takes us even further. We like to ask ourselves:

“ *What would he think if he saw an international Society of Mary made up of men from different cultures and continents? Is this the Society of Mary he dreamed about? What would he ask us about the future of the Congregation?* ”

Perhaps he would ask us something much simpler about what we are doing here. And the answer would be: we are preparing for our perpetual vows. After years of formation, studies, community life, missions, joys, difficulties, and questions, we find ourselves once again before the decision to give our lives to God in the Society of Mary. That is why this experience comes at such a meaningful moment.

We haven't come simply to look back. We have come to remember where we come from so that we can look forward with greater clarity. But receiving a story doesn't mean keeping it in a museum. It means allowing what we have received to **continue to grow and bear fruit**. Roots don't exist to keep a tree in the past. They exist so that the tree can continue to grow.

We came to France to discover where our story began. We have found places, people, memories, and testimonies. We have walked along the same paths, celebrated the Eucharist in places that preserve our memory, and tried to imagine the hearts of those who came before us. Now we receive that same story. It is also our story. And we want to embrace it, live it, and continue it through our own lives.

Here at La Neylière, we still have a few days ahead of us - more conversations, encounters, and moments that will surely continue to help us discover what it means to be Marists today.

