

Welcome to each one of you.

I am father John Larsen, the international leader of the Priests and Brothers of the Society of Mary.

I am saying welcome to you in this short video, and it's also a welcome to our Year of Vocations for Marists throughout the world, and to everyone who shares in the call of Mary and the call of the Lord.

The Lord continues to call people, that's for sure. We heard of how he does that. There are many examples in the Gospel, for example, in Mark, chapter 10: He meets a young man. And the young man says, "How can I have life?" And the Lord said: "keep the rules and follow the normal way of life". And he said: "I've been doing that". And the Lord says "no, if you really want to follow me, give up everything, give up everything, and come and be with me totally". Because the Lord loved him. And because of that love, He called him specially to be a disciple of his. And He is still doing that, in today's world He is calling people specially. That young man in the Gospel went away, sad, because he wasn't able to follow the Lord, the cares of the world, the riches, the voices he was hearing around him, and in his head, meant he had to say to the Lord: "look, I can't follow you". And many still say that, but the truth of the gospel passages, is that the Lord calls us, and calls us again, in love. And it's that call of the Lord to follow him in love, that we as Marists are celebrating, and praying about and reflecting on this year, starting on November 15, the feast of our holy founder, the venerable Jean Claude Colin. Since his time, men and women, people have been following the Lord with the spirit, and in the way of Mary, inspired by our early founders.

This year, during this year of vocations, we want First of all, to celebrate, and rejoice and renew our own vocation. This is a time for each of us to appreciate the call that each of us has heard from the Lord, to follow him in Mary's way. Now, sometimes it's really difficult. It's easy to say I can do all the things that the priests and the brothers do without being a priest or a brother. But this is a special way of doing those things, committing our lives totally, to follow Christ, to be His disciple, through thick and thin to Jerusalem, and beyond whatever that might mean. So the motivation for what we do is the call of Christ, and the

call of Mary. And it brings great joy and great peace. And we want to renew that joy and that peace this year.

This is a wonderful opportunity for renewal in Thanksgiving, in gratitude and joy for our call to be merest. We are not called alone, however, we are called to follow the Lord in our communities. And so this is a year also to encourage each other in our call to follow the Lord as disciples, and specifically to follow him as Mary did as Marists. And so we support each other by listening to the stories of the others calls, and by telling our own, and by listening to the Marists around us, the young people, all our friends, our colleagues, our partners in mission and encouraging each other, to live the call well, and so a culture of vocations builds up and is nourished over this year.

Sometimes we live in a culture within our societies, which discourages vocations, for many reasons, in which it's very difficult to follow the Lord as a priest or a brother in the society of Mary. But we remember that the Society of Mary is very international, and together, as brothers from different parts of the world, and as partners in mission from all over the world, there is a culture of Marist vocation, which can be nourished and appreciated and develop.

We not only see it as a time of renewal for our personal vocation, as a time for encouraging each other in our vocations whether as priests or as brothers or partners in mission or young people. We also see it as a time for renewing the work of the vocations directors throughout the world. We thank them for all they are doing. We thank them for their work and for preparing this year of vocations. But we can't leave them by themselves. They will guide us over this year in ways and long paths that will help us to rejoice in our vocation, and encourage others to join us. They will lead us with monthly reflections or material for monthly reflections, they will encourage us to have an annual retreat around the theme of vocations, they will be supporting us, but they cannot be alone. We too are called to encourage them, and in a sense, to become vocation directors ourselves, wherever we are, and whatever way we can.

Above all, we pray, we pray in our hearts, and in our communities, that the Lord will call and that we will respond. So this is a wonderful moment of grace, this year of vocations. Let's really enter into it with enthusiasm, by our prayer, by our renewal of vocation by our encouragement of each other, and so our lives become attractive, and people want to join us in the work that Mary gives us to do.

And if that young man in Mark 10, had difficulty following the Lord, Mary herself, at first, at the time of the visit, at the time of the Annunciation, had trouble following the Lord. But at the end of the encounter with the Lord, from the depth of her faith, she was able to empty herself and say “whatever you want, Lord”. And if, during this year, we are able to do the same as Mary, this year will have been a beautiful year indeed, for each one of us, and for people who are attracted to our way of life and want to join us. Because this is life to the full! Living water is springing up to eternal life as Marists in the church of today.

Thanks very much, all the best for the year.

Our vocations team that have prepared this week are inviting us to pray a special prayer. And so let's begin this vocations year with this prayer as we pray together

in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, Jesus, good shepherd. deign to look at this family of Mary, with your merciful eyes. Throughout this year of vocations, we want you Lord, to help us to enrich the merest world, with the fire of the Holy Spirit. May her subtle and delicate presence make us breathe the spirit of Mary. Thus committed to our own vocation, we will become credible spokespersons for your gospel and renewed and strengthened with the fire of the Holy Spirit. We will help to sprout the germ of vocation that nests in the hearts of young people accompanying them in the fulfillment of their personal vocation.

Oh Jesus. Give us vocations according to your heart. Amen.

Venerable John Claude Colin, pray for us.

Mary, seat of wisdom. Pray for us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.