

# Reflection from the Superior General

September 12, Feast of the Holy Name of Mary

One senior Marist, once an outstanding leader, told me from his wheelchair in the aged-care home: "I sometimes feel like I am on an ice-berg floating away from the body of the Society of Mary". Another had been told he was welcome in the community "just as long as he could take care of himself". There can be generational and cultural loneliness too with our different stories, memories, life-experiences and places of origin. Many people, Marists among them, can often feel vulnerable and isolated.

The Holy Name of Mary this September 12 offers quite a different perspective. Mary is blessed with her own unique Name among the masses of unnamed "anawin" throughout history.

The headlines in Europe last week were dominated by the tragedy of a super-yacht off Sicily suddenly sinking. We soon learned the names of the famous people who drowned. RIP. However, the same



Mediterranean Sea has been called "a cemetery" by Pope Francis for the thousands of migrants drowning as they attempt their perilous journeys in the hope of a new life. Mostly their names remain unknown. Who wants to know them? We can be distracted while people near us are drowning in their own "seas" of loneliness. This feast invites us to offer salvation by calling these struggling people by their own unique names and sharing our stories, especially the story of our faith which gives new life.

Some of our confreres find simple, effective ways to live the spirituality of the Holy Name of Mary. Another Marist I met in a nursing home told me: "When I feel well enough, I set off in my wheel chair, visiting other patients, listening to them. Often, I come to know their families, too. I have wonderful a ministry here!"

September 1, until the Feast of Saint Francis on October 4, has been named the "Season of Creation" by Pope Francis. The created world calls us into wider communion since "each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous". (Laudato Si', 84).

Six of our young confreres are presently preparing to pronounce Perpetual vows this September 28. They come from Cameroon, Togo, Vanuatu and New Zealand. They will vow themselves to live chastely for the rest of their lives. However, all Christians are called to practise the virtue of chastity, a life of respectful and graced relationships. Chastity abhors the sin of manipulating others, blotting out their individual names and stories, or objectifying them in any way, for our own selfish purposes. The sin of pornography, for example, is one festering wound inflicted by the demon of loneliness and isolation. The chaste Christian life honours welcoming, honest and transparent relationships.

Vibrant communities within the wider society around us, and also within the Society of Mary, nurture these life-giving relationships. Strong communities require perseverance, creativity and commitment. It can be as simple as participating fully in community activities and making the best contribution we can. This September 12 is a graced opportunity to reach out to others by sharing our prayer – especially the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Communion - our meal tables and our lives. Let's look out especially for our confreres who find themselves on their own this Holy Name.

Living prayerfully, in the state of grace, confessing our sins which divide us, means that we are never isolated from the love of God. William Dalrymple in his book "From the Holy Mountain" recounts meeting an Italian priest living like a hermit, isolated within southern Turkey among Muslims, some of them hostile to his presence, and asking this holy man: "aren't you lonely?". The priest's answer was, "loneliness ... what is that?" Our novice master used to tell us, only partly jokingly: "I am never lonely when I have my rosary beads!".

May all our Marist Family, especially those who feel isolated in any way, rejoice in Mary's Holy Name!

*John Larsen s.m.*