

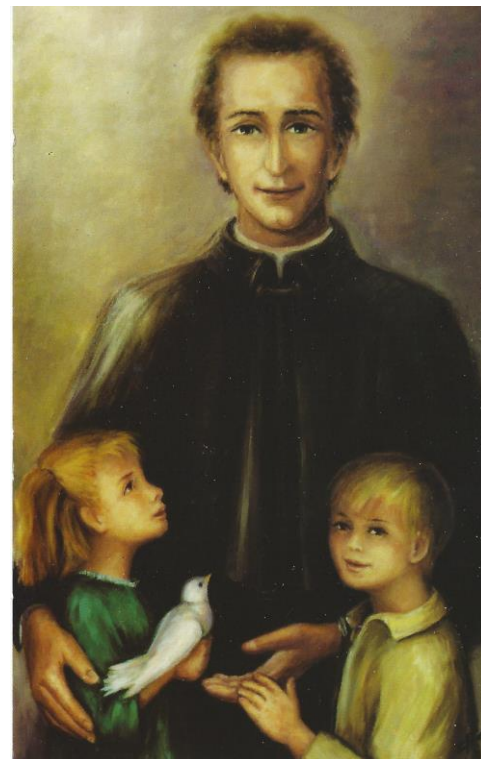
**Tribute to Father Joaquin Masmitja**  
**By Sr. Mary Catherine, IHM**

“Cherchez la femme!”

A Frenchman once coined this phrase, “Look for the woman behind the man,” but a Basque priest ardently believed and lived it out in his life. His name? Our beloved Father Founder, Fr. Joaquin Masmitja.

The denigration of women, flowing from an anti-Christian cultural revolution, as well as attacks on the sacred cell of society, the family... sound like today? You are right, but it also sounded much like 19<sup>th</sup> century Spain, and this tribute is to a man who believed in family and restoring it through consecrated prayer, gospel living, and education.

He grew up in a virtuous Catholic family, formed a family of Religious who from heaven and on earth unite together today to praise this man, a courageous founder inspired to reform the natural family by the education and formation of women.



Where did he come from, anyway? His own family, a canticle to Christian virtue, consisted of Senor and Senora Masmitjá. Before his mother was married, she belonged to a noble family, but living in a caste system she went ahead and married for love a lawyer, who at that time would be considered beneath her rank. Before little Joaquin came into the world the Masmitja couple experienced suffering: they lost a nine year old daughter and a two year old son. As they bade farewell to their two little loved ones, this dolor only strengthened their own union. Soon God blessed their acceptance of His Will by sending three sons: Narciso, Joaquin and Antonio. Together as a family they grew in the beautiful area of Catalonia.

A peaceful, docile nature and an understanding penetrated with sincere piety marked little Joaquin, their fourth child. Because of his formation and education by his parents, he easily responded to a call from God to become a priest, a response marked with love of God and enthusiasm for the Gospel enduring all his life.

When he entered the University of Cervera, the one principal Catalonian university at this time, he shone with brilliance and his professors awarded him the highest honor: the position of proving published conclusions on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Patroness of the University. (This was their idea of feast day fun!) He came out precociously successful, brilliant and much lauded. This event, however, did not alter the direction of his life: to become a holy priest.

At the university, the professors gave him a report card - Conduct: Excellent; Talent: Superior, Extraordinary; Aptitude: University Professor, Canon Lawyer - consequently, he obtained a licentiate in both civil and canon law, which served as useful in the Foundation of the Daughters of the Immaculate Heart.

Finally, on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1834, Joaquin attained the highest honor of heaven: the ordination to the priesthood, chosen to be from men for all men. His father looked down from eternity, while both families re-united to witness in the Church of St. Steven, the ordination of their dear relative, Joaquin Masmitja.



The young priest faced challenges, like our young priests today---a Revolution had occurred in the 1830's which prohibited church ceremonies, etc. It was only in 1840 that these prohibitions were removed. Great prudence was needed and Father's ecclesiastical superiors appointed him, as a very young priest, to be a vicar of his area.

Revolution, changes, attacks....Joaquin's Superiors appointed him because this young father displayed great discretion.....which he transmitted as a quality to be prized among our Sisters.

In 1847, Father Masmitja felt the need to take the woman from her ignorance in which she was surrounded, an ignorance which he considered to be a great factor in the ongoing decay of Christianity. Once again, he believed in "Cherchez la femme!" He felt his own mother's influence from his childhood and he saw the need for spiritual mothers of young women, who would turn society around by becoming saintly mothers of families, or spiritual mothers of families.

What did Father Masmitja do when he received an inspiration to found an Order of Sisters to form and inform young women? He prayed intensely and sought advice, especially from his good friend Anthony Claret.

He also sought advice from others and the same recommendation came: He needed great abandonment to God begin this really impossible enterprise, especially with society being anti-Catholic. He decided that the instruction of young poor girls, especially in moral formation and religion, was imperative.

In 1848, the year of the Communist Manifesto, two forces stood against each other: the devil, through Karl Marx, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, through Fr. Mastmija. We know which one would triumph. Father began his foundation with seven young women who were also his spiritual directees. It is interesting the range of ages of these seven were 13 years! The youngest: 19 and the eldest 32! Family...to become a family these young women needed to be taught and Joaquin chose a virtuous widow, who had formed her own family. Until her death the young women in the Community called her "Madre."

As a member of a chancery, Father received much flak from the members of the Chancery for this project. Finally, he decided to go ahead and talk heart to heart with his Bishop. The Bishop listened and said, "Very Well, you will begin here in Gerona!" Father exclaimed, "Thanks be to God...you are a man different from other men."

He formed his first Sisters with the qualities of a good family: simple, welcoming, gentle, calm, and joyful. And what next...you know the story...families became revitalized with the Christian Faith and many young women also became brides of Jesus. We now are part of the living history, uniting as a family with those who have gone before us and those who are with us now.

Father Joaquin, without you we would not be here...thank you in addition to all your diocesan work, for founding and forming our Community. We are striving to follow your admonition: Daughters of the Good Jesus, let us love one another in the Heart of our Mother!