

Reflection from the Superior General

2020 has been a very difficult year for everyone. For many people it has been tragic. Everyone is hoping for a new start and a better future in 2021. How can we contribute to a brighter future?

The Christmas crib, since the time of St. Francis of Assisi, offers hope for everyone and especially for us as Marists. Whether it is the magnificent "presepe" in St. Peter's Square or a tiny papier-mâché crib in the poorest shanty town everyone can perceive a new and hopeful future when we pray at the crib.

Mary is the contemplative disciple who gave life and hope to the world through her faith. She inspires Marists, bearing her name and moving into 2021, to be contemplatives like her. As we pray during Advent and Christmas with the beautiful Scriptural readings from the daily Masses and the Offices (especially the Office of Readings) we share Mary's prayerful involvement in a world that can often be frightening and unjust. This contemplative vision strengthens us to build a new and more compassionate world and to avoid rushing backwards to the status quo.



The essential beauty of the crib is its earthy simplicity. Everything is in harmony, both nature and grace. A new vision for 2021 will require grounded decisions about how we are to live more simply and graciously with nature, the sacrament of God's presence. The natural world is crying out because it is in pain. We Marists try to make generous and tough decisions towards living more simply, believing "an ecologically sustainable style of living is an intrinsic part of living the Gospel today". (2017 G.C., 44).

The crib also offers us a glimpse of the company we would prefer as we enter 2021. There are the shepherds who were rejected from

more polite society but were able to recognize the Messiah as one of their own. There are the "wise men from the East" who are strangers and foreigners seeking the truth to set them free. Then there is the young couple, Joseph and Mary, and their child, born far from the home village. In the midst of this unlikely crowd of criminals, pilgrims and refugees the Lord reveals his love for this people, both at Bethlehem and wherever we will find ourselves in 2021.

Saint Joseph is the dynamic dreamer. He first listens to the Spirit speaking softly in his dreams and then he risks everything to follow the call resolutely. He challenges us to take risks too, by truly discerning the promptings of the Spirit in our own hearts and by re-committing ourselves to keep walking the way of the Lord, never allowing ourselves to become stuck. He not only dreamed; he also risked setting out.

What is our contribution to a brighter 2021? Let the crib teach us. We are called to be contemplative, like Our Lady, our mother and our model. We are to choose to live very simply, like the crib-scene itself. We are to find Christ in the company of the poor, the migrants and the "seekers" of our time. Like Saint Joseph, we develop a new interior freedom to embrace the challenges the Spirit whispers into our hearts. This all sounds very much like our Baptismal call and our Religious vows.

2020 has left many of our companions bloodied and bruised. Perhaps each of us has experienced this year as especially difficult. Let's care deeply for each other. The Work of Mary started at Nazareth and Bethlehem and continues through our Marist lives and mission, today and tomorrow.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!" (Is. 9:2).

A blessed Advent, Christmas and New Year!

John Larsen s.m.