

MISIONEROS MARISTAS

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Dear Friends,

As we celebrate Holy Week our attention is focused on what transpired in the life of that Jesus of Nazareth some 2000 years ago as he entered what we Christians refer to as His Paschal Mystery. Here in Latin America our people traditionally turn out in numbers to walk with Jesus on the road to Calvary on Good Friday making the Way of the Cross but fewer are there on Holy Saturday night to celebrate His Resurrection. The youth of our local church community of Barrio Lourdes act out live the Passion and Death of Jesus as the Way of the Cross winds its way through the streets of the barrio. We will ask why it is that our people identify more with the Jesus as the Crucified One than with the Resurrected Jesus. They are conscious that their world is full of persons who suffer, crucified by misfortune, injustice and neglect: the ill deprived of attention, women mistreated, elderly ignored, children abused, and migrants without documents or without a future. And people, millions throughout the world in a state of hunger and misery.

It is difficult to imagine a symbol more loaded of hope than that cross planted by Christians in all parts: stirring "memory" of a crucified God and permanent remembrance of His identification with all the innocents who suffer unjustly in our world.

That cross, raised there among our crosses, reminds us that God suffers with us. It hurts God when the children of our Third World suffer from hunger. God suffers with those who are killed and tortured in Iraq. God cries with the women who daily are mistreated in their homes. We are unable to explain the ultimate root of such evil. And even if we did know it, it would little serve us. Only we know that God suffers with us. We are not alone.

But those most sublime symbols can remain perverted if we do not recover once and for all their true content. What significance has the image of the Crucified One have, which is so present among us, if we do not see stamped on his face the suffering, the aloneness, the torture and desolation of some many sons and daughters of God?

What sense is there in carrying a cross on our chest or around our neck if we do not know how to carry the smallest cross of so many persons who suffer in our midst? What significance does our kissing the Cross of the Crucified One have if it does not awaken in us the affection and love, the reception and our closeness towards those who live crucified?

To adore the mystery of a "Crucified God" it is not sufficient to celebrate Holy Week; it is necessary in addition for us to approach and draw near week by week to those crucified and suffering in our world today. When we act in this way our love will transform them and they too will experience that new life in a resurrected Jesus who is the Christ.

We offer to you, our dear friends, the above reflection as our gift to you this Easter.

With our entering the Easter season one realizes that we have now entered the second season of the current year. For those in the South one is experiencing Autumn or the Fall while those in the North it is Springtime. So now we wish to share with you something of our life and mission during the first few months of 2014.

January saw our Marist Community and Team in recess, in which we were able to renew our energies and take our annual vacation. For his part Juan spent the time in Mexico where he was able to enjoy time with his friends of some 36 years as well as share his final observations in his service of some nine years as a team member of the Continental Articulation of the Base Church Communities (CEBs) at their office in Mexico City. Three couples from Juan's very first years in Mexico celebrated at end of 2013 their Silver Jubilee of Marriage. So it was a great joy that he could celebrate these occasions with each of them and receive the renewal of

their marriage vows during the Eucharistic celebration. Marcos and Monica, Luis and Santa and Roberto and Blanca were youth of the San Mateo Parish when Juan arrived there in May of 1977. They often accompanied him in his missionary endeavours and besides being catechists they were also part of the youth group. Their families had endeared themselves to Juan and took good care of him while in their midst. During his days in Mexico Juan also was able to catch up with some of his Marist confreres. In a very special way he was able to share with two of his confreres that he had been close to from his arrival in Mexico in May 1977. Today Pedro Alarcon is the Marist Provincial and back there in mid-1977 Pedro was a university student and very active in the Marist campus ministry. Juan had accompanied the group during their mid-year vacation to give a mission to the mountainous campesinos communities of Oaxaca in the south of Mexico. Although Juan acted as chaplain he was still trying to learn Spanish and it was Pedro who was fluent in English who came to his rescue. [Incidentally a full account of the Mission to the People of San Vicente was subsequently published in "Harvest Magazine" of the Australian Marist Province.] A few years later Pedro entered the Marists! Juan had not seen him for some 8 years when he and Javier had stayed with Pedro (then Assistant to the Novice Master for Latin America) and the Marist novitiate community in Belo Horizonte, Brazil while there for the 2005 Brazilian CEBs Encounter. Now with Pedro he journeys to La Jornada some 2 hours' drive from Mexico City and is now a Retreat House run by the Marist Mexican Province. It was there that Juan caught up with his fellow Marist, Oscar Salinas who had been in the community with Juan in the El Porvenir Mission of the State of Oaxaca during 1987-88. So it was a very joyful gathering and sharing among Pedro, Oscar, Juan and the other Marists of Mexico. Apart from spending time at home in Tarija, given that their boys were involved in sporting activities, Gilberto and Javier were able to visit their families for some days in the Sud Yungas.

February 2nd, the feast of the Presentation saw all of us together again at our Marist Community House (Colin House) in Tarija to celebrate 50 years of Juan's life as a Marist. On this day in 1964 he entered the Marist Seminary in Sydney, Australia and was officially received and thus he began that way of life that has led him to this day. A group of our youth from the CEBs and our former La Mamora Mission joined our Marist Community in the evening for a BBQ followed by song and dancing. It was a terrific gathering and celebration!

Having now resumed their activities according to their 2014 Pastoral Plan, the Marist Team soon receives a call from the bishop. The pastor/parish priest of Barrio Lourdes where we now live had moved on to another diocese and so this marginated parish [Barrio Lourdes is actually the largest barrio of Tarija City] is for the present without a priest and the bishop has no one available to replace him. (During the past 18 months some 4 of the young diocesan priests have resigned from the priesthood and another has since returned to his native Germany.) So the bishop requests that in the meantime the Marists take care of the Liturgical Celebrations when they are in residence in Tarija; a young ex-seminarian and well qualified [Alex] would be appointed as interim moderator/administrator of the parish. The formula has worked well so far and we together collaborate harmoniously and in the same direction. The weekends when we are away from Tarija Alex coordinates a Celebration of the Word with Communion. So for the present the Marist Team has this pastoral activity to add to its full-time promotion, formation, and accompaniment of the Base Church Communities on the diocesan, national and Latin American levels.

In early March we were able to give a weekend formation workshop to the animators and catechists of the parish of Entre Ríos that is comprised of some 135 rural communities. The local pastor is alone and his energies are consumed in getting to each of these communities once or at best twice a year, normally to celebrate the local feast and to baptize and for First Communion. [In 2013 we gave similar workshops there once every four months.] To enter into a process of evangelization and formation of a true Christian community are behind his reach. Thus he has called upon our service in the diocese to implement this model of being Church that are the Base Church Communities [CEBs]. Subsequently our Marist team is committed to visit during the year these communities and to accompany them in this process.

During the second half of March we had a program of visits to the CEBs of our former La Mamora Mission in the Tarija Diocese and those of the Fatima-Sta. Anna rural parish. Each of these CEBs we try to visit once every four months. It is now some 15 years since we started in the diocese the promotion and formation of the CEBs. In our first years at La Mamora Mission we would visit the surrounding 13 village communities on a monthly or two-monthly basis. Our most remote village, that of Santa Rosa, was some 12-hours' hike up the Andean mountains, getting up to an altitude of some 4200 metres and with the clouds below us; others consisted of a hike of some 2-3 hours after we had left our pick-up by the way. Now Juan is quickly approaching the 70's and Gilberto y Javier the 50's....realizing that we are physically no longer youthful. However we can still make it to some villages like San Francisco Chico with help of a walking-stick and a lot of huffing and puffing. For us, San Francisco Chico is a model CEBs and always a joy for us to finally arrive and share with this so poor yet beautiful community.

The first weekend of April saw us engaged in the giving of a Lenten Retreat to the CEBs animators of the dioceses. When such happenings are programmed we never know just how many are going to finally participate, although each one receives a personal invitation. We were pleasantly surprised to have registered 37 animators for the retreat. It was truly a moment of grace for all present. This year's retreat had as its theme "*Conversion for Mission*" and was developed in three moments by Javier, Gilberto and Juan: "*The Call*", "*Conversion*" and "*The Sending Out*". The messages that Pope Francis has been giving to the Church since his first days reinforced the presentations. One of the notable advances in our pastoral with the CEBs is the integration of a good number of committed youth into the process.

Following the CEBs Retreat and before entering into Holy Week, we as a Marist Team then set off for our traditional Lenten Retreat focused on our missionary life and commitment that we realized this time in La Mamora. Previously we had done our first term evaluation and our planning for the second term of our pastoral year. As mentioned above regarding our local parish of Barrio Lourdes, the Holy Week Celebrations have us as the ministers for these ceremonies. In the past two months since we have assumed provisionally this responsibility in the parish we have enjoyed the deep affection of the people and each Sunday the congregation continues to grow. As we move around, it is encouraging to us as people remark to us on our radio program "*Tejiendo Redes*". It challenges us to respond to their hopes in this search to unite our faith with live and live with our faith.

Now for a little family news. In our Christmas letter we mentioned how Gilberto's eldest (Juan José) would be in 2014 in his last year at college and doing his military service. At the commencement of the academic year he was again elected as president of the whole student body as well as president for his year. Over the Christmas holidays he sustained a knee injury but is now back at playing basketball in the state competition. Lupito, Gilbertito and Paquito continue to be kept busy with their respective football and basketball. Javier is slowly recovering from his broken arm and goes almost daily for needed physiotherapy. Arminda has had her father with us here in Tarija since before Christmas for medical treatment. He is very slowly responding to treatment. He had spent most of last year immovable back at his village in the Amazonia Boliviana where there are no medical resources available. Climate change continues to affect us here. Presently instead of starting to feel the effects of the oncoming winter season it is as if summer is starting all over again with days of extreme heat. There has been no follow-up summer rains this year and all the crops of the district are withering.

In closing, we want you to know that we will have you present in our hearts as we celebrate the Paschal Mystery here in Tarija. We go forward in our faith journey knowing that we do not go alone: the Spirit of Risen Jesus accompanies us and you, our good friends, continue in solidarity with us.

With all our love,

Gilberto/Arminda/Juan José - Javier/Nair/Lupito/Paquito - Juan