

## **Lasallian Educator's Meditation on Saint (Brother) Benilde Romançon, FSC August 13 (Alternate January 29)**

### 1

Pierre Romançon was born the second son of Jean and Anne (Chauty) Romançon's five children on June 14, 1805, in Thuret, France. He was baptized the same day. His devout parents were farmers of modest means. As a child, Pierre had to help with farm chores such as watching the sheep, but, because of his small stature, he was ridiculed by his older brother when unable to help with more demanding chores. This taunting continued from his classmates when he was enrolled in the classes of M. Delais, schoolmaster. While not able to keep up with the games and physical activities of his classmates, he soon surpassed them in learning. He tutored those who needed assistance and took delight in helping them learn their prayers and catechism; this earned him some respect from those who had teased him.

Are you aware of students in your classes who are the objects of taunts, ridicule or even physical abuse by classmates or schoolmates? It is your duty, as "shepherd of your flock" to see to it that no harm comes to your students under your care. Use the strength and firmness of a father to create a climate intolerable of verbal or physical abuse. Use the gentleness and sensitivity of a mother to enable victims of such abuse to come forward to report mistreatment.

Do you favor the more attractive, the agile, the athletic, the wealthy? Ask God for his grace to care more for students who are poor, less gifted, or disabled—those who would otherwise be neglected without your attention.

### 2.

While visiting Clermont-Ferrand with his parents, Pierre noticed two Christian Brothers in their religious habit walking the street of the town. He was struck by their decorum and devotion as they made their way. This initial and brief encounter was the impetus of his vocation. His father was not happy with the idea of Pierre joining the Brothers and losing a son and farm worker. As a compromise, Pierre was enrolled in the Brothers' school at Riom not far away. He progressed well in his studies and was soon helping the Brothers in the role of monitor and teaching assistant. After 16 months in this school, Pierre's resolve to join the Brothers was even stronger. When he applied to the Novitiate at Clermont, he was refused because of his small stature. Undaunted, he asked the intercession of St. Colette, a petite girl who suffered the same fate when trying to enter the Poor Clares. Her prayers were answered with growth, and the same was true of Pierre. In a few months he grew enough to be admitted to the Novitiate on February 10, 1820, at the age of 14! He took the habit of the Brothers on June 22, 1820, and was given the name Brother Benilde. Toward the end of his Novitiate his mother died, and Brother Benilde was allowed to return home for the funeral and extended stay. His father tried to dissuade him from returning, but Benilde was resolute; he returned and completed his novitiate training.

Little did those Brothers praying the rosary while traveling the streets of Clermont realize that their demeanor influenced a young man to pursue a vocation that would eventually lead to his being proclaimed a saint. What a profound effect your behavior can have on others! Model to your students the behavior and decorum you wish them to learn. Your faith in action may plant the seed of faith or help it grow in your students.

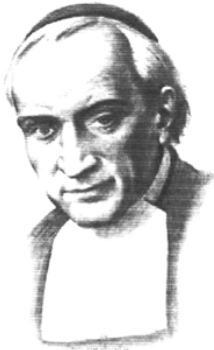
Pierre Romançon would not let his father or the Brothers stand in the way of his becoming a Brother; though little in size, he was colossal in determination. Do you too possess the same resolution when instructing your students? Are you determined to provide the best

human and Christian education to the youth assigned to you? Frequently ask God to strengthen your resolve and efforts in this area.

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Brother Benilde's first teaching assignment was to Aurillac in 1821, and over the course of the next twenty years he was assigned to schools in Moulin, Limoges, Clermont and Billom. During this period his class assignments progressed from his initial elementary class to the senior class in school indicative of his growth as an effective, skilled teacher. In 1841 Brother was directed to open and head a new school in the small town of Saugues. His patient, diplomatic handling of financial controversies surrounding the town's funding of this school helped set the course for more solid support from all parties in the town. He soon earned the reputation as a wise administrator, exceptional teacher, faith-filled catechist, helpful supervisor, strong disciplinarian and exemplary religious. The pupils, parents, religious and civil officials grew to respect and love him. The Superiors used his school and community as way of training new Brothers and bolstering those who were wavering in their vocation. As a Brother and Director, he assiduously followed the Rule of the Brothers while at the same time was a caring, attentive leader devoted to all that was good for his charges. During his twenty years in this small community, he was responsible for influencing over 200 young men to join the Brothers and nearly 60 to become priests. At news of his death in 1862 citizens of Saugues wept openly and proclaimed, "The saint is dead!"

Though short of stature, Brother Benilde grew into a faith-filled, gifted teacher and wise administrator. Have you noticed this kind of growth in yourself? Does your faith make you ever more zealous for the education and salvation of those entrusted to your care? What steps have you taken to encourage and secure this growth within you? How far does your influence over your students reach? Will their lives improve because of you? Will some of them become teachers and administrators because of the way you have taught and led? Might you inspire some to the priesthood and religious life? Frequently ask the intercession of Brother Benilde, the Teacher Saint, for God's grace in your endeavors.



Born in Thuret, France, on June 14, 1805, Pierre Romançon was inspired by the chance crossing of two devout Christian Brothers in the town of Clermont to join their ranks. After initial resistance from his father and the Brothers, he entered the Novitiate, took the habit on June 22, 1820 and was given the name Brother Benilde. He made perpetual profession of vows September 11, 1836. He taught in Aurillac, Moulin, Limoges, Clermont and Billom and worked for over 20 years in the school that he founded in Saugues where he died on August 13, 1862. He was proclaimed venerable by Pope Leo XIII in 1903, beatified by Pope Pius XII in 1958, and was proclaimed a saint on October 29, 1967, the first Christian Brother to be so honored.

For a brief, highly readable biography of Saint Benilde, read

Salm, Brother Luke. *Brother Benilde Romançon, FSC, The Teacher Saint*. Romeoville: Christian Brothers Publications, 1987.