



MARIST VOCATION YEAR

5

Living our Marist vocation with passion cannot be completed without the Marist laity. We tend to leave it to the margin but it is central to the original vision of the Society that it must be a tree of many branches. Jan Snijders asserted in his address to lay Marists in France that the commitment of men, women, ordained priests, lay people, religious and people living married life and secular profession, all to the same mission of embodying Mary's intervention in this present age is part of the core of the original Marist vision. It may have been found unworkable but that should not stop us trying to grow together and rediscover our common mission, common undertaking – the WORK OF MARY, a common superior, a common message, a common approach, and a common desire. And that is the body that Jean Coste pointed out that we may have become too indifferent to and instead, concentrating rather on the spirit. And, of course, when the body is separated from the spirit, it is called death. He observed an encouraging phenomenon of the interest that the laity is showing towards the Marist society, and they are attracted to the Marists through the contact they have with Marist communities, the body that make the spirit visible. And, without that body, the laity would find no point of reference.

To conclude, perhaps this story of Dr Albert Einstein may sum up the need to have a sense of mission, a sense of a call as exhibited by the early Marists and what this sense of mission means for the present Marists and those whom the Marists will attract. Dr Einstein was teaching in the Oxford University in 1942. He has just given out an exam paper to his senior physic class. As they walked through the campus, his assistant asked him, "Dr Einstein, that physic exam paper you just gave your senior physic class. Isn't that the same exam paper you gave the same class last year?" "Yes, Yes. It is exactly the same," he answered. "But Dr, how can you possibly do that?" "Well," Dr Einstein responded, "THE ANSWERS HAVE CHANGED."

Justin Ratsi, s.m.

Living MARIST VOCATION with Passion

"I am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth." (Lk 1:38-40)

“Living the Marist Vocation with Passion” is about living the Marist life with a keen sense of mission. This sense of mission is the barometer of the vitality of the Church and of each individual Christian and religious community. Looking back into the beginning of the Society, it was this sense of mission that drove Jean-Claude Colin and the other Marist founders to establish the Marist project. It was the same sense of mission that drove the young seminarians in Lyon to climb the hill of Fourviere in responding to Mary’s mission, “Here is what I want.” Former Superior General John Jago referred to these men of Fourviere as men available and “men on fire”. It was that “fire” that not long after the first profession in the Society of Mary that St Peter Chanel together with Bishop Pompallier, the first Bishop of the Vicariate of Western Oceania, three other priests and three brothers set out, the first group of over 700 Marists to the vast unknown Oceania, on the Christmas eve of 1836. Lay women and sisters followed in their footsteps later.

In the Mayet Memoirs the theme of Mary supporting the Church in the beginning and at the end of time has always led Colin to a sense of mission. A realization that Marists have a job to do, urgently, in the world – for the salvation of souls at the end of time. In his circular letter, “Light from our origin,” the former Superior General, John Hannan sm exhorted all to live the Marist life and mission with passion by drawing from the rich roots of the Society. Recently, as we are getting more familiar with the life and teaching of our Founder, the Superior General, John Larsen , anticipated this as an opportunity for Marists to have a renewed sense of identity and a sense of mission.

Therefore, in living out our Marist Vocation in this secular world, with passion, it is imperative to rediscover what is this sense of mission shared by the Marist Founders, St Peter Chanel and the Marist missionaries to Oceania can drive a passionate living-out of the Marist vocation in community, driving careful vocation promotion and recruitment, and purposeful collaboration with the Marist laity.

A “sense of mission” is defined as the emotional attachment made towards the mission of an organisation. The attachment occurs when there is a match between the values of the organization and that of the individual. Achieving the mission of the organization can only happen when there is a sense of mission throughout the organization. Even though it is highly unlikely that a 100% of the members will have the sense of mission but it will surely increase as the mission of the Society is implemented and embedded in its culture, and careful recruitment for values compatible with the values of the Society. The chemistry of the value of the individuals and the value of the Society is clearly expressed in Constitution 34: *The process of becoming a Marist must take account of two elements: the common vocation of the Society and the individual’s personal vocation. At each step of formation, one is confronted by the interplay of these two elements.*

When he was still a young boy Peter Chanel, through reading letters of missionaries abroad sent back home, valued missionary work so much, and wanted to emulate them, “I will become a missionary priest,” he pledged. After his ordination on 15th of July 1827 he volunteered to be a missionary but instead was told to look after a parish. His keen sense of mission outside of France led him to Jean Claude Colin and the Marists. He helped Colin in the efforts for the Society of Mary to be accepted by Rome. When it happened on the 29th of April 1836 Peter Chanel was the first to put up his hands to be in the first group of Marist missionaries for Oceania, therefore, realizing his dream to be a missionary.

Peter Chanel valued Mary so much that in his ordination he chose her as his personal motto, “to love Mary and bring others to love.” He believed that the way to Jesus, the way to bring others to Jesus, the way to be a true missionary is through Mary. Therefore, it was not a coincidence that his keen sense of Mary’s role in evangelization brought him to her Society where in the words of Constitution 23, he “learns from him (Colin) and like him from Mary, how to approach the work of evangelization ...Fired with apostolic zeal for the Kingdom...” So, learning from Mary especially her presence in Nazareth and the Pentecost, Peter Chanel and all Marists will do great things for the Lord and they seem to be unknown and hidden. So “they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things, otherwise they will be unworthy and degenerate sons” (Colin’s words in Constitution 228). In that way, constitution 92 affirms that “...the Society of Mary, generation by generation, becomes a reality in the world and its members know the joy that comes from a whole-hearted response to their vocation.”

Becoming a missionary under the banner of Mary as the underpinning values became the underlying sense of mission that drove Peter Chanel to Oceania. This sense of mission was shared and valued by the 756 deceased missionaries who were with Chanel and who were following afterwards from 1836 up to the last two decades of the last millennium. Most of the missionaries left for Oceania shortly after their profession or ordination either in the same year or a year after. It highlights the keen sense of mission and urgency to achieve the mission entrusted to the Society of Mary in 1836. This sense of mission has led to a crown of martyrdom, and according to “Alive in Memory” , 50 missionaries met their death with courage in the hands of the indigenous, some through leprosy, some were lost at sea and in accidents. There were 60 missionaries who died under the age of 35. Many of the missionaries who met their death later in their missionary years died due to some sort of illnesses. Some did manage to return to their home province for treatment and but many stayed on in the islands and died where they were. The witness of their lives became seeds for the growth of both the local church and the vocations to priests and religious life in Oceania.