**FOLLOWING JESUS WITH MARY, LIKE MARY**

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Nothing identifies the youth of our times better than a sincere and intense search for its own identity. Above all in the first stage of youth a young person seeks to encounter a way of “being oneself” and understand one’s function in the world. It is common for groups of young people to reflect in their meetings on themes such as “Who am I?” The rebellion of adolescence consists exactly in this: a searching for one’s own identity and a denial of one’s image of father or mother.

At the last synod of bishops there was a discussion of the theme of “Youth and vocational discernment.” In the post-synodal exhortation *Christus Vivit* Pope Francis affirms: “Often in life we waste time asking ourselves, ‘Who am I?’ You can keep asking ‘Who am I?’ for the rest of your lives. But the real question is ‘For whom am I?’” And the Pope continues: “Of course you are for God. But he has decided that you should also be for others and he has given you many qualities , inclinations, gifts and charisms that are not for you, but to share with those around you.”[[1]](#footnote-1) To be for God and for others is a Christian way to discover your identity. The “Here I am” of Mary reveals her profound desire to be also *for God and for others.* With Mary we seek to be like Mary in following Jesus. But how is this possible?

In Marist spirituality to live like Mary is something more than some practices of pious Marian devotions. To think, feel, judge, and act like Mary means that the Marist is called by God to be like her in all aspects of personal life. Marists are consecrated to Jesus according to a model of Marian discipleship. This means that a Marist vocation has in itself a special characteristic, or in other words, the presence of Mary moulds the way Marists live.

Thus we can say clearly that the Marist vocation is truly Christian just like that of other Catholic Christians, but with a particular element, that is a way of relating with Mary. The Marist vocation is “to be in the world of today, a special presence of Mary, doing God’s work in her way. Marists remember this woman who, by a gracious choice, called them and gave them her name.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Moreover, “as Marists they desire to breathe her spirit, be humble and obedient, and deny themselves for the love of God and neighbour.”[[3]](#footnote-3) This means that the Marist ought to work on this mission doing everything as if Mary herself was doing it. The Marist accepts that all his life should be transformed by Mary from one’s innermost depths to one’s external actions.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The relationship of Mary with Jesus becomes more intimate with him than a spousal relationship. Thus she is influenced more deeply by the Son, as the Son is certainly influenced by the mother. About the filial relationship of Marists with Mary, the founder of the Society of Mary, Jean-Claude Colin emphasises:

If therefore they are and desire to be true sons of this dear mother, let them try constantly to breathe her spirit: a spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of neighbour. So they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things, otherwise they will be unworthy and degenerate sons.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

In seeking to live like Mary we can commit a grave error. It is not a matter of a mechanical repetition of acts, words and silences. It is before anything a “being moulded.” The model is Mary and we ought to *breathe her spirit.* The act of breathing is made up of two vital movements: breathe *in* and breathe *out.* To live is a constant movement to within and to without. An authentic spirituality cannot dispense with this movement. To live after the manner of Mary is to turn within and without, seeking not just to repeat actions, words and silences, but see the world and people with Mary’s eyes, internalizing the word and expressing it in a fruitful manner.

When we breathe the spirit of Mary, we find also a way to discern. The movement to within and to without helps to sort out what is good, what is not so good, and what is bad. It is the discernment of life. It is moreover the discernment of one’s own vocation, of one’s own path. This filter also locates the impurities, separates and identifies each thing. To understand well what happens within us and about us is the first step for a good discernment. A second and important step is prayer, as the most sure path to a deep interiorization and discernment of life and of one’s vocation, following the person of Mary.

The analogy of *breathing the spirit of Mary* triggers a question which is vital for Marists. It refers to the way in which we act in out daily lives relative to what is proper to our mother, so that our life is a reflection of the life of Mary. Thus we merit the dignity of sons. If the qualities of Mary are not noted in our practice then we can say we are not living our vocation, we are not being influenced by her teachings and so are like unworthy sons who do not correspond to the characteristics of their mother.

Mary is mother and, at the same time, companion of those who are made disciples of Christ by baptismal consecration. She inspires Christians to live an experience of intimate faith in God. As Marists we can say that the phrase *to live with Mary* expands *to live like Mary.* It is a way of being that is born of a profound intimacy which shows the characteristics of Mary herself. In everything the life of a Marist should be as if she was acting, thinking, feeling and judging. A symbiotic relationship between mother and child, elevated to the spiritual sphere, leads us to not only breathe the spirit of Mary, but also to feel at the same time the force of her motherly heart, to breathe in the vitality of her spirit.

Questions for reflection:

1. What difficulties do I meet when I try to live like Mary?
2. How do I feel when I place myself at the service of God and of my brothers and sisters?

1. Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit,* 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Constitutions of the Society of Mary, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Constitutions of the Society of Mary, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. J.A. Fernandez, *A Panoramic Vision of Marist Spirituality, p.20.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Constitutions of the Society of Mary, 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)