

CHRISTMAS: ON THE MOVE AND HOME



Greetings from the Superior General
for Christmas 2017
and the 2nd January 2018

Christmas is with us, a time that fills our hearts with joy. For most of us, it will be an occasion to express our friendship, tighten close ties, and share happy times in community, our families and with all the people we hold dear. The joy of the presence of Jesus, in the midst of his people and of human history, fills our hearts and inspires us to share this joy with those near and far. It is a sign of a time that is ever new, when God comes close to our lives and we feel God's presence.

For many, however, the celebration of Christmas will be something that passes by unnoticed. I am thinking especially of so many children living on the margins of our societies.

On the 20th November this year, on the occasion of World Children's Day, we held a conference in Rome, organised by FMSI (our Marist organisation for promoting the Rights of Children) to mark the 10 years of its existence. It was entitled "Children on the move: Rights beyond Borders". I took great pleasure in receiving information on Marist initiatives under way on behalf of migrants and refugees in countries like Rwanda, South Africa, Uruguay, Brazil, Mexico, United States, Spain, Italy, Lebanon, Thailand and Australia.

At the same time, my heart was touched to hear many stories of minors who had arrived as refugees in Italy, many of them without hope or dreams, after their experience of being victims of human trafficking and torture; among them a young girl, displaced by war, whose desire was to go home to collect the doll she had left behind, without realising that in doing so she would not only find her home empty but totally destroyed by the atrocities of war.



As I was listening to these stories, what hit me forcefully was the image of Jesus who was born as a displaced person, in a crib, surrounded by animals and lying on straw. He could, of course, count on the shelter provided by the human warmth and protection of his parents, Mary and Joseph. Surely, they were suffering at not being able to provide a place that was worthy of receiving their new-born child, something they tried to make up for by their tenderness. I am in full agreement with Pope Francis when he said:

“Let us allow the Child in the manger to challenge us, but let us also be challenged by all those children in today’s world who are lying not in a crib, caressed with affection by their mothers and fathers, but in squalid “mangers that devour dignity”. Children who hide underground to escape bombardment, on the pavements of large cities, in the hold of a boat overladen with immigrants...” (Homily of 24 December 2016)

This Christmas of 2017 is the first of the third Marist Century. The coming 2nd January will be 201 years since our foundation. In the spirit of these two events it is good to ask ourselves:

Where can I be ‘on the move’ to and in what aspects of my life? What comfort zone do I need to leave behind and move on from? Which children on the margins can I meet up with, give an experience of ‘home’ to, and ‘make Christmas real’ for? Who can I team up with in some action of solidarity?

Let us live this Christmas conscious of the mystery of our God, ‘on the move’ and ‘migrating’, incarnate and vulnerable, welcomed and embraced by the arms and hearts of Joseph and Mary, the same as happens for you, me, and thousands of Marists and men and women of good will around the world.

The XXII General Chapter spoke to us of movement and of family, of letting things go to enable the new to be born, of being beacons of hope and creators of homes that radiate light, of walking alongside children and youth on the margins of life, and of making ourselves bridges towards a better world. This vision harmonises perfectly with:

- An understanding of Christmas that speaks of being on the move and of incarnation;
- An understanding of Christmas that speaks of the loving and welcoming shelter to be found in the home of Joseph and Mary;
- An understanding of Christmas that today inspires the network of homes where love finds ready expression and that we want to unite as a global family;

- An understanding of Christmas that includes moving on and openness, homes that welcome life, care for it, and generate new life;
- An understanding of Christmas that moves us to take up one of the recommendations of the Chapter, that is particularly meaningful over these days: “to embrace a simple lifestyle and experience our vulnerability as a source of fruitfulness and freedom”;
- An understanding of Christmas that includes listening to those who are voiceless, of widening our brotherhood and sisterhood, our family in true Marist style, as was the dream of Champagnat.

May “children on the move” in turn move our hearts and make us more welcoming of all we meet. May we join in the dance of our God who became small, impoverished, a child. In living out these calls, may we be able to say that we are making Christmas real and thus wish one another wholeheartedly:

Happy Christmas!

This is my wish for all Marists of Champagnat across the world and for all children, especially those who are voiceless.

With great affection,

Ernesto

