

Reflection from the Superior General

I am writing on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Candlemas, with holy Simeon and Anna encountering Joseph, Mary and Jesus in the temple. This Feast challenges all Religious to a renewed commitment to holiness, to the love of God and to the love our neighbour, to union with Christ. Venerable Jean-Claude wrote: "Marists are called to spend themselves for their own perfection and for the salvation of their neighbour and to hold more loyally to the Roman Catholic faith until death".

As I have been travelling around these last few months I have been meeting many confreres who manifest the face of "Marist holiness" in the very ordinariness of their everyday Marist lives. What does Marist holiness, the first reason for our Marist religious life, actually look like when we meet it?

One feature I have witnessed is that Marist holiness can be rather subtle. We do not opt for the grand gesture and we can be suspicious of any signs of ostentatious holiness. Our DNA is shaped by our resolve, first

expressed at our Profession, to "think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things" and our commitment to be "hidden and unknown." (Const. 228). Ordinarily there is extraordinary holiness among us, usually unacknowledged. One of the confreres I met goes over the road early every morning to buy the bread and prepare the breakfast for his community before joining them for Morning Prayer. There was another confrere who carefully checks that his brother takes the correct medication twice daily. No fuss, no bother. Just faithful kindness. Even our own hero of the Pacific, Saint Peter Chanel, would have been quite overwhelmed, I believe, by the veneration he usually receives. He simply embraced his mission of joyfully serving the people of Futuna and sharing his life and prayer with his confrere, Brother Marie Nizier. (Brother Marie's death anniversary is today, February 3.)



Another remarkable feature of the face of Marist holiness is the reality of so many elderly, sick confreres and those who can no longer serve on the front-lines of mission who yet embrace wholeheartedly the vocation to share in the sufferings of Christ in their daily grind. When I invite them to pray for our Society and to offer their sufferings in union with Christ as a blessing for our Marist mission I sense they are happy to accept this missionary mandate. Sometimes our confreres, and the people we meet along the way, can be very difficult to live with and they can become the means of our own sanctification, or we of theirs. Simeon reminded Mary that "a sword will pierce your own heart, too". Much as we may prefer it otherwise, the way to unity with Christ, to holiness, is by way of bearing the cross.

We sometimes hear prophetic calls to "go to the peripheries" and for "preferential option for the poor and marginalized". Many confreres are quietly responding to this call. A Marist heart naturally gravitates to compassion and mercy as we contemplate Mary and pray with her daily. Our communities often welcome needy people to stay for a while because that person has nowhere else to go. Other confreres befriend those who are usually disregarded, sharing their names and their stories.

Another sign of holiness are the Marists who "travel light". They are detached from their own material possessions accumulated over years and from overly relying on their own experience as they grow in faithful trust. "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace, according to your word", as Simeon prayed.

Fraternal congratulations to our confreres who celebrated their Religious anniversaries on this Feast Day. Also, every blessing on our new novitiate community in Davao, which began its work yesterday.

Lent is fast approaching. This can be a good time to ask ourselves what a holy Marist actually looks like and what do I – or we, as a community – need to undertake to continue to grow in holiness. Some commitment that nourishes our specifically Marist holiness would be our Lenten penance for this year.

Fraternally,

John Larsen s.m.