

MISIONEROS MARISTAS

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Dear Friends,

Some years ago the 9 children of our very good friends on the North Coast of N.S.W., conscious that their parents would soon be celebrating 40 years of marriage decided that they should organize a special celebration to mark the occasion, having arrived at the following conclusion: *"Our folks are still alive and healthy and we 9 children are in good shape, with our own families. We don't know whether we all will be around to celebrate a 50th, so why not have a great gathering of family and friends for the 40th."* Bill & Dot have gone on to celebrate not only their 50th but their 60th and all 9 children with a multitude of grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been there to accompany them. Our Juan on this day [May 27, 2016] celebrates 45 years of ordained priesthood and May 27th in Bolivia is traditionally Mother's Day. Having learnt from our dear friends, we are celebrating together here this very special occasion, having said: *"Who knows whether there will be a 50th or 60th to celebrate here together?"* We recall that in our two previous circular letters Juan shared with you a short reflection on *"Beauty and the Priest"* marking his 70th birthday last June 25th and then another on *"Being a Marist Religious Today"* marking his 50 years of Religious Profession on February 2nd. Something that we here in community have reflected upon over the years of journeying together as missionaries we now wish to briefly share with you at the hand of Juan.

In our community library one of the works that we often refer to is entitled *"Jesús Contracorriente"* [*Jesus Against the Current*], short and written in popular style by the Brazilian bible scholar, Carlos Mesters. When we study the 4 Gospels, we discover a Jesus who constantly going against the current, in conflict with the authorities and system of his day. He is seen as a rebel, a revolutionary, as one who goes against the established orders both religious y political, and therefore a danger to them. The texts that we have that speak to us of the life, ministry and teachings of this man of the people from Galilee contain a clear message for all who wish to follow this master. In Spanish in regard to our response to the Good News we speak of the 4 C's: *"la Palabra nos convoca, nos cuestiona, nos consuela y nos compromete -the Word CALL us, QUESTIONS us, CONSOLES us and COMMITS us."* How do we Christians today respond to the world in which we live -this world that is in crisis in so many ways. [One only has to read the recent Encyclical of Pope Francis about our caring for our planet to realize just how critical is our current situation.] And in this time of crisis the temptation is to seek security, returning to taking the easy way out -that of taking refuge in a bourgeois or conformist religion that apparently and falsely proposes security. And what is the way for one who embraces the Good News that is the Gospel of Jesus? A Christianity of Following the Master! To follow Jesus does not mean to take refuge in a past now dead, but means to live today with the same SPIRIT that animated Jesus. This following does not consist in seeking novelties nor in the promotion of select groups, but in making Jesus the only axis of our communities, placing ourselves decidedly at the service of which He called *"the Kingdom (or Reign) of God"*. Therefore, to follow Jesus (to be His disciple) implies nearly always to swim against the current *"contracorriente"*, in an attitude of rebellion in the face of customs, modes or current opinion that do not conform with the spirit of the Gospel. And this demands that we not only quit being domesticated by a superficial and consumer society, but includes at times contradicting our own friends and family when these invite us to follow a path that goes against the Gospel and Gospel values. So to really follow Jesus today requires that we too are disposed to enter into conflict and take up the cross; being prepared to share his lot, knowing that what really awaits us in the end is the glory of the resurrection.

Having shared this with you, I pray that my 45 years of priestly ministry has for the most part been according to the Spirit of this Jesus of Nazareth. Hopefully I have learnt from those times when I have not been faithful in my following and that in the years ahead I may better serve the Kingdom with simplicity and audacity.

NOW FOR SOME UPDATE PREPARED BY JAVIER ON OUR MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES.

Our Tarija Diocese is one that has a very rich devotional tradition consisting of a series of liturgical events like San Roque, Virgin of Chaguaya, Corpus Christi, to cite the most significant; that does not rule out the long chain of other small devotional zonal, local and communal expressions. Almost all year throughout the diocese one will find in one place or another devotions processions, pilgrimages and other rites and liturgies. While these certainly have their value, they do not ferment a dynamic process of evangelization and commitment on the part of the faithful who by and large see their being a Christian expressed by their participation in these events. Thus alternative processes of evangelization and commitment are to a large extent hindered. In spite of this being often the case, we as Marists have faithfully served the Church here in Tarija for the past 17 years with an alternative way of being Church by means of the Base Church Communities [CEBs]. While some pastors are not so open, criticize or are locked into the traditional system and resist the pastoral orientations of Pope Francis, we see that the seeds sown by us with CEBs are bearing fruit and the CEBs gaining space, being for the past 6 years a pastoral priority of the diocese. Many of our people now identify with this way of being Church and with clarity assume their corresponding participation in the process.

The weekend of May 21-22 we celebrated in the rural community of Río Negro the 8th Diocesan CEBs Encounter with some 90 delegates from the 22 existing CEBs of the Tarija Diocese in which we experienced in all simplicity fraternal friendship, sharing and much joy, and all this with a minimum of resources and organization.

We aware that we still face many challenges among which are the promotion and initiation of new CEBs and the revitalization of existing ones and the giving of new meaning to the CEBs in the diocese.

WE NOW TURN TO GILBERTO TO GIVE US AN UPDATE ON OUR ACTIVITIES AS A MARIST COMMUNITY.

As part of our life together in a Marist Community, in recent months there have been a number of special occasions –March 19th, April 18th and May 27th. Here in Bolivia [the Feast of St. Joseph] we celebrate Father's Day that was duly celebrated in our community to honor Gilberto [father of 3 – Juan José, Gilbertito and Marian], Javier [father of 2 –Lupito and Paquito] and Juan [Fr. John]. The night of the 18th the students put on for their fathers a folk festival at their college and at midday on the 19th together we had a Eucharist and BBQ at home. Then on April 18th we celebrated with gratitude a community fiesta on the occasion of Gilberto reaching 49 years of age and 26 of those being lived out in community as a Marist missionary. May is Mary's month and here in Bolivia we celebrate Mother's Day on the 27th, which also happens to be Juan's anniversary of ordination. So we decided to celebrate with a simple community dinner, prepared by the men, and for their part our children were involved in special activities to highlight the day to honor the mothers.

We believe that by fermenting the spirit of community among ourselves as we live out our life and mission as Marists we give witness to our neighbors where we are inserted and thus they too will have a community spirit like us.

With all our Love: *Gilberto/Arminda/Juan José/Gilbertito/Marian-Javier/Nair/Lupito/Paquito-Juan*