

**The 200th anniversary of the birth of Blessed Brother Scubilion
March 21st 1797**

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*On March 21st 1997, it was 200 years since the birth of Blessed Brother Scubilion.
As a way of marking this important Lasallian date, we are publishing the homily given by the
Vicar General of the Diocese of Sens-Auxerre at the anniversary Mass celebrated on June 8th 1997.
This beautifully clear and simple homily has the added value of recalling other outstanding
persons who lived in the same area of France at a particularly difficult time for the Christian faith.*

Anniversary of the birth of Jean Bernard Rousseau, called in religion Brother Scubilion, Sunday June 8th 1997, at Annay la Côte, on the 10th Sunday of the ordinary of the year (Mark 3,20-35).

Two hundred years ago, on March 21st, in this village of Annay la Côte, Jean Bernard Rousseau was born and baptised, and received the names Jean Bernard. This is very symbolic. His parents lived in Tharoiseau, but his mother followed the local custom, which said that a young mother had to give birth at her own mother's house.

One hundred and thirty years ago, on April 13th 1867, on the island of Reunion, there occurred the death of Brother Scubilion, a Brother of the Christian Schools, after 45 years of religious life spent in the service of children, the poor and freed slaves. These latter had gained their freedom in 1848.

Eight years ago, Pope John Paul II beatified Jean Bernard Rousseau on Ile Bourbon, where he had lived from 1833 to 1867.

As we already know, it was in the newly created Department of the Yonne, that Jean Bernard was taught by our own saintly Fathers Petitier and Darcey, and discovered his vocation. It was the parish community that made him aware of his vocation and, despite the fact that for seven years he could not go to school, for there was no school in Tharoiseau, it was this community that suggested to him to help the local teacher. This was how he began to live with the Brothers of the Christian Schools of St John Baptist de La Salle. It was in Auxerre, where to this day in St Joseph's School, the Brothers continue to bear witness, that his vocation was consolidated.

Jean Bernard continued to live there in our midst for a quarter of a century. Despite the Revolution, it was a time rich in saints.

During these difficult times, the future saint Madeleine Sophie Barat responded to the Lord's call at Joigny. She was 22 years old when Jean Bernard was born.

A little later, a few kilometres away, Catherine Labouré was born on the family farm in Fain les Moutiers. Our Lady would appear to her at Rue du Bac. At the time of her birth, Jean Bernard was 9 years old.

In 1797, the Revolution in France was just about over. Five years before his birth, on the prison ships of Rochefort, there occurred the deaths of 5 priests from Yonne, the 3 Hunot de Briennon –two brothers and one cousin–, but especially Georges Edme René, Canon of Vézelay, and Lazare Tiersot Avallon, who died as martyrs at the end of 1794, and who were recently beatified by our Pope on October 1st 1995.

Three beatifications in the space of a few years in Avallon: Georges Edme René, Lazare Tiersot and Jean Bernard Rousseau.

But that is not all. We must not forget that in 1809, in Joux la Ville, was born Jean Baptiste Muard, Founder of the Fathers of St Edme and of Pierre qui Vire, an abbey which would give birth to 42 monasteries.

During this time, near the Carmelite convent in Sens, the last of the Carmelites of Compiègne who had escaped the scaffold had taken refuge.

This procession of saints does not end there. The cause of beatification has been opened of Bernard Morizot, a young man from Avallon who was deported.

You have all come on pilgrimage to Avallon. You are in a land of saints. Who knows, perhaps in a few years' time or in the next century some of you present here today will be beatified too.

Jean Bernard lived in the post-revolutionary period, during the Directory, the time of Napoleon, the Restoration and the time of the constitutional monarchy. Do not think that it was easy to be a religious in those days, and that there were many priests and men and women religious. The Church in France was divided. A National Council had just taken place, and various synods were held in an attempt to restore the Church. In the meantime, Napoleon won a victory at Rivoli in Italy, and the Directory forced the Pope Pius VI into exile. He died at Valence in 1798.

In the Department of the Yonne, the constitutional bishop Loménie de Brienne, had taken the oath, while the Bishop of Auxerre, Mgr de Cicé, refused to resign. Throughout Jean Bernard's youth, the Bishop of Troyes was Bishop of Auxerre. When he left Yonne in 1822, the two dioceses of Sens and Auxerre were reconstituted. Schools were opened by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in both Yonne and the island of Réunion. This congregation had been founded by St John Baptist de La Salle a century before.

We make our meditation on today's Gospel with Brother Scubilion who was formed in this historical and ecclesial context.

I shall limit myself to three messages.

Our Brother heard the call of Christ: "Here is my mother, here are my brothers". After living as a Brother in Poitiers, Alençon and Chinon, and making his vows at Nantes in 1827, he asked the Superior General Brother Anaclet permission to work overseas. His heart had grown to encompass the whole world. From then on, his life was inspired by this conviction. When he arrived at La Réunion and found so many different lifestyles, the children to whom he had been sent, the slaves who were regaining their freedom, and even the colonialist landowners, he kept saying to himself: "Here is my mother, here are my sisters, here are my brothers".

Today, in our everyday lives, let us all say to ourselves: "Here is my mother, here are my sisters, here are my brothers". We have a common bond, the will of the Father, who does not wish any of his little ones to be lost. They are our blood. When I see you before me, I say to myself: "Here is my mother, here are my sisters, here are my brothers".

A second message. The love of Christ makes us capable of being foolish. They said of Jesus: "He has lost his mind". Brother Scubilion was certainly considered to be a fool for helping the freed slaves, even if some people understood what he was doing. He attracted a lot of hostility. People must have thought: "He has lost his mind". I do not think that people here in Annay and Tharoiseau thought that, but a vocation is always foolish for those who prefer the wisdom of men to the folly of the cross.

St Paul says to us today: "I believed, and that is why I speak and we speak". Our Brother was a fighter for freedom, a defender of the rights of man, which had just been proclaimed by the Revolution. He was the true revolutionary who defended the rights of man and, in particular, the right to look for meaning in life and to practice one's religion.

Finally, the third message. Brother Scubilion heard the Lord saying to us: "Any family that is divided will perish, any kingdom that is divided against itself will fall". Among all the different people who composed the population of the Ile Bourbon, he was a promoter of peace and reconciliation. With his Brothers, he worked to create peace among us and in his communities. He was passionate about unity. In December 1996 in La Réunion, you meditated with our Brother on peace and reconciliation. His constant concern was that the family of the Brothers should never be divided, and that the Church should never be disunited.

Let us live the Gospel today with Brother Scubilion!

Jesus calls us all to be brothers, and to form one single family.

Jesus calls upon us to be foolish through love of the Gospel.

Jesus asks us to be instruments of peace and unity.

Amen.