

Reflection from the Superior General

Visiting the Francophone regions of Marist Oceania, and also our “omnes gentes” community in Marayong, Australia, has been a time of rich blessing for me. One particular highlight was a pilgrimage to one tiny beach on the island of Wallis in the Pacific where our early confreres – Fr. Bataillon, Fr. Chanel, Bishop Pompallier, Brother Marie-Nizier, among others – first arrived in Oceania in 1837 after their long voyage from France. As I prayed there I wondered how they understood the mission ahead of them.

As my visit in the Pacific continued I grew in appreciation – awe, almost – of how the mission developed in New Caledonia, Wallis, Futuna, Vanuatu and beyond, as well as in Sydney, in Australia. There is now a strong Catholic and Marist presence in these places which is largely the fruit of the endeavours of the pioneering missionaries and their legions of successors, many of whom are buried in places far removed from their own homelands. Our missionary history is indeed rich, varied and vibrant.

Yet I also experienced some trepidation for all of us who walk in their pioneering footsteps, bearing their legacy. We can easily feel weighed down with a perceived obligation to continue their good works, whatever

the cost. For us to continue to walk faithfully in the footsteps our Marist forebears we are called to avoid the temptation of dissipating our energies in order “to keep things going”, at the risk of a diminishment of our Marist identity and of harm to our community and prayer lives.

We share our predecessors’ mission, of course, which is to bring the joy of the Good News of Jesus Christ in our Marist way to the people of our time. To be truly faithful to their legacy we need to embrace our Marist missionary charism that we share with our forebears while respecting, at the same time, that we live in the vastly different context of our own modern world and of our Society.



Our challenge is to stand on the shifting sands of our own time and to ask ourselves the same question as Peter Chanel and his companions may well have asked so long ago: “given our resources, our mission and our charism, how are we Marists called to bring the Good News to the poor with the greatest possible depth, professionalism and commitment?”. For us, rather than trying to cover all the bases so well laid by our predecessors, it may be time to let go of some of the generous previous commitments our confreres have undertaken. We ask ourselves what ministries are most specifically Marist and re-commit ourselves to those “Works of Mary” that best express our identity and mission for our own times. Our greatest gift to the church and the people of our time is our call to live our Marist charism passionately wherever we may be called. We can be encouraged that we are enjoying a renewed sense of Marist “family” and so we can undertake “the Work of Mary” together with others.

If we are to live our Marist mission more profoundly it must be rooted, more than ever, in the depths of our community lives and personal lives of prayer. It is good to pray together, share our meals together and live under one roof. Even more than this, we hope our communities loudly proclaim the Gospel, with or without words. It is good that we “say our prayers”. More profoundly, we are challenged to live our whole lives rooted in God’s loving presence, with a deep, personal sense that Mary is calling and accompanying us. At the same time our own sense of frailty and sinfulness calls us to constant conversion. A profound Marist prayer and community life bears fruit in a clearly defined Marist contribution to the church and the world of our own time. Like our forebears, we too need to “launch into the deep”.

A blessed day of profession for our novices in Italy and, in Asia, for our young brothers and their formators about to begin novitiate in the Philippines. We also pray for our confreres in Oceania and Asia who participating in their Chapters this month.

A blessed Feast of the Epiphany and a blessed New Year for 2023!

John Larsen s.m.