

Reflection from the Superior General

Rome, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Dear Confreres,

Today, February 2, is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. It is the joyful profession anniversary of many of our confreres. Pope Francis will be celebrating Mass in St. Peter's today with Religious from all over the world, some of our confreres among them. This feast is also an opportunity for us to celebrate our own Marist vocation and reflect upon what it means.



We read (in Luke 2: 22 – 40) that the parents of Jesus “took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord”. We recall our own Profession days, perhaps long ago, when Mary presented us to the Lord in the context of the Eucharist “in keeping with the law”.

Five of our young confreres in Davao recently committed themselves with their first Profession. We thank God for them and ask his blessing on each of them, our young brothers. At the same time we are aware that the international novitiate stands empty this year. For the first time in living memory there are no novices anywhere in the Society of Mary

At the end of the story of the Presentation Luke writes that “they went back to their own town of Nazareth and the child grew to maturity”. As the years go by, our Marist commitment needs to mature daily. I remember as a small boy when I overheard a relative ask a Bishop who was at our family gathering: “when did you decide to become a priest, Monsignor?” He answered: “This morning. When did you decide to get married?” Our Marist vocation needs to keep growing and maturing daily or it atrophies.

“To be a Marist on mission requires daily ongoing formation; spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and human”. (2017 Chapter, n. 80).

In Luke's account there are the beautiful interventions of Simeon, “an upright and devout man”, and Anna, “serving God day and night with fasting and prayer”. Mary presents her Son to the Lord in the company of wise and faithful people who see the signs of the Saviour in their midst and proclaim him as “light to the nations”.

Our vocation, too, flourishes in the company of the wider Marist family. Our vocation is shared with our brothers in community and with all our sisters and brothers in the Marist family. The General Chapter asks us all “to identify, in collaboration with Marist laity, a range of possible forms of commitment open to lay people.” (n. 99).

Picture:

Giotto, *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*

Simeon takes the child from Mary's arms into his own arms and, looking directly at Mary, says: "and a sword will pierce your soul too". Along the way, we have all experienced the bruising and pain of living our Marist vocation – our own failings, disappointments when we have felt let down by others, too few signs of new life. We can become disillusioned or cynical. Instead we are invited to stand with Mary at the foot of the cross and trust in faith that there will indeed be Easter Sunday morning.

In Luke's passage there is also a sense of profound joy – Simeon "can go in peace", Anna is overcome "with praise of God", the parents are "wondering at the things that are being said". The joy is infectious. When we live our vocation with great joy others may want to join us. We can be praying daily for vocations. We can tap young people on the shoulder and call each one by name. "Each Marist is encouraged to invite others explicitly to join them in their life and ministry". (n. 64). Marist units need to "develop a creative culture of vocation promotion". (n. 67). Our joy at living as committed Marists and our invitation to others to participate in our community life and ministries – especially young people who see life differently, often exuberantly, - creates a culture of vocation. All of this is prior to the important ministry of the Marists explicitly assigned as "vocations' directors".



Just as Mary presented her Son in the temple so she presents each of us to the Church and the world to live our vocation with profound joy and faithfulness and a commitment that deepens each day. Mary invites other people to make the same commitment, often through our own joy in our Marist vocation and through our prayers and our personal invitations.

A blessed celebration of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord wherever we may be today!

John Larsen s.m.