

Reflection from the Superior General

Last November 17 was a special day, I believe.

On this day our two General Councils – the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (SMSM) and our own – discerned together a possible combined new missionary outreach. We considered together whether we could collaborate, as two branches of the Marist family, in sending one community of four Marists to Samsun, in Turkey, in response to the invitation from Bishop Paolo Bizetti s.j. of Anatolia. Four of us – Sisters Georgeanne and Cristina, Fr. Juan Carlos and myself - had just returned from a visit to Samsun. There we had encountered people in great need. We listened to some Christian people of the area, mostly migrants from Syria, Iraq and Iran, who are seeking a Religious presence among them who would be based in the local Catholic church in this Muslim-dominated city on the Black Sea. We asked these people many questions, including “what would be the profile of the Religious man or woman whom they might be seeking?” Their

response was clear. “We want men and women who are profoundly of God and of the Church”. That’s the first and main characteristic. The second quality would be that any religious man or woman going there would be a true missionary, prepared to leave the church building to go out to the surrounding areas and look for the sheep who are increasingly “lost”. The third characteristic is that the religious missionary would be prepared to learn the local language(s) – most importantly Turkish, and perhaps also, in time, Arabic. The young Christian migrants are usually able to manage in Turkish and English but their parents will be speaking Arabic at home. The discernment continues and it may be a long process. One obvious practical consideration is whether there are any Marists who can respond to this invitation.



From there we walked down the hill to the “Urbaniana”, the university sponsored by what used to be called “the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide”. The dicastery is celebrating its four-hundred-year anniversary since it was commissioned to oversee the missionary outreach of the Church. Previously it was often “the most Christian kings” of Europe who called the tune of missionary outreach to the “new world”. Marists have been involved with *Propaganda Fide* from our earliest days. This dicastery invited us to accept the enormous responsibility for a mission in vast areas of the Pacific. Last November 17 Fr. Donato Kivi gave a Pacifican and Marist address to those from Propaganda Fide and others gathered in the “aula magna”. He outlined the abundant fruit of the Pacific mission from a local, Marist and ecclesial perspective. He highlighted the roles of Jean-Claude Colin as the founder of the Marist mission in the Pacific, the role of Pauline Jaricot and the visit of St. John Paul II to the Pacific. Our own Marist missionary response in the Pacific was given an indigenous and insightful voice from what was once “the periphery” back to the ancient centre of the Roman church.

In the evening our General House was overflowing with young confreres as the novices from Tuscany and the students from “Casa di Maria” came to our community, including the student-priests, to celebrate the day. These young Marists express our hope for a dynamic missionary future.

These events of last November 17 speak of Advent. The call from the migrants in Turkey echoes the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary. (Lk.1:26 – 38). Our confrere’s address to the Dicastery of Evangelization reminds us that we Marists have always, like Mary, “set out in haste to the hill country”. The gathering of young Marists reminds us of Isaiah: “A shoot shall come from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots”. (Is. 11:1).

Let’s pray every blessing for our six novices due to profess their first vows in our Italian Marist community in Castiglione Fiorentino on January 5, and our confrere Christian Ngoura who is to be ordained as a Deacon on January 7. Welcome, also, to the new novices arriving about now in Davao City in the Philippines.

A blessed and joyful Christmas and New Year!

John Larsen s.m.

Picture: Fra Angelico, “the Annunciation”, Florence, Italy.