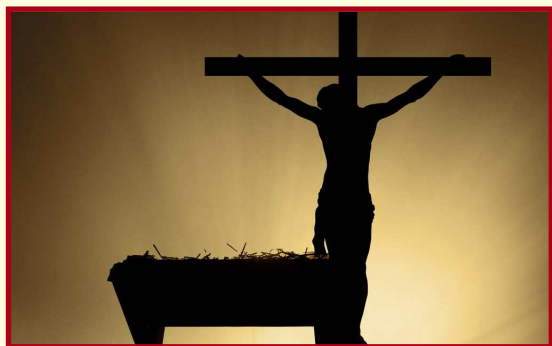


Reflection from the Superior General

Honiara in the Solomons is being torn apart this week by violence, rioting and burnings. On behalf of all of us Marists I extend our brotherly concern to our confreres there and to the people among whom you live and whom you serve. I received this message this morning: "There is great tension everywhere here and we have been informed that something more is going to happen very soon in our already war-torn Honiara". Let's be praying for and with each other.

Ours is a violent world. It probably always has been. The infancy narratives are set in a very violent world. Our early French Marists lived in an era of constant wars and revolutions. However, we encounter the antidote to violence in this season of Advent and Christmas in a profound human and divine compassion that finds God's love expressed in our human concern for each other. The weapons of violence are first forged in our own hearts. However, "swords are turned into ploughshares" in the universal kindness and compassion which we see foretold in the vision of Isaiah. (Is. 1.)



Our Marist charism lived fully, with its emphasis on quiet unassuming Marian compassion, is an antidote to the violence all around and within us. It's an attitude of the heart. This may be expressed in actions as simple as honoring and celebrating significant moments in the lives of those around us and showing our concern for others with an encouraging word or a message or a phone call. The Christmas message of God's love shining through human weakness and suffering reminds us all of our call to human kindness especially for those who may be going through difficult times, often unnoticed.

Sometimes we can feel we ourselves are the war-wounded, the victims, rather than the perpetrators of violence. Advent is the Season to search for ways of reconciliation and forgiveness. Traditional spirituality draws the essential link between the crib and cross, as Saint Marcellin Champagnat often taught. The love of God's incarnation makes sense only when the two moments are connected. The crib and the cross are also connected in the sword which pierces Mary's heart. Reconciliation and forgiveness never come cheaply.

Advent calls for some penance so that our hearts may be free to welcome the Lord and others into our lives. This is a privileged time to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. A healthy asceticism is not some sort of self-improvement exercise but a way of prayer, work, and leisure that leads us to respond more generously to God's grace inviting us to live our own Marist vocation ever more profoundly and joyfully. We are celebrating our call particularly in this Year of Marist Vocation.

Advent involves much more than simply a good resolution along the lines that I "should be more concerned about my neighbour". Advent calls us to follow the "logic" of the Christ child, the son of Mary, who came among us in his vulnerable humanity to invite us into the very life of God. In a world of violence, the divine comes among us as a simple human child in order to draw our own simple lives into the very life of the God of justice and peace.

Sometimes the many stories of human suffering are simply overwhelming and compassion-fatigue blunts our ability to respond. Perhaps we cannot address directly the huge issues of human suffering and violence internationally but we can certainly open our lives and hearts to those who are suffering near to us and dirty our hands in caring for them even at the cost of our own comfort and regular routines.

Let's be praying together that this Advent and Christmas will be a time of great joy and encouragement. Our violent world is being redeemed by the compassionate love of Christ in which we participate by our concern one for another.

A blessed and happy Advent and Christmas!

John Larsen s.m.