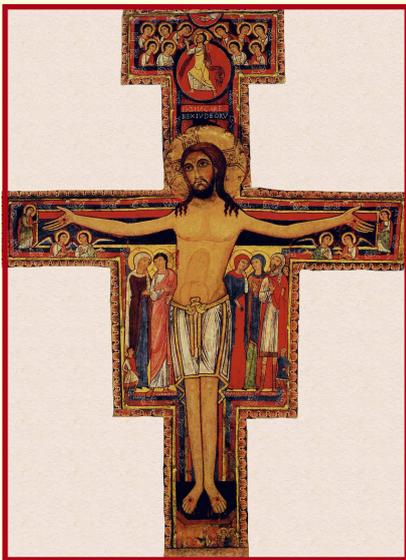


Reflection from the Superior General

Rome, Feast of Saints Peter and Paul

Dear Confreres

It was a joy to go to "Casa di Maria" last Friday, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, to confer the ministries of Lector and Acolyte on eleven of our Marist seminarians as they complete their academic year and head off on their "mission immersion experience" to different regions of our world. They are heading into complex situations with people of many religions (and none), with different languages and perspectives. They are called to listen sensitively and carefully to every person and situation and respond with a faith that is nourished by the Word (the ministry of Lector) and Sacrament (the ministry of Acolyte). They are like Mary heading off into the hill country of Galilee, inspired by the Spirit and bearing the Body of Christ.



Crucifix of San Damiano
"Go and repair my House"

Our young confreres are growing in our common Marist vocation of listening to the people and situations of our time and responding sensitively from a profound faith. This is the call to dialogue. We share this vocation with Mary who listened to those around her, "pondered these things in her heart" and gave instructions to "do whatever he tells you".

Dialogue begins with the asceticism of dying to our inner noisiness so that we can be attentive to the voice of "the other". Firstly, it is the spiritual discipline of listening to the quiet voice of the Spirit every morning as we ponder the Scriptures and hear what the Lord is saying. Then we are called to listen to our confreres especially those who are different from us. Then we listen to the Word of the Lord who speaks with a special clarity in "the cry of the poor", both our sisters and brothers who are suffering and the creation around us which is crying out as it is despoiled. This asceticism of listening is difficult to cultivate but it is an essential dimension of our understanding of "hidden and unknown in this world". We pay attention to "the other" rather than to our noisy selves.

The other essential dimension of dialogue is our compassionate and sensitive response, speaking "the truth in love". We may use words but our actions always give greater testimony to our faith. We can be in "a foreign land" a long time before anyone ever asks us "why are you here among us, interested in us and caring for us?" Only then may we speak authentically of our Christian faith that motivates us, and invite them to join us on our pilgrimage with the Father, Son and Spirit within the community of believers.

We can easily offer facile answers that echo only the prevailing language and opinions of everyone around us. As Marist Religious we are called to live more profoundly and respond with our personal faith in the Risen Lord. Elizabeth asks Mary: "why am I honoured by a visit from the Mother of my Lord?" Mary responds with the *Magnificat*. This spirituality of dialogue harmonises beautifully with our Marist charism, breathing Mary's "spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God and the most ardent love of neighbour" (Const. 228).

Some Marists shape their life's work around this call, as do our confreres who work in the area of inter-religious dialogue. Fr. Larry Sabud from the Philippines has studied and ministered in this area for years, firstly among Muslims and more recently among Buddhists. This year another Filipino, Fr. Kevin Medilo, has been granted a full post-graduate scholarship to study and research inter-religious dialogue in Rome. We trust in faith that there will be abundant fruit from their work.

Our General Chapter challenges all Marists: "to strive for a higher level of professionalism in missionary involvement ... especially in the area of inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation.... (G.C. 2017, 9b). However, "dialogue" is more than a ministry, even a critical one in our divided world. "Dialogue" is a way of life for all Marists – young and not so young - as it was for Mary whose name we bear.

John Larsen s.m.