

Reflection from the Superior General

April 20 is Holy Saturday this year. Holy Saturday can be overshadowed by the pain of Good Friday followed too immediately by the joy of Easter Sunday. Holy Saturday is when the world is shrouded in silence, hopelessness, and a sense of misplaced dreams.

I am encountering some Holy Saturdays in my travels in Australia and New Zealand.

In Australia, I met Catholics who do not know where to look or what to say in response to the findings of the Royal Commission on Child Abuse. On top of that, there is the conviction of Cardinal Pell, a towering figure in the leadership of the Catholic Church in Australia for decades. He is at present in prison.

In New Zealand all the flags are at half-mast. The nation is devastated by the massacre of people who were gathered in prayer two Fridays ago in Christchurch. The far right has produced a terrorist who has fired bullets right through the heart of what had seemed such a peaceful society.

We know of other Holy Saturday moments. There is Theodore McCarrick in the USA and Cardinal Barbarin in France. There are our confreres in Bamenda, Cameroon, as civil war wages about them. We know of Catholics in Mindanao, Philippines, after the recent bombing in the Cathedral of Jolo during Sunday Mass. We have a confrere in Venezuela. These are moments of speechlessness, self-doubt and dread.

Then there are the Holy Saturday moments that some confreres and members of our families are enduring in their own hearts and lives.

This April we enter into the Paschal mystery where the first disciples of Jesus were also devastated by the terror of Golgotha and endured the shamed silence of the following Saturday. They were overwhelmed by the violence

perpetrated by the religious leaders of the day. These first disciples had also waited for the rulings from the courts of the day and were left terrified and speechless. They ran away. On Holy Saturday there is an awful silence over all the world.

In this Paschal Season our Marist eyes turn to *"the woman"* (Jn. 19:26) at the foot of the cross who could not understand but would not run away. She remained while others fled. She was wrapped in silence on Holy Saturday, uncomprehending and overcome, yet hoping against hope.

Our charism calls us to stay faithful with *"the woman"* on Holy Saturday, trusting like her when everything seemed hopeless. This is what we as Marists offer the Church and the world. Our charism calls us to go to the places of suffering and injustice and remain there quietly and compassionately with Mary, hoping against hope – even against all the evidence – that there will be new life and a new Church where *"the starving will be filled with good things"* (Lk.1:53) because God will never forget his mercy. These can seem the "last times" as Mary is gathering her children. This is our "hour" as Marists. The Church, as always, is called to constant purification and renewal. Our Marist charism challenges us to hope with Mary when everyone is stunned in silence, as on Holy Saturday, confident that God's grace will see us all through to new life.

One confrere I spoke to in Australia, when commenting these days, quoted the psalm: *"As they passed through the bitter valley, they made it a place of springs"* (Psalm 84).

We walk this Paschal journey this year with Mary and with her people. This is our charism. We accompany *"the woman"* during these Holy Saturday times as a new Church is being born. The emptiness in the hearts of all believers on Holy Saturday will echo with profound joy at the emptiness of the tomb on Easter Sunday morning.

John Larsen s.m.

