



**CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS**  
**An Excerpt from the**  
**Circular Letter of the Superior General No. 4**  
**February 17, 1988**

**Very Rev. Claude Grou, C.S.C.**

**Jacques-Françoise Dujarié**  
**A Man of Courage and Concern**

Dear Confreres,

February 17, 1988 marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of Father Jacques François Dujarié, the founder of the Brothers of St. Joseph. This humble country priest played an important role in preparing the ground for what was later to become the Congregation of Holy Cross and he has much to reveal to us when we try to understand the charism of our foundation.

Unlike Father Moreau, Father Dujarié has left us with very few written documents to help us understand his teaching. We can certainly learn much more from his life than from his writings and even there we soon discover how little we know about him. We do know that he was for more than thirty-five years in charge of the parish in Ruillé, yet we find practically nothing on his sermons. We are told repeatedly that people were struck by his goodness and his generosity and they referred to him as “the good Father,” but we know very little about his pastoral approach or his way of speaking of God in his sermons. In spite of this lack of information, it still seems possible to focus on some basic dimensions of his life and to find in them sources of inspiration for us.

### **Sketch of the Life of Father Dujarié**

Jacques François, the first son of Jacques Dujarié and Françoise Leroux, was born in Rennes-en-Grenouille on November 9, 1767. He spent his childhood in the village of Sainte-Marie-du-Bois. His father was a small landowner, a man respected by all in the village.

Brought up in a good Christian family, Jacques François was from his youth attracted to the service of God and immediately after completing his basic education, he started preparing himself for the priesthood. The social situation in France in those revolutionary years was however in no way favorable to the Church and a young man preparing for the priesthood knew very well that he would soon have to face persecution. In 1792 Jacques François, now twenty-four years old, had to leave the seminary because of the new persecution that the Church was undergoing. He went back to his home where he worked for some time, always keeping alive his desire to become a priest. It was only at the end of 1795 that he could at last be ordained in a secret ceremony. However, the period of open persecution of the clergy continued, and after his ordination, Father Dujarié had to go into hiding. For more than six years, he lived as a fugitive, and he ministered to the people at great risk to himself. These were years of intense suffering for the young priest.

The political atmosphere changed in 1802, and for the first time Father Dujarié could look forward to exercising his ministry in more normal conditions. The following year he was appointed as priest in charge of the parish in Ruillé. He spent the rest of his active life in this parish.

The new pastor of Ruillé became immediately aware of the enormous work to be done. The faith of many had remained strong during these years of persecution, but little had been done to serve the Christian community and educate people in the faith. He was faced with the enormous task of rebuilding the community. The previous generation of priests had been decimated by the revolution and the context of the last fifteen years had made it impossible to prepare a new generation of ministers for the Church, which had to find a new and creative answer to the needs of the time.

Father Dujarié soon realized that he had to surround himself with persons with whom he could work, and after one unsuccessful attempt, by 1806 he gathered around him a group of women to help him. The ten who formed the first community in 1806 soon became the seed from which a new community was to grow, the Sisters of Providence.

It was much later that the idea of organizing a group of men to take care of the education of boys came up. In fact, the idea seems to have come from a common need felt by the priests of the Diocese of Le Mans. Those priests had asked their bishop to establish a group of brothers. Bishop Pidoll asked Father Dujarié to take on the responsibility of organizing this new group of religious.

Father Dujarié accepted this task. By that time, though, he was fifty-two years old and his health was rapidly deteriorating. He had the full responsibility of the parish and he had to guide the growing group of Sisters of Providence. The first brothers lived with him in his parish house, but soon the house was too small and he had to purchase more property and build a new house, “le Grand Saint-Joseph” for his brothers. Father Dujarié did not see this foundation as something essentially different from similar efforts to form groups of teaching brothers in other parts of France. He had before his eyes the example of the “Little Brothers” of Jean-Marie de la Mennais and the Brittany Brothers, the future Brothers of Christian Instruction of Gabriel Deshayes, and closely followed the pattern they had set. Like them, he found the inspiration in older groups of brothers dedicated to education of youth, particularly the de las Salle Brothers.

In 1823, Father Dujarié proposed to organize a society of missionary priests to help his new foundation. He writes, “This plan would be to establish here a society of four (sic) missionaries who

would give missions, especially in country areas, and who could provide spiritual assistance for our two congregations” (*Catta*, p. 171).

From the very beginning, the foundation of the brothers was a source of difficulty for the founder. There were endless problems in having the group recognized civilly, in financing the new foundation, and above all constituting them as a sound, permanent group of brothers. The request for schools came from many sides and Father Dujarié sent his young brothers to answer as many needs as possible. Unfortunately, this often meant sending the brothers out with an inadequate formation behind them. Brothers came and left at an alarming rate every year.

The year 1830 was particularly difficult for Father Dujarié and his brothers. Once more social and political changes brought a new period of hardships for the Church. A great number of brothers, ill prepared to face such a situation, decided to leave. Something had to be done to save this new foundation.

The annual retreat of 1831 was a turning point for the small community. The brothers were in such different circumstances that Father Dujarié was unable to bring all of them together for the retreat. The retreat was, however, for those who were there, a crucial moment of discernment. The brothers realized that the future of the group lay in their hands. They felt a need to make a commitment to support the group. At the end of the retreat, fifteen brothers pledged themselves to remain faithful to the work begun. Their pledge was prefaced by these words, “In mutual agreement, to assure the continuation of our institute and to perpetuate its existence for the greater glory of the Lord and the salvation of souls, we pledge ourselves...” (*Moreau*, *CL* p. *xiii*). In their discernment, the brothers were guided by a man who was soon to have a prominent role in their life, Father Basile Moreau.

Although all but one of the brothers who made this pledge kept it to the end, the community was not yet out of difficulty. One of the main sources was the fact that Father Dujarié, more and more affected by his sickness, was practically unable to continue the leadership of the group. Led by Brother André Mottais, the brothers started to look for help. They met the bishop of Le Mans, and with his encouragement, a possible solution seemed to be in view. A new man had to be found to take the place of the aging founder. It was however important to help Father Dujarié to accept having to relinquish the responsibility he had since the foundation of the community. He humbly acknowledged that it was time for him to retire. The bishop of Le Mans asked Father Basile Moreau to assume the task of guiding the destiny of the small community of brothers. Father Moreau accepted this task and soon led these brothers on a new path that would make of this small community the seed of a much larger plan.

Father Dujarié’s health continued to worsen and by 1836, he had to abandon his pastoral responsibility at Ruillé. By that time, the brothers had moved from Ruillé to Le Mans. Father Moreau invited the founder to retire with the community of his brothers in Le Mans. In October 1836, Father Dujarié moved to Le Mans, and it was there that he lived the last fifteen months of his life. He died there on February 17, 1838, at the age of seventy-one.

## **Father Dujarié and the Brothers of St. Joseph**

Unfortunately, we know very little about the early history of the Brothers of St. Joseph. From the information we have it seems clear that they were considered as a group of lay religious although they were not at first officially recognized by the Church as a religious order. At the outset, no one had a permanent commitment to the group. It is only in 1831 that we find a form of permanent commitment in the pledge taken by the 15 brothers. The idea of perpetual vows was brought up at that time, but it was only in 1836 that the first brothers made perpetual religious vows.

Father Dujarié's main concern when he brought together the first group of brothers was to answer the needs of the Church. These men were there because there was a mission to fulfill, a mission seen in the context of the Church of the time. There was an urgent need for Christian education, particularly in the remote villages of the region. The brothers were given a short period of formation and within only a few months they were offered the basic knowledge they needed to teach as well as a deeper Christian formation. It is with this elementary formation that they went out to various parishes, and shared what little they had with the young people entrusted to them.

When they came to Ruillé, these young men were obliged to live a life of true poverty. Father Dujarié lived in poverty; so did they. The situation in the country parishes in which they worked was not much different. Most of these parishes were poor and the brothers simply had to accept this situation. There was certainly no high salary for schoolteachers, and the small community had very little means.

Sharing the zeal and the concern for mission of Father Dujarié as well as his life of detachment and poverty was, however, a shaky foundation if not accompanied by an equally solid spiritual foundation. Most brothers came to the community with a strong faith inherited from their families, but they had very limited formal spiritual training. Father Dujarié used the annual retreat as the main moment in which to offer to his brothers a deeper strengthening of their faith. He knew that most of the brothers had little overall formation before starting their life as teachers and he was probably aware that most of them would find scant nourishment for their religious life in the parishes where they worked. The priests were busy with their parish duties and would have little time—and sometimes little talent—to help a young religious deepen his commitment.

If we look at the letter of Father Dujarié inviting his brothers for the retreat, we can see three points of emphasis: each brother must work at his personal conversion, renew his apostolic zeal, and learn to acquire the spirit of Jesus Christ. Calling the brothers to the retreat of 1825, he wrote, “The first and primary goal of the retreat is to sanctify you more and more, to fill you with a renewed zeal for the salvation of children and to acquire the spirit of Christ” (*Vanier, p. 263*). In 1827, he insisted on the importance of a good reparation for the retreat “so that during these happy moments you may discover everything that prevents you from advancing on the path of virtue and this becoming men of God” (*Vanier, p. 276*). In 1829, he spoke of the retreat as a privileged moment for them because “during that time we can consecrate ourselves entirely to the great and unique reason for which we have been created and for which we have abandoned our families and friends to embrace the religious life” (*Vanier, p. 308*).

The brothers had found in Father Dujarié an example of a life of totally given to the service of the people. They were inspired by this life of service and of poverty and no doubt many of them tried to emulate this spirit of dedication. Father Dujarié reminded them of the basic dimensions of the spiritual

life: a constant striving after spiritual conversion, an effort to acquire the spirit of Christ, and a commitment to serve people. There was a need to help the brothers internalize these values as they grew in their religious life, but Father Dujarié could not with his many responsibilities and failing health provide them with the guidance they required.

His spirit was fortunately already shared by a group of brothers who had been with him since the early days and who could share with the young people who came to Ruillé what they had learned. Among these, we recall the names of Léonard Guittoger, Etienne Gauffre, Vincent Pieu, and above all, André Mottais.

Brother André Mottais joined the community at its very beginning in 1820. Father Dujarié sent him almost immediately to receive his training with the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Paris. Coming back to Ruillé after his novitiate, he guided the first generation of novices in their initiation into religious life. He shared with them what he had received from the de la Salle Brothers. He became more and more aware that the community had to find a stronger foundation and he later played a prominent role in preparing the transition what would lead the community in 1835-36 into a new direction under the leadership of Basile Moreau.

### **The Message of Father Dujarié for Us**

I wrote at the beginning of this letter that Father Dujarié teaches more by his life than by his writings. I would like to say something more on the way he teaches us by his life. I find in his life a message of courage in adversity, of compassion, of openness to reading the signs of the times, of sensitivity to the needs of youth, and of service to the poor. I would like to spell out these five points in a little more detail.

#### ***Proclaiming the Gospel in the Midst of Difficulties***

Father Dujarié lived in difficult times. His early life developed in a period of open persecution of the Church. He showed his capacity to be firm and courageous in times of persecution. He upheld gospel values when these were rejected by society and when upholding such views was even considered a criminal offense. When in 1830 the Church faced a new periods of anticlericalism, he encouraged his young brothers to continue to be witnesses of the values by which they lived even if it meant becoming the laughingstock of others.

#### ***Love and Compassion***

For his brothers, Father Dujarié appeared as a loving and compassionate father. The few letters he has left us show his love and concern for his brothers. This love is usually expressed in simple and concrete terms. Answering a brother complaining of his poor health, he reminded him of the primacy of his duties and yet spoke to him in compassionate terms: “Take as much care of yourself as you can without going against the good of the students” (*Vanier, p. 400*). In his circular letter of 1828, he expressed his joy in seeing that he would soon be with his “children” again. He adds, “God only knows how much I love you. You will always find in me a true father, always concerned with your happiness here and hereafter” (*Vanier, p. 297*).

We can detect a certain form of paternalism in his way of speaking to the brothers. It is very likely that this man (now sixty years old), separated from the young men by his age and his work as well as by a sickness that would prevent his being more regularly with them, never saw his relationship with them as one of a brother, but rather as that of a father. We should however note that he recognized these “children” as adults capable of taking care of their own destiny. The responsibilities he entrusted to some of them shows his capacity to love his brothers as children and yet to respect them as adults.

### *Answering the Needs of the Time*

Father Dujarié was capable of understanding the needs of the people and of the Church and finding answers to them. We have seen this in the short biographical note given above. He knew how to discern the needs of the time. He could understand the more urgent needs and work at responding to them.

### *His Concern for Youth*

In his effort to answer the needs of the people and of the Church, two points come out constantly: his concern for the education of youth and his love of the poor. These two types of concern were noted by the town council of Ruillé when he was proposed as parish priest in 1803. In the minutes of the council we find, “(He) is devoting himself zealously and carefully to teaching young boys and helping them free of charge to learn how to read and write.... (He) goes to help the unfortunate as much as his means allow...” (*Catta*, p. 44).

In his note on the life of Father Dujarié, Father Moreau comments on these two dimensions. He sees how the concern of Father Dujarié for Christian education reflected his understanding of the needs of the Church and of society. He writes, “It was on this generation of youth that all the hopes of Church and country reposed. To bring youth back to the acknowledgement, love, and practice of its religious duties meant the renovation of the country” (*Moreau*, *CL*, p. vi).

### *His Concern for the Poor*

We are told that Father Dujarié cared for the poor but we have very little information on his approach to them. Father Moreau recalls that in his first sermon in Ruillé, Father Dujarié gave his pastoral plan in the following words, “I am a priest to be the consolation of the widow, the father of orphans, the support of the poor and the friend of those who suffer” (*Catta*, p. 46). These words are almost the exact words of the prophet Isaiah to express the messianic times and the coming of the Kingdom. They certainly express Father Dujarié’s special concern for those who counted most in the eyes of Jesus, the poor, the marginalized and those who suffer. Later in his reflection on the life of Father Dujarié, Father Moreau noted that Father Dujarié’s practice of poverty was an expression of his love of the poor, “Father Dujarié’s love for the poor knew no bounds. This explains why he was almost extreme in his practice of the spirit of poverty” (*Moreau*, *CL*, p. xxv).

## **Father Dujarié and Our “Sacred History”**

When Father Phileas Vanier published a collection of documents on Father Dujarié in 1948, he added a fairly, long discussion on the question, “Who founded the Congregation of Holy Cross?” The

obvious purpose of his article was to contradict, from a historical perspective, the opinion that Holy Cross had not been founded by Father Moreau but by Father Dujarié.

Forty years later, there seems to be no point in reviving this discussion, yet I feel that the solution we reached—that the founder of Holy Cross was really Father Moreau—gives us only a partial view of the truth. Father Moreau and Father Dujarié would probably both be very unhappy with the response we have reached and they would both say that Holy Cross is neither the work of one or of the other, but really the work of God, and that they were both but instruments of Providence in realization of his plan for us. Their view is not the result of their humility but rather of a genuine vision of faith and a deep understanding of the way God's plan works.

We ought to see the history of Holy Cross not so much as the history of some specific individuals but as the action of God among his people. Our sacred history as Holy Cross is, therefore, first, and foremost the history of a community answering God's call to serve. Yet we need to acknowledge that the very first group of men who later became our community was gathered by Father Dujarié, although it is with Father Moreau that this group took on the form of the type of religious community we know today.

We gratefully acknowledge the role played by these two great apostles, yet we remember that their role has to be seen as part of the history in which the community itself had to shape its own response to God's call. In fact, some of the key moments in this history have shown themselves in a common response of the community. What would we be if the fifteen brothers who gathered for the retreat of 1831 had not agreed together to pledge their fidelity to continue the work, or if the groups of brothers and priests on the first of March, 1837, had not seen in the signing of the Fundamental Act a way to answer to God's design for them?

The intuition of Father Dujarié became a source of life for the Church of his time because there were men who came and shared with him his sense of mission, because these men were ready, like him, to face the challenge of bringing Christ to a generation that had been alienated from him. These men shared his own understanding of the need for the education of youth and they were ready to live a life of poverty, and service for the sake of Christ. The values, which they shared, have remained alive throughout the history of Holy Cross and are still present today.

As we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Father Dujarié, we acknowledge with gratitude the role, which he played in the very early moments of what was later to become the Congregation of Holy Cross. We are proud to recognize that in the early years of this history of this group of brothers, so deeply linked with the beginnings of Holy Cross, there was a poor and humble country priest, a man of zeal and courage, a man who would overcome persecution and ill health, to bring Christ to people.

Claude Grou, C.S.C.  
Superior General

## NOTES:

1. The information on the life of Father Dujarie is taken from Catta, Tony, *Father Dujarié, Founder of the Sisters of Providence and the Brothers of Saint Joseph* (translated by Edward Heston, C.S.C.) and from Vanier, Phileas, *Le Chanoine Dujarié, Recueil Documentaire*. English readers will also be able to find a good account of his life in Santo, Br. Joseph, *The Life and Times of Jacques-Françoise Dujarié*.
2. In this section, I have used Moreau, Basile, *Sketch of the Life and Works of M. L'Abbe Jacques-Françoise Dujarié, Pastor of Ruille-sul-Loir*. The text is found in the introduction to the Circular Letters of Father Moreau. It helps us to see how Father Moreau understood the link between what Father Dujarie had initiated and his own project.