



REMEMBERING VBLE. BR. GABRIEL TABORIN

Message from the Bro. Animator General: 24-11-2024



Rome, November 9, 2024

Dear Brothers, members of the Nazarene Fraternities, Aspirants FSF, Educational Communities, Christian Communities, Catechists and friends of the Sa-Fa Family:

For another year we commemorate the feast of our Founder, Venerable Brother Gabriel Taborin, on November 24. The peculiarity of this year is that we celebrate the 225th anniversary of the birth of Brother Gabriel and the closing of the 200th anniversary of his definitive departure from Belleydoux when, at the age of 25, the young Gabriel decided to found a Congregation, took the religious habit and began the educational, catechetical and liturgical animation mission which continues to this day.

During this year we have had as our motto "On mission today with Brother Gabriel". It has helped us to reflect on the mission project that he dreamed of and lived, and which continues to this day, inviting us to join in the mission and to update our mission in the world and in the Church as the Sa-Fa Family.

We close this year of celebration around Venerable Brother Gabriel with gratitude for all that we have lived and learned, and we renew our commitment to continue his work.

Gabriel, a young man in search

On November 1, we celebrated 225th anniversary of Brother Gabriel's birth in Belleydoux and we can say that he continues to live, full of energy, in the Sa-Fa Family.

When we look into the biography of a person who has lived a long and intense life, we dwell on the most significant moments of his personal story and on the human and religious traits that characterised him. The young Gabriel, in his twenties, experienced some moments that marked his life forever.

At the age of 25, the time came for him to finally emancipate himself from his family. Behind him were many family memories, rich experiences of formation, hours of reflection in search of the meaning of his life and a lot of work in the parish and in the school of Belleydoux. Nothing of what he had experienced disappeared, but was projected into a life plan, not yet well defined, but firm in the fundamental choices.

Looking at the young Gabriel, we learn that deep convictions must be manifested in the way of life that one embraces. To be made from within, from the interiority, is an art that requires time and concentration. Brother Gabriel was not born a founder, nor a teacher, nor even of humble character; he had to make himself through intense prayer, moments of interiority, reading, listening to the advice of good teachers, great sacrifices... and with the grace of God. Only in this way was he able to clarify and unify his life in a project to which he gave himself with all his being.

His vocation was above all an interior journey which he travelled with great effort until he found the treasure he carried within him. From there, he began his journey to give shape to his response. The young Gabriel, in his twenties, did not live alone, engrossed in his world and his thoughts. There were two elements that he tried to internalise and make his own. The first was his trust and abandonment into the hands of God. From his relationship with God in prayer he allowed himself to be shaped and questioned. In this way, his life took on the spirit of the Gospel which finally led him to choose to follow Jesus in religious life. The second element was the reality around him, with the concrete needs of the Society and the Church of his time. All this questioned him and asked him for concrete answers which he made a reality with his disinterested collaboration in the parish and his assiduous work as a teacher in a school he opened in his own house. We can say that Brother Gabriel's life was gradually becoming shared and generous.

Our world, rather than helping us to enter into ourselves, favours dispersion, passing experiences, apparent aesthetics, the search for what is easy, entertainment; in short, it leads us to feel more than to think, to do more than to be and to retain more than to give. Brother Gabriel's life invites us to favour paths of interiority,

to become aware of what we are and what we want and to project our life according to what we feel called to. In this way, we will live a unified, meaningful life and profession.

Young Brother Gabriel on his first steps



We know the story of his journey from Belleydoux to Saint-Claude to say goodbye to his friends and then to travel to Lyon to join the Brothers of the Christian Schools as a religious (this second part of the journey never took place). The meeting in Saint-Claude with the Bishop's secretary led him to stay for a time as a valet to Mgr. de Chamon. It was there that, in a conversation with this bishop, Brother Gabriel spoke to him about his life project and his research. The Bishop told him: "You yourself will be the one to form this work, God is calling you to it; you will begin it here" (Historical review). Br. Gabriel then took the religious habit in the nearby parish of Les Bouchoux with five companions, after a spiritual retreat: "That day was undoubtedly one of the most beautiful and consoling of my life" (Spiritual Testament).

In the following months he began his mission by serving in the cathedral and in the parish school of Saint-Claude, a mission that was to be short-lived because of the abandonment of his companions. Thus he found himself alone again, weighed down by failure and uncertainty. He himself writes: "I was left alone with one Brother in charge of almost three hundred pupils, with the service of the cathedral and the care of our little home. I endured this first humiliating trial with great resignation, saying to myself: if this work comes from you alone, it will surely be a stillborn work; but if it is God's work, he knows how to sustain it against all odds". It was a painful and humiliating trial, which he had to digest from his convictions of faith. But it did not deter him from his goal.

It is understandable to abandon what has been started because sometimes we lack the strength and the convictions. At other times it is not possible to achieve what was planned. Brother Gabriel was left alone in Saint-Claude. But instead of abandoning his project, he put himself in the hands of God's providence. With the help of Mgr. de Chamon, he accepted other opportunities in different parishes, which helped him to prepare himself better for what he felt called to do. Guided by his zeal and his search, he passed through the parishes of Jeurre, Courtefontaine, Brénod and Hauteville as an itinerant catechist and tried to found a community. He finally settled in Belmont, the cradle of the Congregation.

His confidence and perseverance would one day lead him to find favourable conditions for the development of his project. Only those who have strong convictions are indispensable for the world to move forward. Brother Gabriel is an example of perseverance in what he set out to do, despite setbacks and failures. In the history of great people we always find perseverance in the face of all odds and, without going that far, we also see it every day in the love that a mother or father is able to give their children under adverse circumstances.

I have met many young people in the classrooms and in the catechesis rooms who, in the face of Brother Gabriel's life, appreciated his perseverance in trials and his constancy in trying again and again to found the congregation. In the same way, I have seen catechetical groups or other activities in schools that have been sustained over time, thanks to the perseverance of the catechist, the educator or the animator of the activity, thus overcoming situations of loneliness. This is where I see that our strength can lie: in holding on to what we believe in and persevering in it.

Keeping one's word, one's commitment or one's assignment with perseverance is part of the success of a mission. Where can we find our strength? Brother Gabriel, a young Brother, found it in his clear choice of life, and mainly in prayer. His example invites us to persevere. Let us seek strength in prayer and within ourselves. Let us trust that favourable circumstances will come, which we must explore and welcome, so that life will develop in the desired direction.

Let us live this new celebration with a sense of gratitude to the Lord for making us participants in the work founded by Brother Gabriel and let us learn from the processes he went through to bring his work to completion. May Brother Gabriel accompany us in our lives.

Happy Feast!

Bro. Francisco Javier Hernando de Frutos, AG