



MISIONEROS MARISTAS – “CEMPAC”

Edificio “Catedral”, Federico Ávila 390-1B
Casilla 345, Tarija - Bolivia

Christmas 2015

Dear Friends

We wish to begin our Christmas Letter to you with the following reflection that we have made at this sacred time.

For us Christians, who is this child that we are accustomed to adore as we kneel before the crib this Christmas?

The real Jesus is not the smiling white-faced child that our consumer society uses to justify its business and evasion. The boy Jesus identifies with the exiled, the persecuted, the marginalized, the suffering, the poor ...

Our consumer society falls into the temptation to turn Christmas into another way to manipulate and oppress the people.

The infancy narratives of Jesus have nothing sappy or romantic about them. From the cradle, humanity takes different positions concerning Jesus, *the light and the darkness (John)*, *the political and religious authorities and the people outside (Matthew)*, *the poor and the rich (Luke)*.

We may ask ourselves, where do today`s Christians find themselves? -With the satisfied? - With those who buy, sell, eat,...? Or with the exiles, the poor, those alone, those abandoned in a foreign country? - With the refugees?

In Bethlehem TODAY bloody irony is repeated. This village a few kilometers south of Jerusalem is inhabited by a Palestinian population as a whole and very poor.

Almost all are Christian. In the Basilica built where tradition locates the birth grotto, great feasts take place at this time ... usually attended by many Christian tourists, who come in big planes and coaches.

An army of occupation protects these tourists, facilitates access to the grotto. The people of Bethlehem, (*"today`s poor shepherds"*) would wish with all their heart to go to the birthplace of their countryman Jesus. But they have to wait for another day.

May our celebration this and every Christmas be one of solidarity with the little ones of this world and we welcome them and recognize in them Emanuel “God-with-us”.

Briefly we wish now to share with you something of Marist life and mission since our last Circular Letter on the occasion of our Silver Jubilee.

We had a very beautiful and joyful celebration for November 22nd. The festivities commenced with a concelebrated Eucharist in the church of our barrio, presided by our bishop, Msgr. Javier.

Some 80 animators of our Base Church Communities came to join us from all corners of our extensive Diocese of Tarija.

Bishop Javier spoke tenderly of Mary and of our Marist spirit and mission, and repeated emphatically that we should not leave the diocese. From the local parish church we all walked a block to our Marist Community residence (Casa Colin) for a simple fiesta-style luncheon.

As of December 22nd we are in annual recession and will take time to visit family and friends and rest up so as to be invigorated to embark upon our many mission commitments for 2016.

We will start back with Juan`s GOLDEN JUBILEE of Religious Profession as a Marist on FEBRUARY 2nd- the Feast of the Presentation.

When Juan entered the then Marist seminary on this day in Australia, there were 13 in his group, 9 went on to the novitiate, 6 were professed on this day in 1966 and 3 today celebrate 50 years of Marist Profession.

Juan`s two living companions are in Australia while Juan continues his Marist and priestly mission in Bolivia where he will celebrate this day with our community of Misioneros Maristas at our "Yanacahi Retreat" outside of Tarija with a BBQ and later in the evening with the bishop and Conference of Bolivian Religious in Tarija City.

Once again, GRACIAS for being there with us on the journey.

With all our love.

Gilberto/Arminda/Juan Jose/Gilbertito/Marian-Javier/Nair/Lupito/Paquito-Juan

"Todo a Jesús por María, todo a María para Jesús"

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