

Reflection from the Superior General

We can be nervous sometimes as we wonder: "Who is coming after me? What will happen to our fine institutions, our Provinces or our Districts, our financial securities? Will all my life's efforts eventually come to nothing?" We can be tempted by the demon of discouragement.

The mysteries of Holy Week and Easter invite us to be open to receive the grace of encouragement. For Mary at the foot of the cross, and for all the disciples, Golgotha was a moment of anguish. Everything seemed to have been lost. Jesus himself cried out: "Father. Father. Why have you abandoned me? and there was darkness over the world".

Yet within their discouragement and anguish those first disciples, Mary among them, discovered through their eyes of faith that there were new signs of life. They remembered Jesus' words: "when a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it bears much fruit". However difficult to understand the mystery, the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning proclaims unexpected new life. This inspires us as Marists.

Humanly speaking, we may deeply regret losing control of our cherished works, our institutions and our ways of governance. Yet we dare to believe that, by God's grace, our faith, hope and love over so many years of dedicated Marist life and service will certainly bear good and enduring fruit.

Last week, when Pope Francis met with the leaders of the Marist Brothers in Rome, he told them:

This is a time of reading the times, not looking back, always looking forward! Like one who is at the helm of a boat: to see if the course is right the helmsman does not look at the wake behind him, but looks forward, keeping an eye on two or three stars that give orientation.

One of those guiding stars that enables us to set our course for the future is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we celebrate liturgically over these weeks. As we remember these saving mysteries we rejoice that the Spirit is still loving us into new life. We see Marists of all ages, professed and lay, who are full of

joy at our Marist vocation, embracing it with a greater interior freedom every passing year and facing courageously whatever new challenges may come their way. There is no denying the pain of "letting go" of the past but there is always new life, just as spring follows the winter, if only we have faithful eyes to see and loving hearts to trust.

Another star to guide our journey into an uncertain future is the sign of Mary in Nazareth. Mary speaks to us of all our small Marist communities in different parts of the world, often quite hidden and unknown, gathering each day to pray, to live and work together, in humble and quiet ways that serve so many people who themselves are often forgotten and struggling.

Yet another guiding star is Pentecost, a spirit-filled community with Mary and the other disciples, going out courageously to preach the Good News. Mary at Pentecost inspires us to look beyond our small horizons, always discerning new possibilities for preaching the Good News among people who are often very different from ourselves and live in unfamiliar worlds.

Many changes in our Society certainly involve the pain of "letting go" of much that we have cherished in the past. Mary at Nazareth, at the foot of the cross, and at Pentecost is "the star of the sea", *stella maris*, showing us how to navigate into the future. We dare to embrace the uncertain future, trusting not in ourselves or in our "achievements", but always only in God and in Mary. Easter Sunday morning enlightens our faith to believe in new and unexpected life in ways we could never have imagined.

A blessed Holy Week and Easter and Fiesta of Saint Peter Chanel this month of April.

John Larsen s.m.

