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“Marist Way” is a True Name & a True Way

The Holy Spirit, by various means and promptings, brings those He has chosen to the point of decision. The mature are instructed and make their decisions based on knowledge and the Spirit's leadings, and the young are presented by the proxy faith and belief of parents and godparents. They confess their faith in Jesus that the things hoped for in the depths of their hearts Jesus will justify; and what they confess with their lips will lead them to salvation. The water of Baptism is poured, the Sacrament conferred, and *ex opere operato* the grace of Faith is given. What then is missing, since they have received the fullness of the Spirit, and as subjects of their King bear the Kingdom within them?

Our Pontiffs from Paul VI onwards have raised the issue. They have pointed to the possibility of wrong or incomplete instruction of the mature, and the inability of the young to speak for themselves. For so many of the People of God what is lacking is the knowledge and experience of the individual personal conversion experience of justification and salvation given to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, because of the overwhelming love and wish of the Father.

The knowledge and experience of the extent and intensity of the love of God for us - this conversion experience that our Popes tell us is so often missing and so very necessary for our sanctification and mission - fills us with such a bursting love of gladness and joy, that it swells and pours forth in a wellspring, overflowing to the world around us. The love of God is not a decision to be made to love Him and those around us, but a compulsion to respond and return something of what He gives us in His generosity of grace, and so glorify His name. The Holy Spirit sharpens our perceptions of His gifts. He supplies the means to be the bridge between the Kingdom in which we now live and which is in us and we are subject to, and the world we live in but are not of.

Peter urges us to hold on to what we have - to what we have already received - and we can recognise that there are several and various ways to safeguard the treasure of the Kingdom within us. Many have a secret corner they are unwilling to share with others, but we can never truly know another unless they completely reveal themselves to us. But the Father is a Father we can know and with whom we can enter a deeper and deeper relationship, because Jesus said that He and the Father are one, and all the Father has said and revealed to Him, He has said and revealed to us. We have only then to turn to Jesus in order that we might know the Father.

Knowledge of God is not knowing God, even though knowledge of Him can lead us to know Him; that is, lead us to sanctity, a primary goal for all the People of God and the indispensable companion to those whose avowed intent is mission. Sanctity always goes hand in hand with mission but sanctity always leads. Here, then, are two paths - the way to life in Christ; and a way to bring the world to salvation.

When Mary first said what she wanted - a Society bearing her name to be known as "Marists", with the mission of making the whole world Marist and leading the world to her Son - she did not say how that was to be achieved. It was left to Fr. Jean-Claude Colin as elected leader of the first Marists to have the vision of the way to sanctity and the way in which to meet the mission challenge. He always charged the Society to look to the perfect discipleship of Mary, especially at Nazareth, and to think, feel, judge and act as Mary would in all aspects of their lives.

Father Founder knew the Society had come into being as an approved missionary society both by the wish of Mary and also by the approbation of the Pope, but he accepted that to evangelise the whole world would be an impossible task for so few clerics and religious. He saw the main instruments of evangelisation as being the People of God who were the interface between the world and God's Kingdom. He visualised the role of the Society as the animators, advisors, instructors, of the People of God, whose sanctity and mission would be directed to the world as they met it. The People of God were not to be seen as helpmates to the Petrine ecclesial hierarchy but would present a new face of Church to the world, recognising needs, supplying answers, being compassionate, embracing the marginal, lonely and depressed, guiding people on the way to God, a bridge between two kingdoms, a way to Christ and salvation.

The Society of Mary exists like a tree with various branches on the same rootstock. Each branch has grown and is nurtured by its own special charism of Fathers, Brothers, Teaching Brothers, Sisters, Missionary Sisters and T.O.M./Marist Way members. Though all are motivated and animated to move in their own chosen directions and fields, all have Mary as their common Foundress and all are charged with the same mission for which their special charisms enable them. Thus, all declare openly that that is what they are actively engaged in, and this is true for the lay branch of the Society when candidates make their dedication and declared intention to actively engage in missionary activity, become part of the Marist Family, and expect to receive their own particular enabling charisms.

The minutes of Chapter agreements and resolutions over years, regarding the role of the People of God in the Society have often and at times been largely inactivated by the preoccupation of the Society with such necessary matters as finance, organisation, etc., but which it seems have occluded vision and drive towards the primary goals of sanctity and mission.

The T.O.M./Marist Way continue to be supportive of Parish, community, and the world as they meet it, and try to identify and sate the needs of material necessities, loneliness, grief, community, instruction, etc., becoming a bridge to all those seeking God and His Kingdom.

"Marist Way" is a true name for the Marist branch of the People of God: it points the way to perfect discipleship, with Mary as their model; and at the same time it indicates to us the method by which Mary's mission to the world can be achieved.

Now is a time for review, for action, for mission; a time for a "Marist Way".

C.H.J. Marist Way Hull Group, England. Pentecost 2009.

Charles died in Hull on Saturday 20th June 2009. May he rest in peace. Amen.