

Reflection from the Superior General

When we Superiors General met with Pope Francis about a year ago, he instructed us to give our greatest attention to how we lived the vow of poverty. The worst threat to Religious Life today, the Jesuit Pope told us, is "spiritual worldliness". The vow of poverty is a strong antidote to spiritual worldliness. It was no surprise, therefore, that when we met as Superiors General last week in Assisi, the city of Saint Francis, much of the discussion was about the vow of poverty.

Motivation for taking the vow was front and centre. A Religious takes the vow of poverty in response to a call to be a radical follower of Jesus Christ, poor and humble.



Tony Leon, fms: Mary, the Visitation

We compared the "kenosis" of Jesus Christ, especially on the cross, and the dramatic action of Francis of Assisi in stripping himself bare of everything in front of his townsfolk. Jesus looks steadily at all those whom he calls as disciples and he loves us, challenging us: "to go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven: then, come follow me." (Mark, 10: 17 – 27).

Fr. Colin wrote: "The preserver of all virtues, and hence the true defence and guardian of the Society, is poverty." (1872 Constitutions, #442)

We, Apostolic Religious, have our particular institutional challenge to live this vow authentically. Our ministry demands we offer the best service we can for our people. Our challenge is to make an on-going discernment between the real needs of our apostolate, which may be quite sophisticated, and constantly re-committing ourselves to simplify our lives— communally and personally – and striving to live the Gospel without compromise.

Poverty, like charity, begins at home. It would be spiritual worldliness for us to claim "my" time, "my" money, "my" bank account, "my own plans". We live

poverty authentically when we share all things in common – our lives, our time, our possessions, our money – stripping ourselves of any form of personal entitlement, for the sake of following Jesus of Nazareth.

Our vow of poverty brings us into greater solidarity with those who are poor through no choice of their own, usually because of injustice. Sharing our lives, our talents and our energies with the poor, we learn to become poor ourselves, trusting in God's Providence, and advocating for justice. (Constitution #110).

Today is the Feast of the Visitation. Mary is a disciple of Jesus who identifies with the "anawim", the poor, who are specially loved by God. She travels simply and "in haste" - no excess luggage there! - to the peripheries, "the hill country of Judah". She bears only the Word of God. Poor as she is, Mary brings great joy to Elizabeth whose child dances in her womb, as his predecessor, David, danced before the Ark of the Covenant. "In the sixth month" Mary knew when it was time to leave, returning to Nazareth, an unremarkable and poor village, where she worked and lived humbly with her family.

This Feast of the Visitation is a time for us Marists to re-commit ourselves to embrace the vow of poverty as disciples of Jesus, both communally and personally, shunning any form of spiritual worldliness that might fudge our response to the radical call of the Gospel.

Fraternally,

John Larsen s.m.