

Reflection from the Superior General

Profound conversations with others who trustingly share their life stories, especially with Marists, can be moments of blessed encounters. We can hear of the challenge to grow in response to our fundamental Christian and Marist call. Sometimes this struggle to persevere in the Christian-Marist "way" is arduous. One of the graces of servant-leadership within the Society includes many such privileged encounters.

Lent is a time to help us to return to the roadmap for the Christian and Marist pilgrimage and check that we are on the right track to keep growing in our Marist and Christian vocation. It is easy to be allured by many distractions and overcome by the rigours of the journey and so to lose our way in the heat of the day. As the years go by it is all too easy to just surrender to "the world", drifting along aimlessly.

It is a joy to listen to our younger confreres who are full of energy as young Marists on fire with the Gospel. Their challenge is to keep directing their energy within the perspective of dynamic faith. They can easily come to believe that everything depends on them and then they can shatter, or just become despondent, when their plans go awry, as if they themselves have failed. The call of Lent for them is to profound *prayer* of trust in the Lord who, rather than they, is the true Saviour of the world.



It is a joy to listen to our confreres in their middle-years who have achieved some competence and facility in Marist life and ministry and who remain inspired to keep growing. Sometimes they find themselves in leadership and they are asked to give support to their companions undertaking the Work of Mary. Their Marist challenge is to keep focused on the call of the radicality of the Gospel, rather than compromising with distractions that make our lives too comfortable and easy. This can be a season for all sorts of addictions to divert and overwhelm us. The call of Lent is to *penance*, healthy ascetic practices that keep our vision focused only on Jesus and Mary, casting aside the lure of comfortable compromises.

It is a joy to listen to our senior confreres who have achieved a profound degree of integration of their faith, their memories and their experiences, and who remain joyful in their Marist vocation lived for so long, and as faithfully as possible, with all their ups and downs. They so often remain vitally interested and enthusiastic about all that is happening. Their challenge is to keep searching for ever new and fresh paths to continue contributing to the Work of Mary in ways that are appropriate to their health, faithful to their wisdom and immersed in their prayer. This is a form of *almsgiving*, to keep "giving".

We set off on our Christian pilgrimage with our Baptism. We find bearings for the journey as Marists. The goal is transformation into Christ in the heart of the Church, no less. Sometimes we lose the way. The blessed season of Lent keeps us on track by prayer, penance, and almsgiving. It is a time to celebrate Confession and Reconciliation, of re-setting the path.

Sometimes we can seem like solitary pilgrims, alone and isolated, on this Christian-Marist journey through life. With our Marist profession we pledge to journey together and to support each other, for all our individual eccentricities, our own particular personalities and struggles. Lent is a time to seek out our companions on the journey, to support each other by listening, especially when we or they might have turned aside, choosing to go it alone, perhaps because we or they are hurt or weary or discouraged.

I appreciated these words of Pope Francis recently: *Love needs tangibility, love needs presence, encounter, it needs to be given time and space: it cannot be reduced to beautiful words or images on a screen, momentary selfies or hasty messages. These are useful tools that can help, but they cannot substitute for real love. When was the last time I went to visit and to listen to someone who was alone or sick or changed my plans to meet someone's needs?* (Angelus message. Feb. 11, 2024).

A blessed Lenten journey and a joyful celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus this Easter!

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