

Reflection from the Superior General

Recently I have been delighted to participate in two significant anniversaries, one in Senegal and one in France. Prayerfully remembering our history can inspire us to discern directions for the future.

The joyful inauguration of a new school situated in the suburbs of Dakar was the blessed occasion to celebrate 75 years of Marist missionary life in Senegal, in Africa. More than one thousand students, mostly Muslim, are already enrolled. Everyone entering the school meets a striking image of Fr. Jean-Claude. We also blessed a newly-completed Marist community-house near the school for the three Marists ministering there. A number of Marist Sisters and Marist Missionary Sisters are also involved in this mission, along with a growing number of committed Marist Lay associates. During the Eucharist we gave thanks to God for so many people who have contributed to our robust mission in Africa.



The following week in France, Marists, both the Sisters and our Renewalists from La Neylière, joined with the Bishop, clergy and laity in the cathedral at Belley, to celebrate the two hundred years since the re-establishment of the diocese of Belley, in 1823, and the appointment of Bishop Alexander Raymond Devie, so influential in our Marist history. Over the previous several days I had accompanied the Renewalists on a walking-camino "in the mountains of the Bugey where the first Marist missionaries experienced the joy of proclaiming the Good News to forgotten people" (# 54) Our theme during our Marist pilgrimage was "their call is to be truly missionary". (#12).

We reflected together on what inspired so many Marists to leave their home comforts to go out to hear Confessions and preach the Gospel in such demanding conditions. It would have been much easier for those first Marists to remain snugly by the home-fires in Cerdon on those cold winter days in the rugged Bugey mountains. Nor did they stop in the Bugey. Before long others had travelled to distant shores. Why did they get up and go? Why would we get up and go, in our own day?

Baptism calls every Christian to missionary discipleship. However, we Marists have always understood we also have a particular and personal call from Mary which is one fruit of our Baptismal vocation. Mary gives us her Name and commissions us to undertake her Work with a passion. When it is cold outside and the warm home-fires may attract us to stay comfortably nearby, Mary's call urges us to go forth.

We are also motivated "to go to the peripheries" when we listen attentively and prayerfully to the cries of distress around us. Whether it is loneliness or addiction or a hopelessly unjust situation, so many people are in need. Also, our created natural world is stressed and cries out for healing. As Marists we are called to offer the healing grace of the Good News and the Sacraments to our suffering world and a simple, prayerful, faithful and common life-style that preaches the Gospel, sometimes without words. From our earliest days, Marists have discerned the needs of people both near (as with the neighbouring Bugey villages) and far and have responded generously and courageously in the manner of Mary.

Also, our shared enthusiasm is infectious. Embracing our Marist vocation communally we encourage each other by sharing our dreams, struggles and joys. When Etienne Déclas joined the Colin brothers in Cerdon and they set out on their shared missions in the Bugey they believed that the Society had truly begun. We sense they relished the challenges as they faced them together. Others soon joined them.

On July 23 we will be celebrating the pledge at Fourvière in 1816. Let's celebrate this day by taking at least one step in a missionary direction. "Mission can be as simple as crossing the road". (2017 General Chapter).

Fraternally, in Mary's Name.

John Larsen s.m.