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Holy Week-Easter 2026

Dear Friends,

At this time of the year our Comunidad Marista is accustomed to share with you the latest of its life and mission here in Bolivia. As we prepare to celebrate the central mystery of our Christian faith, we see that our world is ensconced in upheaval at every turn. For the past 3 years the Ukraine people have been invaded and at war with the Russian Federation, the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip have daily been bombarded by Israel, Israel and the United States have waged an unrelenting war on Iran, Lebanon -the Pearl of the Middle East- is now being destroyed by Israel and the ongoing civil war in the Sudan fades into the background of world news as thousands die there from starvation and the ravages of war. It seems that our world is spinning out of control and its leaders bent on their power and lust for capital at all cost. In midst of this reality, we should ask as believers in the resurrection of Jesús of Nazareth, *"What is the true sense to the resurrection and how ought we respond as a consequence"?* Perhaps our reflection that follows may give some light.

"There is a question of human social existence that torments the spirit, and for which the resurrection of the Crucified One brings a ray of light: what is the meaning of a ray of light? What is the meaning of the violent death of those who commit themselves to the cause of justice? What future awaits those proletarians, peasants, indigenous people, and anonymous souls who were historically crucified for demanding their rights?

History is generally told by the victors and from a perspective that aligns with their interests. And who will pay for the suffering of the vanquished?

The resurrection of Jesus offers us an answer. For the one who rose was one of those defeated and crucified, Jesus, made a suffering servant and condemned to crucifixion.

The one who rose was not a Caesar at the height of his glory, nor a general at the zenith of his military power, nor a sage at the height of his fame. The one who rose was a crucified man, expelled from the earth. He inherited the first fruits of new life.

The resurrection of Jesus showed that God took the side of the vanquished. The executioner does not triumph over his victim. God raised the victim from the dead and, in doing so, did not disappoint our thirst for a world that is finally just and fraternal. Only by raising the vanquished do them justice and return to them the life they stole, a life now transfigured.

The insurrection against injustice gives true meaning to the resurrection."

The days that have led up to Holy Week here in the Latin American Church have been marked by the celebrations associated with the Feast of St. Oscar Romero, the slayed archbishop of El Salvador who prophesized that if they should kill him for his defence of his people, then he would live on [be resurrected] in the life of his people. Such prophesy has come to pass.

Meanwhile here in Bolivia the country is still in a very unsettled state. 2025 saw us with over 50% inflation, the absence of the U.S. Dollar that had for years been our second currency and quoted at 7 Bolivianos for \$1 U.S. for the past 20 years being available now up to 20 Bolivianos for \$1 U.S. on the black market, and the scarcity of petrol and diesel. Presidential elections were held in

August with a runoff in November between 2 right-wing candidates; the previous left-wing government having been wiped off the board. So, we entered 2026 with a new pro-Trump right-wing government that promised to set the country on track from Day 1 by selling us out to the IMF, World Bank and the multinationals and now ready for privatization of all our assets and resources. Instead of things getting better as promised they have got worse and the Constitution being violated in the process. We now have gasoline but triple the price and of the poorest quality. Last week there were state and council elections throughout the country without the participation of any force from the Left. The spectre for the immediate future is very bleak and no emerging new leadership. The institutional church does not speak for the people and lacks a prophetic voice. Our young clergy are ensconced in their churches and walking around in the streets in birettas and black capes as seen in movies reflecting the church of the Middle Ages!!

Having said all that of today's reality here, we are nevertheless trying to respond positively and full of good spirit in the midst of our people whom we accompany and serve. Our mixed Marist Community of 12 members for its maintenance has been sustained by the generous sharing of a small group of friends and has not received in all these years salaries or stipends or any form of income for the services it provides. Nevertheless, we have been blessed and live simply.

As noted in our recent Circular Letters, 2025 and 2026 are landmark years for our Marist Community. In June 2025 we celebrated Juan's 80th birthday, on February 2nd 2026 our 35th anniversary of having been commissioned as Misioneros Maristas here in Bolivia and Juan's 60th anniversary of Marist Profession and on May 5th Juan will begin his Jubilee Year of 50 years here in the Latin American Church as a Marist Missionary.

Over this long period, Juan, for his part, has generally enjoyed good health and been very active...and adventurous. As of 3 years ago he submitted his resignation from pastoral responsibilities and activities in the diocese to the bishop of Tarija, while still continuing with his Marist Team in our involvement and accompaniment of the CEBs [Base Church Communities] at the different levels -local, national and Latin American. In one sense, he is seen as retired but still involved in the mission that he loves!

Last September Juan noted below his right nipple what one thought to be an insect bite but did not heal upon treatment and then in November the dermatologist twice tried at burning it out, resulting in ordering a bioscopy that showed that it was a malignant tumour that should be operated. The operation was finally performed successfully at a private clinic here in Tarija last month by a well-respected plastic surgeon and now friend. The pos-operation biopsy concluded that all was now clear...and as his surgeon said: "Juanito, you can bring out the champagne!" He has weekly controls with him and the skin-graft has taken well ...and all looking well. Deo gracias!

The past month has seen Juan taking it easy at our community "*Refugio Yanacachi*" outside of Tarija City. His surgeon tells him that he does not appear to be 80...still a "jóven"! He has told him that he was hoping, instead of going out to Australia as earlier planned for R&R with beach and surf, to begin his Jubilee Year on May 5th to take 10 days at Santa Marta on the Caribbean in Columbia that is his ideal spot nearest to Bolivia, given Bolivian is land-locked. [Historical Note: Sta. Marta was the 1st diocese created in the New World-the Americas]. Enrique, his surgeon, then replied:" Juanito, you have to go"! And so be it.

Well, Holy Week is almost upon us. Juan's close priest friend, Jaime, of the Archdiocese of Sucre, has a rural parish of some 15 communities. In previous years, we as a Marist Team have given formation courses in the CEBs there. He has asked Juan to accompany him there now for the Holy Week ceremonies. So, he is taking the overnight bus from Tarija to Sucre next Monday night. Jaime will pick him up at the bus terminal, then take him to the Chrism Mass at the Sucre cathedral and after the clergy luncheon we will drive to Alcala Parish where we will stay through till Easter Monday. Then Jaime will drive him back to Sucre [3 hours away] to take overnight bus back to Tarija.

Our Marist Community has been in the wars, as they say, in recent times; not only with Juan's tumour, but with other ailments. Gilberto's wife, Arminda, plays basketball and every Saturday afternoon plays in a local team. In one match she suffered a nasty fall resulting in a hair-line fissure to her right heel. After time on crutches, she eventually underwent weeks of phytotherapy and now getting around more easily. Javier's two boys, Lupo and Paco are noted soccer and basketball stars and while in Tarija during vacation have been playing with their respective local teams. Well, like Arminda, they too suffered falls. Lupo is out of action, getting around with a brace on his knee; the same knee that was operated upon a few years back. For his part, Paco's fall resulted in his having to be operated on in La Paz, requiring the travel from Tarija to La Paz by Javier and Nair to be with him. The operation was last week and he needs to stay there for 6 weeks in recuperation and daily physiotherapy before being able to return to his post as a police superintendent in the Amazonian city of Cobija, border with Brazil. Then there is Gilberto's fall from a motorbike last month. Before our taking on our present mission in the Tarija Diocese, we had our 2nd mission in the Amazonia Boliviana, that of Palma Flor where both Gilberto and Javier married and our first 3 boys were born. Their wives, Arminda and Nair are cousins and one of their uncles there was Amador who became the animator and leader of the community. Our last visit there at the Palma Flor Mission was last September for its feast day celebrations. Amador took care of us. He was having prostrate problems for some time and finally was finally operated on in Riberalta at the government hospital in late January. The operation supposedly was successful but things went amiss with the attention there during the days of recovery resulting in his unexpected death. Gilberto then travelled from Tarija to Palma Flor [3 days on buses] to represent all of us and to assist with the traditional rituals there when one dies. Given that Amador served for years as the lay minister of the community, it fell upon Gilberto to step in as the priests of the Vicariate no longer attend the mission. A nephew of Arminda lent Gilberto his motorbike to get around while there but the dirt roads were very slippery given the continuous rains. Unfortunately, Gilberto skidded and fell into a ditch, fracturing his right shoulder that was then temporarily attended to by one of the locals in the village. It was necessary for Gilberto to spend almost 2 weeks there in Palma Flor to take care of things before returning to Tarija and in a lot of pain. Once back here, the local orthopaedic surgeon, having requested x-rays, told Gilberto that the solution was to operate and a plate inserted, all of which was going to cost a fortune. Gilberto wanted a second option with a new young surgeon here in Tarija who hoped that the shoulder could heal with injections and physiotherapy. That treatment has now successfully been completed. Also, we say: "*Deo gracias!*" With all these health problems, our community emergency fund has been depleted, but we are thankful that all have come through the ordeals in good form and good spirits.

This summer has seen more rains here than usual. We are now into autumn as the Easter Season approaches, but more rain and the ground very soggy. Our home garden at our "Refugio Yanacachi" has suffered badly, resulting in zero production. Our fruit trees got hit by several hail storms. We just need more time and patience to attend to the property as we would hope!

With all the recent comings and goings, we have had to find time to prepare and produce our weekly radio programme. It is hard to believe that we are now in our 20th year with the radio...some 1000 programmes and a lot of preparation involved!! Nevertheless, we enjoy doing it. For necessity, we have to be attentive to all that is going on – local, national, global and churchwise and to keep studying and reading. Often when we are there recording our programme, the different presenters of the radio ask us to give live interviews for their respective programmes. The voice of the Marist Team is well known throughout southern Bolivia!

It's time to sign off and in so doing we wish you every blessing and joy for the Easter Season. Know that you are in our prayers. Keep us in yours. Thanks for your continuing solidarity
GILBERTO/ARMINDA/JUAN JOSÉ/CHIQUI-PAOLA/LITTLE JOHN/MARIAN -JAVIER/NAIR/LUPO/PACO-JUAN