



CERDON MARIST INTERNATIONAL NOVITIATE

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TASTING GOD



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EDITORIAL

At the beginning of the novitiate journey, we were worried and concerned about how we would begin the journey well. Now that we are now towards the end of our journey, we ask a similar question: how do we finish the journey well?

During last few weeks, we experienced many strong earthquakes, nearly every day. It shook not only the building, but also every member of the community. In one way or another, sometimes in our novitiate journey, we experience being shaken. That experience of being shaken will become stronger once we are aware that we are about to finish the novitiate formation journey. The usual tendency and danger are to slowly give up, lose interest, slow down; and to just sit down, relax, count the remaining days, and start packing. To be honest, this can be a big challenge to both formators and novices.

Both self-evaluations and group evaluations are finished; applications for the first profession have been made; and planning for the profession liturgy has already begun. These are valid reasons to slow down, be lax, and relax; this is one way of looking at the journey.

There is another way of looking at the journey, even while aware that the journey is about to end – this is the calling and invitation to finish the novitiate journey well. The words of St. Paul will be a big help and encouragement to finish the journey well: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

What St. Paul is conveying is that we must stand firm and endure to the end. Remember, though, that standing firm is more than just standing still – if we don’t get that



idea, we’ve missed the point. We must move forward; we must persevere. We must be like Paul and say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” St. Paul is actually giving us a model to finish this long journey well, to keep going in spite of the hardships and obstacles. It is not just a matter of simply keeping going, but rather a matter of sustaining and maintaining the form, remaining consistent, keeping the discipline, and staying focused.

As you and I run continue the race set before us yesterday, today, and tomorrow, take time to reflect on your own journey. Remember Paul’s words to Timothy, and realize that with the Lord, you too can fight the fight, run the race, continue the journey, and keep the faith. Keep going; with the Lord, we can run well and finish strong! May you and I be like the apostle Paul as we come to the end of our journey.

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HOLY NAME OF MARY



Whenever I come across the Holy Name of Mary, it always reminds of three things about the beauty of this holy name: the liturgical feast, the person of Mary, and our personal relationship with Mother Mary in life.

The feast of the Holy Name of Mary always says something special to me each year, as we take time to celebrate the holiest creature of all. The feast day of the Holy Name of Mary always binds different people of all stages in life together. I remembered this when we attended the celebration at the Marist Brothers' place in Davao City. It was a different atmosphere altogether: under the band of Mary's holy name, her children came together to share that evening with love and care. The celebration was one of witnessing how her holy name and spirit continue to have an effect on people. It was an experience of love in reality, sharing and accepting each other as her family. I still recall the joy of that evening: young and old were praying and celebrating together, but what really touched me was the diversity of the evening – people from different countries and backgrounds able to share with each other harmoniously without fear or prejudice.

But what brings us together to celebrate this name, the Holy Name of Mary? There is no other answer than the person of Mary, who she is. She is the person who calls us together as her sons and daughters. She wants us to share her life with others – a life that is full of grace, knowing that “the Lord is with her”; a life that was beautifully described as “blessed among women” by the angel. Indeed, her life was not only blessed, but the fruit of her womb is our salvation. She is called the Mother of God, and she continues praying for us sinners. Her entire life is well described by her name: the Holy Name of Mary. This is the woman whom Fr. Colin rightly asked Marists to imitate, and whose spirit Marists are called to live.

Each of us has a different relationship with Mother Mary. My relationship with Mother Mary

is something I find very important and fun at times, by just calling her holy name whenever I wish. It always gives me comfort and peace of mind when I call out to her. Her holy name can invoke different moods and experiences to me personally. Hence, if I could record how many times I call her holy name throughout my entire life, I would not be able to do so. It always sounds so melodious, this name; it gives me love, courage, strength, care, and humility in my life. The name itself has power to move and stop things in life. Last but not the least, I like the way St. Jerome described the name of Mary: *Stella Maris*, the Star of the Sea. She is the star for those of us who struggle in life and in following her Son, Jesus; she is the star leading us to live Christian life faithfully and fruitfully.



LOOKING AHEAD TO NEW NOVICES



The joy of receiving new novices

It is always encouraging to see young people wanting to join the Society of Mary. It is even more encouraging to see the generosity they show by entering into the long process of preparation to become its members, placing themselves at the service of the Gospel in the spirit of Mary. The Constitutions say that this “longing for the Marist religious life” is a gift of the Holy Spirit (C.36). It is also and often an attraction awakened in them by the example and invitation of other Marists who love and care for the family to which they belong and are happy to share their joy with other people.

Many Marists in different parts of the world cannot directly experience this encouragement. In their countries and communities there are no vocations; they cannot directly experience people calling at the door, nor can they enjoy their physical and spiritual presence. They can only rejoice, yes, although it is a limited joy, when they hear that in other parts of the Marist world there are candidates received as members of the family.

Here at the novitiate, we are fortunate to receive them, enjoy their presence, and work with them. At this moment, we are looking forward to seeing the faces of the new candidates, listening to their stories, knowing their dreams, and also experiencing their personal and particular situation – the fruit of conditions in their countries of origin, in their families, their training, and their age...

How are the candidates called to start the novitiate next January?

The situation is not what we would have dreamt. First of all, this is because the eight new novices we expected to receive come only from Africa and Oceania; no other unit of the Society had candidates ready for this year. This is one of the greatest poverties we are experiencing. As it is usually said, “The real poor is not the one who has nothing, but the one who has nobody.” That is our reality, and we have to live with it.

Things have gone even worse, humanly speaking. The four coming from Oceania have arrived safely in Davao. The other four coming from Africa did not arrive. Well, they arrived at the airport in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, but were refused entry at immigration control. They were sent back to Cameroon. It is not the first time this has happened to religious, but it is the first time it has happened to us. Can they be readmitted? That is what we wish and pray for, knowing that it will not be easy.

As for those who have arrived, we have already seen their faces, faces from two countries in the Pacific, Fiji and Vanuatu, with their characteristic features and colours. They are following a program of orientation to the new country and its culture, in order to prepare themselves for the experience of the novitiate, which begins for them in January. It means that they will not be mixing with the present novices, currently in the last stage of their novitiate; instead, the new novices will come once the profession has taken place.

The formators have more information about the incoming novices through the reports they received from the formators in Oceania and from psychological reports. Documents, however, do not say everything, and it is frequent that the reality is somewhat different from a written document, especially when a big change of place and circumstance is involved, as in the present case.

This information is a starting point. It needs to be contrasted with the daily life and behaviour during these two months of preparation and during the novitiate period. The whole formation, particularly the novitiate, is considered a period of personal growth, of transformation. To measure the evolution in a person and the growth obtained or the capacity for growth, benchmarks are needed along the way. That is why it is so important that accurate information is received.

Together with this information, the personal commitment, good will, and enthusiasm of both candidates and formators are vital. We deal with people, not with computers, machines, or robots. We entrust these new novices and their formators to the care of Mary, the First and Perpetual Superior of the Society.

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST IGNATIUS: PART II



A spiritual retreat is time set aside to revive prayer, to let the word of God speak to our hearts as we observe absolute silence. It is also a time to leave, for a few days, one's activities – to make a break in one's rhythm of life and, placing oneself in the presence of God, to taste God and discover his wonders in our lives. This is the reason why it is necessary to take a break in life, leaving all one's activities to revisit one's relationship with God. It is in this perspective that the novices took a two-week leave of our usual program to listen and recharge with God.

Our retreat began on Monday, July 24, and ended on August 7, 2019, with a closing Mass. During the two-week retreat, we journeyed with Christ, meditating upon the great moments of his passage on earth: his birth and baptism; his passion and death; and, finally, his resurrection. Meditating on his great moments, we recognized ourselves as sinners relying on the mercy of God. Journeying with him, living the suffering that he lived from Gethsemane to his burial after his death on the cross, we became, through the joy of his resurrection, a new people with a new strength.

These stages of his life led us to recognize the free gift of God: his presence among us. Then, we can make decisions and change our lives to do his work. Finally, we recognize his love both through his suffering and by his gift of the Eucharist. In this way, we once again renewed our covenant with Christ, renewing our commitment to love him always and to serve him concretely in our lives.

During the two weeks of retreat, the novitate team assisted us through spiritual accompaniment, helping us to concentrate, to find the answers to questions that we might ask, and assisting us in the difficulties that we might encounter during our meditations. At the end of the retreat, we were all radiant with the joy that comes from two weeks spent reflecting on the person of Christ, as well as from the abundant graces that we received during the retreat. These graces allow us to continue, with determination, to be disciples of Christ, and to serve him in the Society of Mary, as our founder, Fr. Jean Claude Colin, would wish.



HUMAN FORMATION: TRANSCENDENCE



Some weeks before, our formators announced that we would have the Bugey Mission Experience for three weeks: one week in Davao and two weeks in Marist communities outside Davao. We did not have any idea of where we would go, or of

what kind of mission we would encounter. At this time, I was having lots of thoughts and anxious feelings, because I was thinking that it would be very hard for me. In the end, however, everything turned out well.

Before going for our Bugey Mission Experience, we had a five-day session with Ate Leah and Ate Orett, both of whom help us in our human formation. I have found them very helpful in my journey of formation throughout this year.

For the first two days, Ate Leah introduced us to the places where we would be going, and we looked at what kinds of missions we would encounter. She gave us questions which, in answering them, I began to have a fair idea of what I might expect during the Bugey Mission Experience; this really calmed down the anxiety I was feeling at the time. The questions asked: Who am I? What do I expect in the mission? How will the host expect me to behave and how can I be available for doing things both inside and outside the community? By answering these kinds of questions, I gained confidence to go to any place for the Bugey Mission Experience.

The other three days were spent with Ate Orett. Topics we talked about included: “My Heart’s Desire,” “Dreams of Glory,” “Woven into Being,” and “My Kite Experience” (my experience of transcendence). These topics helped me to go within myself and have a conversation with my deepest self. My ego truthfully mentioned my heart’s desires – both important and unimportant – as I intertwined my values and needs with my desires. However, by identifying these elements in me, I gradual-

ly came to feel free and relaxed, after I had put aside the least important desires, values, and needs – which were obstacles to my journey of formation – and upheld those desires, values, and needs which will help me in my mission.

My kite-ing experience also gave me knowledge of the times when I made sacrifices in order to make my kite soar high. I also reflected upon how I handle or cope with crisis situations, as well as strategies to handle them better. It was very beneficial to do this and to make myself conscious of forming objectives to deal with life situations. Additionally, in “Dreams of Glory,” I was pushed to have a goal of something I would like to accomplish at the end, directed by my inner desire of who I want to become: a Marist. At the end of the day, I presented my goal to God and allowed God to respond to my desires, values, and needs.

The topics of transcendence shaped and prepared me for the three weeks of the Bugey Mission Experience. After these sessions, I really felt calm and eagerly waited for the pastoral weeks to come; I believe my brothers also felt the same way.

In the ministry, I actually did well, without any feelings of doubt or anxiety, because I was aware of myself from the talks which we had had. With the host as well, I didn’t feel shy, hesitant, or nervous to stay with them.

Finally, this also helped me to build confidence of who I am and of anything I want to do for my pastoral or ministry in the future; I could say that it put me, emotionally, on the right path for growth, allowing me to minister with the right emotion. Lastly, it helps in my prayer life, dedicating my whole life to God each day.

Leonard Wui AMORA