

# Reflection from the Superior General

Rome, 2 March 2018

The Solomon Islands are the setting for a long and proud Marist history. "The Marist history in the Solomon Islands is pure gold dust," according to the emeritus Archbishop of Honiara, Adrian Smith S.M. The colourful story is strewn with Marist martyrs and saints and, I guess, our share of stragglers, too. Until quite recently every mission station scattered throughout many of these islands was "Marist", under the leadership of Marist Bishops. The fruit of all this missionary labour is a church that is described by the new Dominican Archbishop of Honiara as "young, dynamic and growing". It has been a great encouragement for me to have been visiting these Islands for the last ten days.

However, from our Marist perspective everything is changing, and fast. Now almost all the parishes are led by local diocesan priests (a tribute to the Marists who worked so hard to encourage an indigenous clergy). Now there are other Religious Congregations here and some of them, like the Salesians, have established themselves in quite some style. Young men who may be thinking of the Priesthood or Religious Life are just as likely to knock on doors of other Congregations as to turn "naturally" towards the Marists. Our numbers are much diminished, too, and several of our confreres have chosen to walk by another path.



As I have been here, listening to the stories of our confreres, I have realised yet again the truth of the much-quoted saying of Pope Francis; "we are living in an era of change so much as a change of era".

In our Catholic Tradition the path in the ways of spiritual growth is often mapped in two distinct but related journeys – the active night and the passive night. The transition between the two is seen as perilous and I believe this is the stage of the Marist presence in the Solomons right now. Our journey here has

been very active – building schools, parishes, a local church with individual Marist missionaries, each a boundary rider. Now everything is changing and we are handing over to others. It is like the passive night of the spiritual Tradition. The path is just as dark as before – probably darker - while we are being called to a new trust in God. God is taking over as never before and we are caught at night on a roller coaster of a wave. We need to hold on tight...to God.

The days of the lonely missionary building up the Kingdom of God in "splendid isolation" (and a good bit of loneliness at times, too) are giving way to more prayerful communities of several Marists responding to the specific needs of the local church, especially the needs of the poor. I visited four such communities and was delighted with the faith and the apostolic zeal I met there. "Every man to himself", financially, is very slowly changing to transparent sharing of financial resources for Marist life and mission. "Near enough is good enough" is not good enough now. Our mission is becoming more focused – education, care for the handicapped, rural training, growing ecological and spiritual awareness among an increasingly educated Christian community – and we Marists need to be more focused and better educated, too. The way is being shown to us. We need to trust.

The Marist glory days are over. We are still called here in the Solomons to do Mary's work, just as surely as ever. It's just that as we are handing over to others – especially "The Other" - we need to change direction.

The future is "letting go, letting God". It's the heart the message for Lent, too.

*John Larsen s.m.*