



CEMFRAT —CENTRO MARISTA “FRATELLI TUTTI”

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Dear Friends,

Today is Easter Tuesday. As we sit down once again to share something of our life and mission here in Bolivia, we are mourning the passing of our beloved Pope Francis. At the same time, we are celebrating his Pasqua-his Passover, his death and resurrection united to that of Jesus of Nazareth whose Paschal Mystery we are commemorating in these days. As St. Paul reminds us: *“But we believe that having died with Christ we shall return to life with him: Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead will never die again. Death has no power over him any more”.*

In his first seconds as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis asked the crowd to pray for him, showing the world what kind of pontiff he wanted to be — a pastor close to the people. Francis has left us. After a papacy of almost twelve years, we realize that he will be remembered as the Pope of the *“Church on the Move,”* as someone who led the Church's movement toward the *“existential peripheries,”* which decentered the Church. He, who came from the farthest reaches of the world, installed himself at the center so that the Church would look to the peripheries. The peripheries burst into the center, and the center—often—did not receive them. We will need time to truly understand what Francis left us, the Church, and the world. He was a man who wanted to live the Gospel authentically and consistently, and among his most cherished teachings is his desire for *“a poor Church, one that journeys with the poor, one that serves the poor”.*

On Easter Sunday morning, from St. Peter's there in Rome, the whole world heard Francis deliver his final Easter Message and received his blessing. The previous evening we as a Marist Team had celebrated the Paschal Vigil in the home of two elderly sisters -Hermanas Daisy y Anna María – who because of their condition were unable to participate at their local church. It was one of the most moving Easter Vigils that we have celebrated. Daisy and Anna María were overjoyed that we were able to offer them this opportunity. We had come to know them when we started the La Mamora Mission in 2000. Their lives were dedicated principally to the education of adolescents and young people from the *campo* who did not have the opportunity of going to an established secondary school and beyond. They instituted an alternative form of education that was recognized and supported by the Bolivian government known as *“CETHA”*. The wives of Arminda and Javier who were raised in the Amazonian Region of Bolivia had received there a very basic primary education. So, when we arrived at La Mamora, they were able to receive a diversified secondary education as there was a CETHA nearby in the region. They would set off early on Friday morning and return home of Sunday evening. At this time, Nair was breast-feeding their new-born Little Paco [Paquito] who accompanied them. Meanwhile the three men went about their missionary activities at La Mamora Mission and took care of the other three young boys -Juan José, Lupo and Chiqui. From this moment, the Marist community became close friends of Daisy and Anna María who always supported and encouraged us in our accompaniment of the Base Church Communities [CEBs]. Later Arminda and Nair were able to undertake further studies in Tarija City where they became professionals in administration and nursing respectively.

We as a Marist Community realize just how blessed we are with the friends we have made here over the years. One such friend is Padre Jaime who on April 7th celebrated his Golden Jubilee of Priestly Ordination. Fortunately, we were able to be present for the occasion. Jaime is a priest of the Archdiocese of Sucre and we have known Jaime for several years, having first met him at a CEBs Encounter. From there, he had asked us as a Marist team to conduct workshops at the centre that he and another priest friend established in the archdiocese. The centre provided capacitation in agriculture

for campesinos of the region as well as the formation of lay ministers and leaders. The last such workshops we spoke about in our previous circular letter. The centre is situated in the provincial town of Tomina, some 2 hours drive from the state capital and a 11-hour drive from our base in Tarija City.

Jaime is much loved and respected by the local clergy and people of the region. So his jubilee was marked accordingly, consisting of 4 days of celebrations. Jaime had asked Juan to be his "Padrino" [Godfather] for the occasion. Sunday's celebration was held in the parish of Alcala where he is the official pastor. The whole town turned out for the Eucharist and luncheon that followed -all having been planned and provided by the local council. A truly terrific and enjoyable day for all. Sunday night, back in Tormina, the local pastor hosted a private dinner, attended by the archbishop [who is the Primate of the Bolivian Church] and the Marist Team. Many stories were told, a lot of laughter and the archbishop got around to becoming very interested in knowing so much about Australia. Monday's celebrations centred on the Eucharist and luncheon there in Tormina. We were surprised by the gathering. Present were 5 bishops and some 40 priests of the archdiocese. For us, it provided us with the opportunity of mixing with the other 5 young priests who came to stay 3 days with us before the end of the year there in Tarija, along with Jaime. Together they form a priestly fraternity that Jaime himself initiated. After the Eucharist, the archbishop offered a banquet for all present. As Juan was the "Padrino" he was called to sit there at the table alongside the bishops and Jaime. After the formalities, the occasion turned into a true fiesta with lots of music, dancing- and drinking! Next day we stayed on with Jaime and his fraternity for a BBQ and sharing.

Meanwhile Bolivia is in a state of crisis. For the past 6 months we have had a severe shortage of petrol and diesel, causing days of waiting in long lines. The country is without any U.S: dollars and a lot of dollars have been taken out of the country by the big companies, so that country now is virtually bankrupt -the banks with little local currency...all transactions limited and restricted. The U.S. dollar on the black market is offered at double the official price. Prices have shot up on practically everything, small business in danger and unemployment on the increase. The present government has been unable to provide solutions to the situation and as a result, the different unions and institutions have taken to the streets in protest.

Presidential elections are due in August. The governing leftist government is divided into 2 camps, one that supports the present president and one that supports the former president who is trying to run again, even though the constitution makes him ineligible. Some are now looking at the current president of the senate to enter the field as an alternative candidate for the official party. The rightist opposition is completely divided. Some 17 aggrupation are registered and none of the leading contenders is willing to form a united front with one candidate – all contenders want to be president. None of the contenders from the opposition have any clear plan for government but are solely self-seeking. The next 3 months are filled with uncertainty and there are already efforts by some to have the elections cancelled for August.

Now to finish our present sharing, we turn to some news about our Marist Community. Healthwise, we realize with the years our bodies are not the same as when we started out on this adventure together some 35 years ago. Both Arminda and Nair have recently had some health problems but fortunately are under control. Gilberto last month was struck down with herpes and the recovery is long. On April 18th he was able to celebrate in stile with community and friends his 58th. In these days, we have together attended to our "Refugio Yanacachi" property and it is looking spectacular and our recent sowing is responding after good rains. Next on the agenda is Juan's 80th on June 25th. In all these years we have never gone away together with the wives. So, we have decided to take a trip away including Arminda and Nair who have never seen the ocean [as Bolivia is landlocked]. We have made reservations from June 11th to June 25th in the hope that in the meantime some "padrinos" are forthcoming.

With all our love: *Gilberto/Arminda/Juan José/Chiqui-Paola & Little John -Javier/Nair/Lupo/Paco -Juan*