

Reflection from the Superior General

On December 8, 2020, Pope Francis surprised us all again. In his letter entitled "With a Father's Heart", (*Patris Corde*), he dedicated 2021 to Saint Joseph. This man-of-dreams "teaches us that amid the tempests of life we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course" (no.2).

Joseph, like his namesake in the court of the Pharaoh, interprets dreams that save his people. These dreams are God's dreams and never merely his own. In the Gospels Joseph speaks by his decisive response to these dreams. This month of March, during this year dedicated to Saint Joseph, we Marists can learn from Joseph how to "let the Lord steer our course", how to respond to God's dream

for us. We entrust ourselves to God's loving Will, God's dream rather than our own. We accommodate ourselves to live in the depths and to abandon the apparent security of the shallows that are so familiar to us.

There are four dreams in the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel narrative.

In the first dream Joseph, "the just man", is profoundly disturbed when "the angel of Lord commanded him to take Mary as his wife". In the midst of his doubts and insecurities Joseph trusted in the Word of God revealed in the dream and he trusted Mary. We can all be unsure of ourselves sometimes, perhaps discouraged with our own fragility, or that of others. We can be tempted to keep our distance from God and from others. Joseph's example calls us to remain engaged and trusting.

The second dream challenges Joseph to "get up, take the child and his mother, and go to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you". He is one refugee in a long history of migrants, from the times of Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, right up to our present day. Although Marists generally have a fine tradition of missionary availability, sometimes we can want to be left undisturbed, to stay just where we are. Joseph's example calls us to develop the inner freedom of a pilgrim heart. This may mean risking a new mission, or trying to understand people and ideas in new and kinder ways, or even moving to an age-care

facility. There are plenty of worldly voices who, like Herod of old, can frighten us into insisting on maintaining the status quo. Joseph is told to "get up and go", a pilgrim and a migrant.

Another dream instructs Joseph to take "the child and his mother and return to Israel". Joseph will claim the child as his own and so give much-needed security to both Jesus and to Mary. This is spiritual fatherhood. The vocation to be a father involves real responsibilities, highlighted today when fatherhood can easily be debased or abused. Our celibacy can call us, like Joseph, to accept responsibility to accompany, always in loving respectful and liberating ways, those who are vulnerable.

The fourth dream calls Joseph "to make his home in a town called Nazareth". There he works as a "tehton", earning his livelihood with wood and stone. He shares the fruit of his labours with those around him. Our Marist way of life also calls us to work, as far as we are able, and to share the fruit of our labour with our community and, together with our community's discernment, with the poor.

From the time of Father Jean-Claude, until today, Joseph is the patron of our Society. This "man-of-dreams" invites us to challenge our own very limited horizons with the greater loving dreams of God for us and for our world. We pray with him, and through his intercession.

Reflection Question: What signs do I/we discern of God's dream for the Society of Mary within the Church of today's world, and how am I/ we called to respond?

Faternally,

John Larsen s.m.



St Joseph, General House Chapel, Rome