

Reflection from the Superior General

Rome, Feast of St Peter Chanel

Dear Confreres

During this last week we Marists formally opened a new community along *The Camino*, in Spain. This community provides a place of spiritual nourishment and welcome for any pilgrims who pass by. One of the early pilgrims to arrive and stay was a Marist from the Pacific. He was struck by the presence of a relic of St. Peter Chanel. Peter Chanel seemed to be accompanying our confreres through the early days of their new mission, encouraging them and giving them a focus as a new Marist community opens welcoming strangers and searchers, who are the modern pilgrims.

Peter Chanel is challenging our confreres in Spain and all of us to “go to the peripheries” of our world and share in the lives of the people we find there. It was not an easy task for Peter to leave his beloved France and go the far ends of the world. It was only with the encouragement of a friend that he was able to set out. *“Peter had a difficult time saying farewell...he wavered. Jeanne-Marie Chavoine got him over the moment*

of anxiety with a few energetic words about priests who go mouldy in the midst of comfort and do nothing for God’s glory”. (“A Mission Too Far”. p. 41).

Even if we are unsure of ourselves, our brother Peter and our sister Jeanne-Marie Chavoine are encouraging us to make the effort to go to the peripheries of our world, whatever that might mean for us in our situation.

Both in France and on the tiny Oceanian island of Futuna Peter seemed to delight in the company of everyone he met. Peter is encouraging us on this his feast day to open our doors and our hearts to the people we meet along the track as we reach out to the peripheries. Sometimes these people come at inconvenient times and they may be very different from us, but there’s always a welcome. In a typical diary entry, Peter writes: (March, 1839) *“Rising 5.30. Holy Mass. Prayer. Meditation. We have scores of visitors...”* The following day he writes: *“5.30 Mass. Prayer. Meditation, during which we were interrupted...”*



This desire to “go to the peripheries” and share our lives with the people we meet there will probably not involve travelling twelve thousand miles and certainly not in a sailing ship, as it did for Peter Chanel his confreres. *“It may be as simple as crossing the road”.* (2017 General Chapter, No. 7). It is more an attitude of the heart than a question of geography.

Peter was almost overwhelmingly aware of his own inadequacies as he set out on his own journey. He struggled with language, with loneliness and with self-doubt. He was losing the respect of the local people who came to believe he had been abandoned by his Superior, Bishop Pompallier, who had promised to return, but never arrived. However, Peter persevered, trusting that Mary had called him to this mission and that his strength was in the Lord.

We too can feel vulnerable and inadequate as we struggle to persevere in our vocation but, like Peter, our strength is in our belief that Mary is calling us to this life and our belief that the Lord will give us all the grace we need.

Peter is a Saint of the universal Church. He is also our brother Marist. He encourages along our own Marist journey towards the peripheries, our welcoming attitude to everyone we meet, in spite of our own disappointments and hesitations. Peter is encouraging our confreres on Spain as they reach out to the various pilgrims they meet along the way, in spite of their own difficulties as they courageously start a new community. Our brother Peter Chanel is encouraging us along the same path, too.

John Larsen s.m.