

Reflection from the Superior General

Recently we were delighted to welcome here in Rome many of our confreres who minister in our formation communities throughout the Marist world. These confreres take to heart Fr. Jean-Claude's words "the Society must begin a new Church again" as they face the daily challenges of forming younger Marists for the future.

When we Marists speak of forming a new Church with a Marian face we do not mean that we are starting a new Church, some sort of cult, nor a Church that is opposed to the Petrine, hierarchical Church. Rather we are talking about a new spring-time in our Church which is both ancient and new. The freshness comes from the life-giving Spirit which shaped Mary's life among us and which we as Marists embody in our special way.



The formators who came here prayed and shared about their own experiences, hopes and concerns. They were enthusiastic about playing their part in forming this new Church with a new generation of Marists. They talked about all aspects of formation. They searched for ways to "begin a new Church again".

The moment of Nazareth sheds a special light on the ministry of formation. For those years that Jesus was in Nazareth he "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. The favour of God was upon him". (Lk.2:40). The Nazareth years are understood in our spiritual tradition as a call to a simple life-style, rooted in prayer among ordinary people. Jesus, the Word of God, grew in understanding of his own divine call day by day in the ordinary world of Mary and Joseph, their family and neighbours and all that was happening around them.

Father Jean-Claude spoke very dearly of Nazareth. He said: "Our Spirit, the spirit of the Society ... do you know where it is to be found? I personally find it in all its fullness in the house of Nazareth".

Yesterday, in Mozambique, Pope Francis echoed that same wisdom of Fr. Jean-Claude when he said: "Returning to Nazareth can be the way of ... being renewed as shepherds, disciples and missionaries". (September 5, 2019.)

Formation for a new Church with a Marian face invites us to return to Nazareth. In Nazareth we live and work simply, very close to the ordinary people around us and with our days rooted in and nourished by prayer.

Now the formators are returning to their ministry of forming Marists for a new Church with a Marian face. They return, as it were, to Nazareth to accompany young people who aspire to be Marists.

Yet we know that all of us are called to this ministry of formation in different ways. Personally we grow in our own relationship with Mary at Nazareth, living simply among our neighbours, sustained by a life of deep prayer. This call to on-going personal formation in the quietness of Nazareth is always just beginning for all of us, no matter how many years we have lived as Marists.

We are also called to accompany the people we meet along the way and invite them into a new life of the Church with a Marian face. Enriched by our own on-going formation in the inner sanctuary of Nazareth we bring others to live in the community of the renewed Spirit-filled Church with the gracious face of Mary. In Nazareth, as in the new Church, our hearts and our ecclesial communities are simple, prayerful and immersed in the ordinary life of neighbours.

By returning to Nazareth each Marist undertakes the ministry of formation, both personal and ecclesial.

A blessed Feast of the Holy Name of Mary wherever we may be celebrating!

John Larsen s.m.