Doing Mary’s Work

January 20th 2013

Isaiah 62, 1-5

1 Corinthians 12, 4-11

John 2, 1-12

It is a privilege being with the leadership of the four religious branches of the Marist Family at this shrine which evokes so many memories, so many hopes and as a place of pilgrimage is such a font of inspiration for us.

In today’s gospel John focuses not so much on the marriage but on the lack of wine and the consequent risk of embarrassment. Through the determined action of Mary, Jesus provides “an abundance” (c.600 litres).

This direct and determining action of Mary brings to mind how our founders perceived Mary as the one who intentionally intervened and so profoundly hall-marked their spirituality and founding charisms. I am thinking of three particular convictions they had coming from this very same source:

* The work we do is Mary’s work.
* The Name we bear has a profound spiritual significance, and
* Fourvière is the cradle of a unique spiritual experience.

**The Work of Mary**

In our Marist tradition we are familiar with the expression having a Marist vocation by virtue of “a gracious choice” (sm const. 228). Another way of saying the same thing is that we are called to do “the work of Mary”.

What exactly do we mean by called by “a gracious choice”? Are we supposed to take it literally or see it more as more than a figure of speech? Does it make sense to say that Mary is actually doing something intentional in calling each one of us by name as it were to our various institutes/congregations?

Can I honestly assent to the proposition that my Marist vocation is something to do with Mary's mindful intention in a literal sense?

The first Marists were convinced that the answer to this question is “yes". Champagnat, Chavoin, Colin and Perroton[[1]](#endnote-1) saw Mary as personally active and intervening in the history of salvation by inspiring Marists to work on her behalf. This is something for us to ponder.

There is no teaching of the faith more fundamental than the resurrection. Flowing from that great mystery the Assumption of Mary into heaven at the point of death says nothing more or less than that Mary shares in the resurrected glory of her Son.

In the transfigured life of resurrected glory Mary is in fact not less active, less conscious, less human than we are, but more active, more conscious, and more human, as she fulfils her unique role within the communion of saints. Her role is deeper, more universal, and more decisive with regard to human salvation, than that of any other human being.

In the light of the beatific vision Mary knows each one of us individually.

The efficacy of prayer is in the measure of its capacity to reflect the mind and will of God. So it is easy to understand the efficacy of the prayer of Mary, whose soul, from the first moment of life, was consonant with the will of God. What God wants is what Mary wants. Mary’s desires, in her prayer, are the desires of God who as we know has no need for mediators. Yet, she is chosen to mediate and we are the standard bearers of that mediation and mission.

So the prayer of Mary knows the same mysterious limits as the power of God: the limits of his respect for our liberty, and the mystery of his gracious election.

Astonishing as it may seem, it makes sense to think in terms of Mary choosing individuals to join in her work. The gracious choice so central to our Marist identity is no mere figure of speech. It is a spiritual conviction which spiritually motivated our founders in the way they thought and acted.

So what we receive in our constitutions are concrete ways to make this intuition accessible particularly in our daily rule of life.

The Work of Mary used by all our founders gives us an insight as to how the founding inspiration was received and understood by them: “the work of God, the work of the Blessed Virgin”. (Cf Marcellin Champagnat).

**The Name We Bear**

We are by virtue of our name the “sons (and daughters) of Mary”. Words recorded by Mayet in 1857 Jean-Claude Colin said “Now that I am old, I don’t insist on making a mystery of it. The name we bear was not given us by men; it came to us from heaven”. Fifteen years later he says in 1872 “Among so many congregations consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, only one, by a singular privilege, has received this beautiful name of Mary. Marists! This name, so consoling, ought to always remind us of our duties as well”. [[2]](#endnote-2)

A letter from Marcellin Champagnat in 1835 to Queen Marie-Amélie states “I gave the members of this new society the name of Mary, convinced that this name, by itself, would bring in a great number of subjects...Without this holy name, without this miraculous name, people would long ago have ceased to speak about our Society. Mary: there you have all the resources of our Society”. [[3]](#endnote-3)

**Fourvière - the cradle of a unique spiritual experience**

In this historical place the church is alive. The People of God come here to open their hearts to a loving mother. May she guide us as she did our founders and foundresses, as she continues to do for countless pilgrims who come here daily so that we may be faithful to her Son in accordance with his intentions. Amen.

1. Most Reverend Father, I beg you not to forget me, above all before the good God and Our Lady of Fourvière where I often transport myself in spirit in order to soften the privation that I experience of not being able to accompany you when you go up. (Letter of Francoise Perroton Wallis, October 6th 1847 – Mayet 240-246 & 248)).

A book of texts, Edwin Keel, n.286. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. (idem n.287/288 p.173). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)