

Reflection from the Superior General

Rome, October 2018

Dear Confreres

Many of us are leading busy lives. Our call is to a generous and joyful service wherever we find ourselves, responding as authentically as we can to the needs of the people whom we are sent to serve. For us, this is liberating obedience to the call of the “Work of Mary”.

However, we can sometimes be too busy, “burning-out”, or suffering from “acedia”, as it was once called. Acedia is marked either by an inappropriate, frantic, rushing-around or by a laid-back and sometimes cynical observer-status. Acedia, like burn-out, is always a call to a deeper interior life.

Our pastoral and missionary activities are a response to pondering the Word in our hearts, like Mary before us. We are called to nourish our inner life – our intellects, our wills, our memories – by prayer and study. As the Dominicans challenge us – “*contemplata aliis tradere*”. We hand on to others only what we have already contemplated in our interior lives. In our instant-response world, we are called to the spiritual battle involved in coming to know and love The Word.



We need regular time for profound prayer and study. This is an essential asceticism, to keep us focused on the Word. We were founded in the confluence of two revolutions – The French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. One was political. The other spoke of work-engines, expansion, new frontiers. The Religious Orders that were founded prior to the Industrial Revolution usually placed a great emphasis on depth of prayer and study. We can learn from them in order to nourish our own Marist, missionary charism more fruitfully.

The Venerable Jean-Claude was clear on his own priorities: “*Without knowledge I would have no faith in the Society, without knowledge it will be ruined. If God leaves me life, I intend to take every means to ensure that we acquire learning. When we came to Lyons they used to say: “Father Colin likes simplicity, he wants simplicity ...” They thought that meant stupidity. I need to explain myself. If there were no learning in the Society I would tremble for its future...*” (Sept. 14, 1846).

We hope we can count on our more senior confreres who may have more time for prayer, study and reflection to offer us their insight and wisdom from their vast experience.

There is no longer the same demand there once was for so many Marists to be studying theology in order to teach in Marist seminaries internationally. However, there is now more need than ever for Marists to be theologically and professionally reflective and competent.

The 2017 Chapter expresses this call like this: Marists are to “*strive for a higher level of professionalism in missionary involvement through further education, research, teaching, publishing and advocacy ... for the wider Church and the world*”. (9.b).

In the northern hemisphere the academic year is just beginning. It is good news that we have confreres who are beginning their Licentiate studies here in Rome – Kevin Medilo (As) in Inter-Religious Dialogue, Kosema Masei (O) in Missiology, Sione Hamala (O) in Boundaries’ Issues, David Sanchez (M) and Arnaldo da Silva (AS) in Formation Studies, Juan Carlos Pina (GA), part-time studies in Canon Law. Other younger confreres are presently studying in places like Canada, Ireland and Australia. This is a sign of hope for an ever more significant Marist missionary commitment into the future.

All of us need to keep developing theologically and spiritually. Academic and renewal courses are most important. However, nothing replaces the daily commitment to theological, spiritual and professional reading, writing and reflection, all done in a context of faith and prayer, for the service of the people.

John Larsen s.m.