

ADDRESS BY SR GRACE ELLUL SM
AT THE MARIST INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EVENT – GUATEMALA JANUARY 2019

A beautiful and very meaningful image has been chosen for this Gathering: Weaving. It is an image that is very dear in so many cultures, including that of the country we are in. Weaving is also an image usually associated with the feminine – and our world is crying out for the feminine in these times of conflict, oppression, corruption, exclusion and disregard for truth.

Let's go back about 14 billion years when nothing yet was. It is hard to imagine nothing. 14 billion years ago there was nothing and God in one creative act said: Let it be! This is what we now call the Big Bang, a moment that contained within itself all the potential that evolved into the universe, into so many forms of life, so much variety and colour – brilliant stars, billions of galaxies, delicate flowers, so many animal species - and humankind. What a moment! So much potential in this great creative act. Let it be – and it all began.

The weaving began with the Big Bang – God's weaving. From nothing came movement and evolution and the beauty of a tapestry develops before our eyes. We look with wonder at our universe, distant galaxies, aware that we are a small part of a great Whole. We feel so small when we look at the stars, when we imagine billions of years. We are small, yet....

God invites each one of us to be weavers, co-creators with God – co-creators in Mary's way. Mary accepted God's invitation. Mary was open, Mary knew how to listen. She heard the voice that comes in silence and recognised her part in the on-going drama of the Universe. She said yes – and again the great "let it be"! resounds. And with God Mary created something hugely new – through Mary's yes, God came to be physically with men and women, part of humanity, experiencing as a man the joys and sorrows that men and women experience. Jesus is God with us.

Mary was able to accept being co-creator, co-weaver, because she was open. Mary wasn't all caught up in herself, concerned only for her own well-being. Mary was open to life. She had the creative imagination that enabled her to see what had never been seen before. Mary was prepared to leave her own plans aside, because she saw something much bigger. Mary was prepared to risk everything – given the cultural norms of her time, Mary actually risked being stoned to death because of the yes she gave to God. Mary knew that she could trust the God who called her – she didn't understand, but she knew she could trust.

Our Marist Founders were also courageous women and men who proclaimed their own "Let it be"! They felt their smallness, people from very small French towns in the aftermath of the French Revolution, part of a still hurting Church. But they listened, welcomed God's call, responded to Mary's wish to have a Society whose members would take on the Work of Mary. Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, foundress of the Marist Sisters, searched for many years, aware that God was speaking yet not clear about what God wanted.

Then came the moment of enlightenment when she received the invitation of the Colin brothers, Jean-Claude and Pierre. She knew immediately that this was the way she would be co-creator with God, this was her part of the weaving. And together with her friend, Marie Jotillon, she set out for Cerdon to begin the Congregation of the Marist Sisters. She, together with the early Marists, had the courage to say “Let it be”, trusting in the plan of the Lord of the Universe, whose great “Let it be” continues to call forth.

And I can ask myself: How open am I? do I have the courage to see myself as part of a great Whole, an unfolding drama? How open am I to change my plans as I listen to the voice of life, the voice of God? Or am I so caught up in my little world, my close circle, my ambitions that I miss the great call?

Let’s go back to the image of weaving. The weaver begins with a simple thread, seeing potential in this simple thread. The weaver dreams of something beautiful that she can bring to birth. Perhaps it is a gift to bring joy to someone she loves. Perhaps it is desire to keep her culture alive. Perhaps it is something useful for someone in need. Love is behind the weaving. In the process, sometimes it is necessary to unravel and to begin again, or to modify the original plan. The weaver is proactive, following a vision and making it happen. The weaver thinks beyond herself and her small circle.

Each one of us is called to be someone who makes a difference. We are connected with everything that is – all that exists is a web of interconnection, each part dependent on other parts. I am part of a Universe that has been 14 billion years in the making. Scientists tell us we are made of stardust. I am called to be a co-weaver, co-creator, with God. I am part of an unfinished Universe, still in the making – and I am called to be part of this process. From the first moment of my existence, God chose me and made a promise. God said to a mystic many centuries ago, a woman in Germany: Before the world was, I longed for you. And God says that to each one of us. It takes courage to really take those words in: God does say to me personally, to each one of you: Before the world was, I longed for you. God’s dream is that I develop and contribute to life according to my gifts. How can I contribute to this tapestry? How can I grow so that I can become more and more the person who lives life, who loves, who reaches out to everyone, who has a special care for the vulnerable?

This is a Marist Youth Gathering. You have come here because you are attracted by Mary’s way. Mary is the woman who has inspired us – we want to think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as she did. Let us claim our identity, our identity as a child of the Universe, our identity as a child of God, our identity as brothers and sisters of Jesus. Also our identity as members of a family, belonging to a particular nation with its own culture. Finally, let us claim our Marist identity – let us have the courage to say with Mary: Let it be. I am ready to live my life as part of a stupendous whole, doing my part to bring about the Reign of God.

May the “Let it be” of the Big Bang, may the “Let it be” of the virgin of Nazareth, be repeated and lived out by each one of us.