

Reflection from the Superior General

Our world is crying out for the Good News, if only we have the sensitivity to hear, to love and to see. Lent is a graced opportunity to sharpen our senses, by faith.

There is a particular challenge we see in the terrible crisis in the Ukraine. One of the many underlying causes of this war is the painful split between the Christians in Russia and those in the Ukraine. The aggressive war in the Ukraine urges us all to work, however and wherever we can, for reconciliation, justice and peace. Our faith-filled spiritual insight allows us to see the injustices around us and love urges us to action. Lenten asceticism is a training ground for this missionary challenge.

Our religious landscape is always changing in our world. Where missionaries were once sent – Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific, for example – our Christian communities are often flourishing, making many demands on us. Meanwhile, those very areas that once sent missionaries are often experiencing serious decline in explicitly Christian practice, overcome by a wave of secularism that in

itself is a challenge and an opportunity for an insightful missionary response. Lenten discipline trains us as Marists to be more perceptive, flexible and adaptable, guided by the Spirit of God.

Lent invites us to ask the hard questions about “how” and even “where” we are called to live our Marist missionary vocation for today where missionary challenges abound. It is too easy to maintain “business as usual”.

There are two Feasts this March of 2022 that give us compass bearings by which to chart our Marist missionary journey for the years ahead and that help us to shape a healthy asceticism this Lent.

Celebrating the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25 we find our guide in Mary, the disciple “who heard the Word of God and did it”. The Annunciation was the moment when Mary began to understand her

vocation to be Mother of the Son of God. She believed in the Word first in her heart. Then she embraced the consequences of her faith with joy, for all her trepidation. Like Mary, this Lent is for us a time of conversion of heart to hear the Word and act on it. The heart of our Marist missionary vocation is contemplative prayer. Could we commit ourselves to some spiritual practices that would nourish our contemplative vocation – perhaps committing less time to the screen and more hours in contemplative prayer or the serious spiritual reading of the Scriptures?

Celebrating the Feast of Saint Joseph, the spouse of Mary, on March 19, we unite with Joseph who silently but courageously put aside his own plans to follow the dreams inspired by God. While very much at home in Nazareth, with its own welcome rhythm of seasons, labour and synagogue, Joseph listened to the Spirit of God and set out again and again, to Bethlehem, to Jerusalem and even migrating with his family to foreign Egypt. What Lenten practices would free my heart to be more flexible and available to respond to the Spirit of God, even risking leaving behind my comfortable and familiar patterns of life? Could I prepare myself over Lent to write a letter this Holy Week for my major superior in which I would offer myself for any mission or any community he proposes. I would prepare myself to embrace wholeheartedly his response.

This Lent is a graced season to discern “the signs of the times” in our world of 2022 and adopt a healthy spiritual asceticism that would shape, by God’s grace, a more contemplative heart and a more courageous missionary generosity to perceive and respond lovingly to the changing demands of Mary’s Work today and tomorrow.

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