

Reflection from the Superior General

Social isolation, stability, and the Sacred Triduum

Sometimes people ask us interesting but unexpected questions here at "Villa Santa Maria" in Rome. One such question came from La Neylière: "would it be good to invite our confreres on renewal at La Neylière to take the vow of stability as an expression of their re-commitment to the Society?" Now, how might you answer that? The question about the vow of stability certainly set me thinking about being locked-down in here Rome – "socially isolated" - for our fourth week now as we enter Holy Week.

We could say that during these days of lock-down almost everyone is being asked to take a commitment to "stability". The civil authorities are asking us, out of concern for others, just to stay at home. So where does that leave us with the Gospel command to visit the sick and those in prison? For some of our people it is unsafe or economically impossible to stay at home. Others have no homes to go to. We can wonder what the call to "stability", and to stay at home, might mean for us and for others.



"Stability" has given monastic Religious fifteen-hundred years of experience in social isolation. We are active Religious. For us "stability" is a call to stay steady and faithful to the journey begun at Baptism and deepened at Religious Profession, especially in turbulent times. Our Constitutions tell us any Marist who takes the vow of stability must "work to re-establish the Society should it ever be dispersed" (Const.88).

The world witnessed the beautiful icon of an isolated pastor remaining faithful to his people with the "urbi et orbi" televised blessing of Pope Francis last week. Stability calls us to stay faithful to our

commitments and to our people even when it is difficult. These days of mandatory isolation may provide the graced moment to ask ourselves, personally and communally, how we could live our Marist apostolic lives even more authentically and faithfully. Let's be brave enough to ask the hard questions.

As we enter into Holy Week we accompany Jesus Christ towards Golgotha. We know that it will lead to Easter Sunday morning – life overcoming death – but we also know it is a long, hard road to the glory of the empty tomb. This is the heart of "stability": faithful perseverance in following Christ together, without diversions, encouraging each other when times are tough, while believing resolutely in new life of Christ Risen. So many of our confreres, especially our senior confreres, are fine examples of just this.

Stability also involves always rejoicing profoundly "in God", living contemplatively. We live with a deep and growing heart-felt gratitude for our vocation. The demand that we stay at home is also an inner call, to stay at home in our own hearts, at peace with ourselves, with God and with others.

We are called to stability in our relationships with each other. Being at home with our confreres during this Holy Week, and probably well beyond, may have its good times and its more difficult moments. Lock-down calls for shared faith and patience with our own frailty and with our confreres. We need to support and encourage each other through these days, especially when there is anxiety or sickness in the community.

Liturgically it will probably be difficult or impossible for most of us to celebrate the Triduum this year, certainly in pastoral situations. We may need to look for alternative and creative ways of praying through Holy Week as well as we can. Stability involves staying together, steady and faithful, especially in the difficult moments, until we experience fully "the resurrection and the life" of Easter Sunday morning.

A blessed Holy Week, so different this 2020! Pray for each other. Coraggio!!

John Larsen s.m.