

Reflection from the Superior General

Fr. Jean-Claude's 1872 Constitutions begin: "this least of Congregations". We never aspired to any show of power. Our "greatness" always lay in finding our inspiration in Mary, in bearing her Name and undertaking her Work with great faith, love and hope.

This month during the Advent and Christmas season our Marist eyes turn naturally to Mary. Within the infancy narratives we find a poor couple giving birth to a son in a small, unused hut. They are a migrant family, displaced, and unable to find a decent place to stay. Yet "God-among-us", Emmanuel, finds his home among these poor people, who are hidden and unknown in the world.

Sometimes in a world of stardom, power and wealth we Marists can seem small and unremarkable both personally and institutionally. Yet this very insignificance is a great grace from God. By our simplicity we come closer to Mary and closer to the "anawim".



Northern Aleppo countryside, Syria, December 25, 2016. REUTERS/Khalil

The Advent and Christmas journey is expressed in each of our personal journeys when we surrender our own egos and any undue sense of personal self-importance to the grace of God. If we trust primarily in ourselves, we are necessarily insecure. When we hand completely everything over to God, our pilgrimage through life may sometimes be uncomfortable but it is always filled with a deep joy. Advent is a special time of conversion, of self-emptying, of repenting of any bitterness or hardness of heart, of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that we are freer and more available to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ born in the Bethlehems of our own lives.

From her Immaculate Conception, which we celebrate next Friday, Mary was born to trust and hope in God with such faith, hope and love that she would never be deterred by sin. Mary's Immaculate Conception gives each of us reason to hope that we too can escape the addictions to our sinfulness.

Sometimes we may wish that our Marist communities were different. Of course, every community could always be better. Yet this very community where each of us lives, with our various joys and struggles, is the special place where we are called to celebrate Christmas this year. God comes to us this Christmas within the fragility of our communities. It's a time of reconciliation among ourselves. Let's celebrate Christmas this year within our communities with prayer, fraternity, forgiveness and simple, human joy.

Our simplicity and our "earthiness", or humility, also brings us closer to the people who may consider themselves unimportant in our own time. God dwells among the poor and we can find him at home there. We Marists, like Mary, hidden and unknown, are especially well placed to understand a God who favours the people hidden along the peripheries. This Christmas we are challenged to go to the peripheries ourselves or invite people from the peripheries into our lives and communities. This is one real-life, tangible grace of Christmas so often decried as having been usurped by reindeer, tinsel and Santa Claus.

In some units of our Society we are letting go of iconic ministries and we are diminishing in numbers rather quickly. It can be painful to accept this. However, we must never hand over to discouragement. Our strength has never been in our numbers. She who sang of her "lowliness" calls us, too, to be humble and close to the ordinary people of our age. Our "greatness" depends only on our passionate commitment to Mary's Work, the mission of her Son. This commitment can only mature with time.

May this Christmas be a blessed time of joy and new life for each Marist, wherever or however we find ourselves. A blessed Christmas, too, to each member of our Marist family and all among we live and serve .

John Larsen s.m.