*MISIONEROS MARISTAS*

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Lent – Easter 2015

Dear Friends,

 During the Lenten Season we follow Jesus as He steadfastly sets His eyes on Jerusalem having set off from his native region of Galilee to fulfill his mission. There in Galilee where he proclaimed his mission before his own people in his home synagogue of Nazareth he finished by saying that no prophet is well received in his own territory. The Franciscan, Fr. Richard Rohr, in his daily meditations started the season with a series on the Hebrew Scriptures where he reflects upon the prophets and Jesus as prophet in the Jewish tradition. These meditations had a certain impact on us here as a Marist Community as we endeavor to recapture that dimension of our lives among the people. When Javier and Juan were participating in early February in the annual Latin American Team Meeting for the assessors of the Base Church Communities (CEBs) we asked “where today are the prophets in our Church?”, because without them as in the history of God`s People the institution falls into infidelity and ruin. For this reason at the start of this present letter we wish to share with you something of what we have gleaned as we journey through the Lent of 2015. (*We in fact during the year hope to produce an article on this very theme.)*

*By definition, the prophet has to be on the edge of the inside of institutional religion. It's a hard position to hold, and it must be held both structurally and personally, with wisdom and grace. There are many times it would be easier to leave the system or to play the company man/woman and just go along with the game. Jesus understood this.*

*Being a prophet demands a good deal of human maturity, groundedness, spiritual intelligence, and readiness to not be liked--even by good people whom you really respect. You must be willing to believe that God is calling you to do this, that God is using you, and that you are an instrument. But don't believe anyone who is wearing the loud badge of a prophet; it is never anything anyone should or would want to do. It is a calling, and often for only one single issue or time.*

*Ironically, a prophet must be educated inside the system in order to have the freedom to critique that very system. You have to know the rules of any tradition, and you have to respect those rules enough to know why they do exist--and thus how to break them properly, for the sake of a larger and more essential value.*

*Here is the key: you can only unlock systems from the inside. A prophet critiques a system by quoting its own documents, constitutions, heroes, and Scriptures against its present practice. That's why they eventually win, but at a huge price to themselves.*

*Prophets step in to disrupt the usual social consensus--"How wonderful our group is!"--and say, "It's just not entirely true!" So you see why the prophets are all killed (Matthew 23:29-39). Prophets expose and topple each group's idols and blind spots, very often showing that we make things into absolutes that are not absolutes in God's eyes, and we relativize what in fact is central and important.*

*A prophet speaks the truth with no formal legitimation ever possible (Deuteronomy 18:9-22). There is no ordination for a prophet. So you can perhaps sense the inherent tension between prophets and priests, and also between prophets and kings (2 Samuel 12:1-7) in the Hebrew Scriptures. Kings and priests were maintainers of social order. The prophets were disrupters of the social consensus. Within the system there is inherent conflict but, ideally, also a balance.*

*Prophets, by their very nature, can't be right at the center of the social structure. They cannot be full insiders, but they cannot throw rocks from outside either. Their structural position to this day is "on the edge of the inside." You must know and live the essential rules before you can critique what is not essential or not as important. (See Jesus do this masterfully in Matthew 5:17-48.)*

*We have never come upon a single church in the whole world named "Christ the Prophet." Maybe now you know why.*

Now let us share with you something of our community life and mission in the first months of 2015. After an end-of-the-year recess, we were once again all together in Tarija, having enjoyed a time of rest and recreation among family and friends in different parts.

As for the past years, our pastoral ministry is centered around the Base Church Communities on the different levels –local, diocesan, national and Latin American. At the end of 2014 the bishop finally installed in our local parish of Our Lady of Lourdes a pastor-parish priest. During 2014 Juan had been the interim celebrant for masses and sacraments, but has now been freed of that commitment although he helps out there when at home and needed. So our full attention is given to the development of our new three-year project with the CEBs at the various levels. Back at the office we have had a series of meetings with the members of the diocesan commission whom we are trying to have them assume more responsibility in the day-to-day organization and accompaniment of the CEBs. This is a real challenge as traditionally our people are not accustomed to assume effectively such responsibility.

To date we have visited the majority of the existing CEBs in the diocese to animate them in their meetings and commitment to this manner of being Church. Unfortunately the priests and religious of the diocese have yet to take up the call of Pope Francis to leave the sacristy and get to where the people are in their daily reality and lives. The resistance is not with the people themselves but with their pastors. As in previous years we programed an directed a Spiritual Retreat for our CEBs Animators of the Tarija Diocese that was entitled *“Following Jesus: Serving from Below”*.

This year as mentioned in our Christmas letter we, as a Marist Community and Team, are celebrating our Silver Jubilee. One of our desires in recent years has been to produce a manual in which we set forth what is for us this model of being Church which we name *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base –Base Church Communities or CEBs.* There are various books and other written materials on the subject that have appeared and been used over the past 40 years, all quite good and accessible to the communities to help them in their formation and journey together. However, although we ourselves have developed and produced various courses and aids concerning the CEBs, from our lived experience and accompaniment of the CEBs as a Marist team we now see opportune to undertake this project. In our own country and in other parts our discernment is that to some degree the CEBs has lost some of what we call its *“mística” or* spirituality and mystic-its spirit, identity, option and methodology. Our intention is to focus on recuperating these aspects and actualize them according to the present context, in a way and language that is accessible to all of the members. No doubt it is an ambitious undertaking. In recent weeks we have developed the outline, dividing the work into 25 themes and each of us, having made a distribution, now are in the process of preparing the initial text and format. Hopefully the end product will be a valuable contribution to the CEBs throughout the world on our part as a Marist Team.

Our calendar for 2015 is a full one, with very few spaces at this stage. Our time is divided between the development and conducting of formation courses throughout the diocese and Bolivia, the accompaniment of the various communities and their animators and assessing the process. One important area to attend to is the promotion and formation of new communities and new animators.

Finally we share with you some news of our little Marist Community. Our newest member, Marian (the daughter of Gilberto and Arminda) is now six month’s old: she is just so beautiful and receives plenty of attention and brings a new joy into our lives. Juan Jose (our eldest boy) who graduated from High School last December is now settling into his chosen career, that of mechanical engineering. As this is not one of the careers offered at the universities in Tarija, he has had to go to Córdoba in neighboring Argentina to study. This means that he has to live away and rent basic accommodation for himself. So far things have turned out well and with the internet and all its possibilities for communication he is in constant contact with us here in Tarija. Earlier in February his brother, Gilbertito, trained with the national aged 17 soccer team in Cochabamba. Lupo, Javier and Nair’s elder son, has this year changed school and now is at the De La Salle College in Tarija and is delighted with this. There he is among friends of his famous basketball team. He was confirmed before Christmas and the bishop is one of his admirers. Paco soon to turn 15 has shot up in the past 12 months and continues as the star goalkeeper here in Tarija. The rest of us, *the oldies/los viejos*, continue to be in good form, although the years are telling, but we are still, as we say, *jóven* *de corazon* - *young at heart.* Recently on our round of visits to the CEBs in the diocese back at our former mission here of La Mamora, included in our visit was that to the San Francisco Chico community that is high up in the Andean Mountains. For some 15 years we have visited it periodically that has entailed our leaving our 4x4 pickup at river’s edge in Cachimayo and then setting off on foot along the mountainous path, a steep ascent that normally means a continuous climb of more than 2 hours, getting up to an altitude of some 3000 metres. The local council in 2014 started the construction of a dirt road, having previously put in 2 foot-bridges over the winding river that runs through the mountains. However to take advantage of the newly constructed road up to the village, one still has to cross the river in 3 places in a vehicle. Earlier in the week the animator of the community informed us that we would be able to get all the way to the village in our 4x4; however in the meantime it had rained heavily in the area and as we got to the river there was no way we could cross it in the vehicle. Once again we had to set off on foot as we had done for the past 15 years! Juan gearing up for his 70th in June was consoled by all that next visit all will be well and there would be no need to have to hike it!

So speaking of Juan’s 70th, his Mexican friends want to know what celebrations are in place. They want Mexico to be included! Modestly here we go about our life and mission as 2015 is our Silver Jubilee Year and hopefully will end it with a celebration on 22nd November. We still have no concrete plans for it, given our restricted financial possibilities.

For 25 years we have been blest and able to be who we are and what we do as a little Marist community and team. All that being possible because of our good and loyal friends who have shared with us over those years with minimal support from the institutions in whose name we do mission. As we grow and get older, our expenses have risen considerably in recent years and at the same time our fountains of financial support have diminished to some extent. In humorous tone taking into account our prospects for the future, Juan says that as we are all very good cooks we could set up an international restaurant around the central plaza of Tarija (that has very little to offer in that field) and thus supplement our income to continue our mission and maintain ourselves. Putting we men, women and children to work in that way may also be an effective apostolate!! In more recent years some of our pastoral expenses have been assumed by a project a Holland Church Aid agency helped to fund. That project has run its course and they have notified us that they, having helped us with this project, are not in a position to help us with our new 3-year project, although they have admired what we have done by means of the CEBs and fully confide in us. So apart from our own maintenance and living expenses for the 10 of us, we have to look for new sources of income (that seem to be fewer each year) for our continuing pastoral ministry. Our Marist Community Lenten Retreat before Holy Week has as its focus the virtues and values that we wish to rekindle in us as Marists and give witness accordingly.

May the Risen Lord Jesus light up your lives in this Easter Season!

With all our love: ***Gilberto|Arminda|Juan Jose|Gilbertito/Marian-Javier|Nair|Lupo|Paco-Juan***