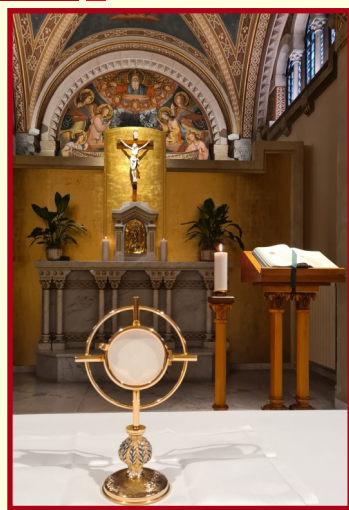


Reflection from the Superior General

Last Saturday, against the background of wars waging in so many regions of the world, six of our younger confreres here in Rome professed their perpetual vows in the Society of Mary.

These young men come from the units of Africa, Oceania and New Zealand. I imagine some of us might understandably be asking: "Good for them, but where are the young Marists from our own region?". However, these young men represent all of us since we are all united in one Society of Mary. The unity of our Society is one of our most prophetic Marist responses to our often-violently fragmented world.

As Marists we are united, above all, in our faith in Jesus Christ – died and risen – whose broken and glorious body is the Church. We are also united in our common commitment to live our profound and beautiful Marist charism. Our communities, particularly when they are clearly intercultural and intergenerational, are our local testimony to our unity in Christ and in Mary.



The Sacrament of Unity is the Eucharist. Whether we are in the southernmost Marist community in New Zealand or in northernmost Norway, or anywhere in-between, we express and nurture our unity when we pray for and with each other in our daily celebration of the Eucharist, "one body in Christ".

One of the gems of our 2017 General Chapter is the recommendation "to spend one hour in private prayer each day". (GC2017, 32). This is a call to each Marist individually. However, since 2017 some confreres, partly inspired by the Chapter's challenge, have decided to come together each day, often in the morning, for one hour of silent Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. The silence and depth of the Lord's loving presence in the Eucharist begins to permeate our lives and overcomes any false duality between contemplation and action which might think: "I say my prayers and then the real work begins". Moreover, a palpable sense of fraternity and shared-mission slowly seems to unify such communities. Perhaps there is little we can do

about terrible wars in foreign lands, but we Marists can work for unity and peace within and among ourselves, and all around us, by our Eucharist-centered prayerfulness.

Aggressive nationalism and narrow tribalism, which can also lurk within our own hearts and Marist units, lead to wars. We remember our missions in New Caledonia where churches are being deliberately set alight by indigenous protestors, desecrating unity and the Eucharist. Our iconic and beautiful church of Saint Louis, near Nouméa, was recently burnt down. The Provincial of Oceania, Fr. Kiade Rayalu, writes : *Now a lot of young Kanak men are calling that they let go of their Christian faith and return to their ancestors' ancient religion where we will probably see again how tribalism will take over. It is such a pitiful situation that I want to ask that we as Marists pray for the leaders of New Caledonia and also for the guidance and protection of our confreres and their work with the people there.*

Last month nine men and women from different branches of the Marist Family – four from the Society – united together for one month of praying and studying in Thailand around the theme of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. Fr. Hermes ("Larry") Sabud, the Director of the Programme, summed up their time together as focusing on a profound conversion of heart towards peace-building and dialogue with "the Other". The participants of the Workshop began each morning with one hour of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, as well as celebrating the Eucharist daily.

Our world is fraught with divisions and wars. The temptation is to retreat into narrow nationalisms and tribalism. The call of the Gospel is to be united in Christ. Our Marist call is to unity, peace and reconciliation. We are united with our six newly finally-professed confreres who are Brothers for all of us in our one Society. Congratulations to them, and also to their formators.

A blessed Fiesta of Saint Francis of Assisi today, the Saint who sang of *fratelli tutti* – fraternity.

John Larsen s.m.