

Mary's Devotion

The month of May is for many Catholics a time for special devotion to Mary. It is a time of Marian processions and May crownings.

Father Jean-Claude Colin and the early Marists had deep personal devotion to Mary. It has often been supposed that the Society of Mary exists because of their devotion to Mary: being devoted to Mary, they decided to form a religious congregation dedicated to her.

But Fr. Colin was always very clear about the origins of the Society of Mary: "It is not a work of human beings, but of God". It was Mary, in union with the will of God, who took the initiative and inspired the foundation of the Society. Fr. Colin even got the General Chapter of the Society in 1872 to declare that Mary is the Foundress of the Society.



Mary desired this Society that bears her name because she was concerned about God's people in this modern age, with all that threatened them and their practice of their faith. We can say, then, that the Society of Mary was founded not because of Fr. Colin's devotion to Mary, but **because of Mary's devotion to the people of God**. The purpose or mission, then, of the Society of Mary, of the Marists, is to be the vehicle whereby Mary continues to care for God's people in this world.

This is why Marists have never promoted specific devotions to Mary. We have directed our marian devotion toward the people who are Mary's concern. Our Marist energies have been channeled into doing Mary's work and being the vehicles of Mary's merciful presence in the Church of our day. So, while we may each be personally devoted to Mary, celebrate her feasts, pray the rosary and other prayers in her honor, our devotion to Mary expresses itself principally in our devotion to God's people, especially in service to those most in need.

From the very beginnings of the Society, it has been evident that this mission of doing Mary's work and thus making Mary present, as it were, in the Church and world of our day, could not be accomplished without the collaboration of lay people in this effort. And, the central dynamic of Marist life is something that lay people can share in very simply: anyone who becomes captivated by Mary's motherly, compassionate concern for God's people, and reaches out in action to bring Mary's care to people, is doing Mary's work and sharing in the mission of the Marists.

Obviously, Mary's concern for God's people originates in God's mercy, in the salvation God wrought in Christ Jesus, and in Jesus' compassion toward people. So, in a way, Marists don't do anything other than what any good Christian would do. Nevertheless, by identifying with Mary in her motherly concerns for people, Marists find their hearts and the focus of their attention directed in particular ways. Like Mary, they are particularly solicitous about those of her "children" who have lost their way and perhaps have become disaffected from the Church. They are on the lookout for those who have been marginalized by society or who have "fallen through the cracks" of the Church's ministry. Marists share Mary's motherly sensitivity to every kind of division or conflict: Mary wishes to gather people together in her embrace, heal the wounds in the human community, and reconcile people with God, with the Church, and with one another. The deep political and social divisions in our [American] [every] culture, and the bitter antagonisms among Catholics today, cry out for Mary's healing presence and therefore for the ministry of Marists.

Now, it may sound easy to be a Marist and to do Mary's work. But Fr. Colin knew how we humans can get in the way of God's grace, how readily we get self-absorbed, how we act out of mixed motives, seeking benefit for ourselves rather than being single-hearted and wholehearted in our service of others. So Fr. Colin left us a bit of wisdom to guide us in our service: we Marists are to strive, with the help of God's grace, to be, **like Mary, hidden and unknown in this world**. This does not mean that we shrink from engagement in service in the world. What it does mean is that we Marists are to serve without seeking benefit for ourselves: we are not to allow any desire for prestige, for control over others, or for personal gain to animate us. Solely the interests of Jesus and Mary are to consume us.

It was Fr. Colin's experience that, paradoxically, the more we strive to remain hidden and unknown while doing great things for God and God's people, the more we will have an impact on this world.

Mary's invitation is always there for you: come, join us in doing the work of Mary. Leave yourself and your selfish desires behind, and discover the joy of serving as Mary did, she whose spirit always "rejoices in God my Savior."



Edwin L. Keel, S.M.
March 16, 2012

Edwin L. Keel, S.M.

This does not mean that we shrink from engagement in service in the world. What it does mean is that we Marists are to serve without seeking benefit for ourselves: we are not to allow any desire for prestige, for control over others, or for personal gain to animate us. Solely the interests of Jesus and Mary are to consume us.

It was Fr. Colin's experience that, paradoxically, the more we strive to remain hidden and unknown while doing great things for God and God's people, the more we will have an impact on this world.

Mary's invitation is always there for you: come, join us in doing the work of Mary. Leave yourself and your selfish desires behind, and discover the joy of serving as Mary did, she whose spirit always "rejoices in God my Savior."

Edwin L. Keel, S.M.

March 16, 2012