

Reflection from the Superior General

Rome, Feast of Mary the Mother of God

Dear Confreres.

A blessed New Year, 2018, and Feast of Mary the Mother of God, to all!

The Epiphany is almost upon us. How can the journey of the three wise men from the East (Mt. 2:1-12) help us as Marists move more graciously and courageously into 2018?

They set out: and there ahead of them went the star they had seen at its rising. This attitude of leaving behind, setting out and following the star challenges us to undertake our own journeys from wherever we find ourselves. We are challenged to a detachment that is prepared to leave behind our carefully laid plans and ambitions and follow the vision, the star, into an unknown future. As our General Chapter says: "Marists do not retire from religious life, but continue a spiritual journey that culminates in the surrender of death. The mission of Marists does not cease..." (No. 57). We meet Christ on pilgrimage.



The wise men sought answers: *where is the child who has been born?* All along their way they were questioning and discerning the next step of the journey. There were conflicting voices. That "old fox", Herod, tried to deceive them because of his fears. They followed the dream and *left for their own country, by a different road.* We, too, are called to a life of discernment, wary of being deceived by any voices that are not in harmony with the Gospel. We, too, are trying to understand the mystery of God's presence among us as we travel *by a different road.* Saint Benedict describes the primary task of the spiritual life as "quaerere Deum! Searching for God!" We find our way by discernment. *Where is the Christ child?* Pope Francis puts it this way: *Each Christian and every community must discern the path the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zones in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.* (Evangelii Gaudium, 20).

The wise men found *the child with Mary his mother.* The scene can seem so tranquil. The reality was probably much more chaotic. Often this year we may find

the Christ Child with Mary in the messiness of our lives. The world, in Genesis, was born out of chaos. The Word came among us in the darkness. If our lives are too tidy and "nice", then perhaps the Lord cannot find his home among us. It is in the ambiguities and struggles of our own hearts, and of our communities and of our own world that we will find Christ.

The parents of the Christ Child are migrants, struggling with the bureaucratic demands of government, experiencing rejection from the comfortable world of the inn, and with only simple shepherds, themselves rejected by society, as companions. The wise men worship the Child and offer the best gifts they can to see the migrant family, with Emmanuel, God-among-us, on their way.

As we enter into 2018, we can learn from the journey of the wise men from the East. We can focus on the star, the vision, the beyond, being prepared to risk setting out again. We can keep discerning the call of the Lord, asking the right questions and listening attentively for the Word, the Truth.

We can be prepared to live with ambiguity and struggle in our desire to seek the Christ Child on the peripheries, where life can be very difficult sometimes. Our journey will surely take us among people abandoned by society.

The early Marist missionaries, embarking on their own uncertain journeys to distant lands, prayed for the protection of Mary, Star of the Sea. We, too, pray "Ave Maris Stella" as we embark on our journey in faith into 2018.

John Larsen s.m.