

Reflection from the Superior General

Rome, 1 June 2018

Dear Confreres

This last week I attended an international meeting of Superiors General here in Rome. A Marist Brother from Syria, Georges Sabe, was one of the speakers. The Marist Brothers have stayed in Aleppo, in Syria, through all of the fiercest fighting of recent years. Brother Georges spoke of "a human hemorrhage" of refugees from Aleppo, especially of Christians whose population has been decimated. These people have fled anywhere, but especially to Germany, Canada and Australia. However, the Marist brothers have remained, opening their doors to anyone who seeks refuge with them and trying, against all odds, to teach any children at all who can find their way to the make-shift classrooms.

This month we celebrate the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

When Jesus was attacked his arms remained open and his heart was exposed. He was fatally wounded but these very wounds became sacred with divine love. As the Preface of the Feast says: "*won over to the open heart of the Saviour, may all people draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation*". His open, loving heart was the source of the blood of the Eucharist and the living waters of Baptism.



We can feel that there are battles raging all about us too, and there is a human hemorrhaging of support and encouragement. There may be problems that seem insurmountable. We can feel personally deeply wounded. The most natural thing in the world is to run away or blame others or just surrender in any one of a multitude of ways. The challenge is to do just the opposite. We will look to the Sacred Heart and never turn inward on ourselves. We will keep opening our hearts and minds - and the doors of our communities - in a loving, life-giving, embrace to those who come knocking. The person knocking may be our Superior or a difficult confrere - or both!

There are many hopeful signs of this happening all over the Society. One of our Brothers, Denis O'Brien, who is celebrating his fiftieth jubilee of Profession this year, has just volunteered to help in whatever way he can in one of the most difficult missions in the heart of Buddhist (and monsoon) Asia. His Province is encouraging him even though they are also sacrificing when they support his discernment. Or, again, there is our school in Atlanta in the USA which has just lost two key Marists from leadership - one to be Vicar General in Rome and one to be Bishop in Atlanta. However, undaunted, the Marist educators in the USA have convoked a forum to find new and creative ways forward. Our confreres in Europe, who are struggling in so many ways, have opened an *albergue* with welcoming doors for pilgrims in northern Spain. In Peru, our confreres have been threatened with the closure of our ministry in our school and parish. In spite of the sacrifice, they are determined to keep open the doors of the Marist school and parish to the needs of so many around them

It is not a question of multiplying or even maintaining Marist communities, necessarily. Nor is it about moving elsewhere. It is rather a call to meditate upon the Sacred Heart, finding there the strength to open our own hearts and minds and doors, however vulnerable we may be, that there may be new life.

We also celebrate the Immaculate Heart of Mary, whose purity led to her Son's teaching: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*". Mary reminds us that the love of the vulnerable heart is not concerned with ever more action, but rather a contemplative gaze - "purity of heart" - that opens us up to the love of God and to those who are struggling, offering them her maternal welcome.

Georges Sabe FMS spoke of the human hemorrhaging of Syrian refugees, especially to Germany, Australia and Canada. We Marists have communities in all of these countries, and many more besides...

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

John Larsen s.m.