



Reflection

The story of Jean-Baptiste Berne is an excellent example of being there, of being present to others.

Marcellin Champagnat was called one day to the bedside of a seriously ill woman to hear her confession. He found her to be in a destitute condition, even lacking any fuel for a fire. Marcellin consoled her whilst he heard her confession and asked her to place her trust in God. As well, knowing that this was not enough, he brought her all that would be necessary in the way of food, clothing and fuel. He procured a nurse for her and arranged for a doctor to visit her. She died soon afterwards.

Marcellin adopted the son she left behind, Jean-Baptiste Berne, aged 9, and brought him to live with the Brothers. The boy had known little love and no control; he had formed bad habits that had started to ruin his character and to corrupt his natural innocence. He resisted the efforts of the Brothers to care for him, returning their love, food, clothing, and education with insults and ingratitude. He ran away many times, taking up the life of a vagrant. Each time, the Brothers searched him out and brought him home. Some of them became discouraged and felt the boy to be a hopeless case and a waste of their time.

Not so Marcellin. He urged the brothers to be patient, to pray for the boy and to remember that he had nowhere else to go. To send him away was to send him to a life of poverty, crime and loneliness. Marcellin Champagnat believed that the Lord had entrusted the boy to him and to the Brothers, and he was to be treated as if he was their own child. He said to them, *"we have adopted this child, we have no right to abandon him, we must keep him and form him"*.

With courage and perseverance, the efforts of the Brothers and Marcellin Champagnat prevailed, and the boy was turned around. He settled down to a normal life and accepted the help, love and the kindness being offered him. In time, he asked to be admitted to the institute and Marcellin joyfully agreed. Jean-Baptiste Berne became 'known in religion' as Brother Nilamon in 1825. He died on the 10th October 1830 at the tender age of 21, in the arms of Marcellin Champagnat, after thanking him for all that he had done.

The Jean-Baptiste Berne story challenges us to be present to all.

The John Berne School takes the story of John Berne, Marcellin Champagnat, and those early Marist Brothers as its inspiration. The John Berne School exists to help and reach out to young people, just as Marcellin and the early Marist Brothers did to Jean-Baptiste Berne in 19th Century France, and as the Marist Brothers strive to reach out to young people all over the world, since 1817 and through the recent centuries, and still strive today.

<https://www.thejohnberneschool.org/>

The screenshot shows the website header with the logo 'The John Berne School Hope Always' and navigation links: 'What We Do', 'Get Involved', 'Enrolment', 'Community', 'About us'. A banner image features students in a classroom setting. Overlaid text reads: 'BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SMALL CLASSES SIZES WHICH RECONNECT STUDENTS TO LEARNING'. A button at the bottom of the banner says 'How can I help?'.