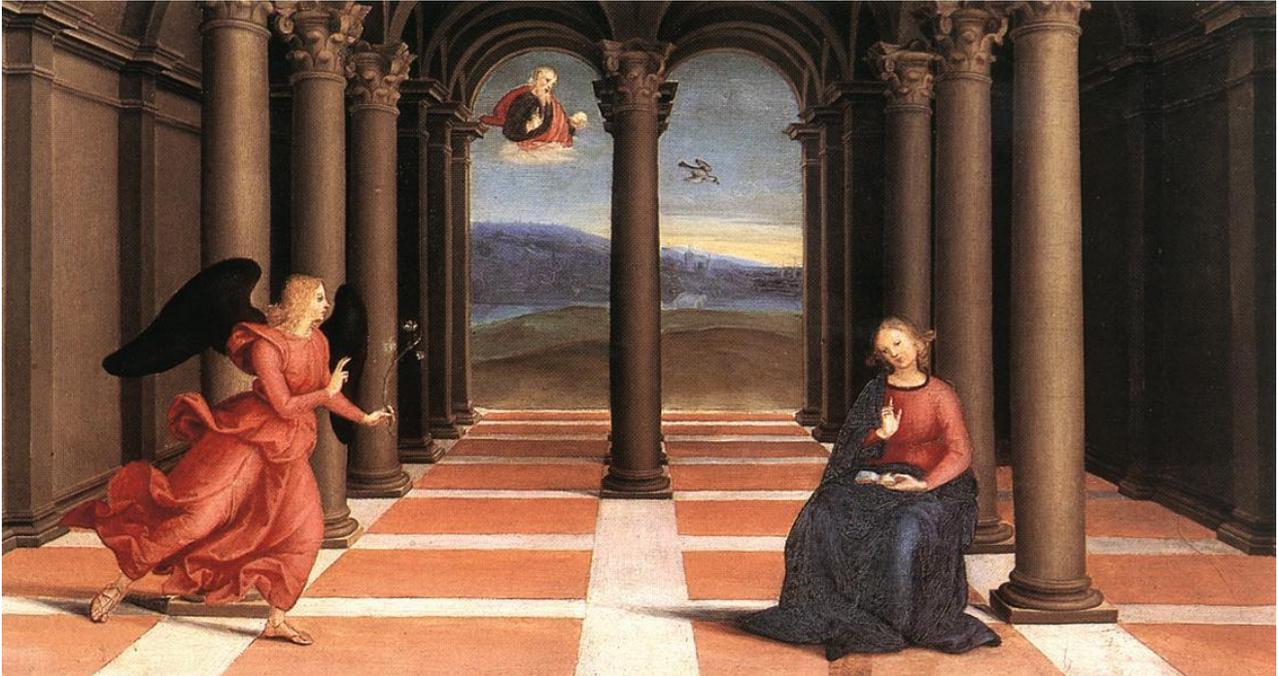


MARCH 25, 2023 - ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD
PATRONAL FEAST OF THE MARIANIST FAMILY
Celebrating the Marianist vocation



Dear Family,

Once again this year we are preparing to celebrate our feast, around the mystery of our common vocation, our Marianist vocation, that draws inspiration from Mary's vocation, which we celebrate on this feast of the Annunciation.

Mary is called, invited by God, to collaborate in his saving mission.

Mary, who with her yes, her *fiat*, inspires our response, trusting in God and desiring that it be done in us according to his word.

This year we propose a time of reflection, prayer and celebration around our common call to be a People of Saints, prepared by Fr. Miguel Ángel Cortés for the World Council of the Marianist Family.

We also offer the possibility of using this image of the Annunciation, by Raphael Sanzio, and some reflections of the Italian journalist Alessandro D'Avenia on this painting.



OUR CALL TO BE A PEOPLE OF SAINTS

At the beginning, the gift

Everything begins with the gift; everything is born of a free love. For us, this original gift is BAPTISM. Baptism is the principle and foundation of our life, where our deepest and most authentic personal and collective identity resides. It is always good to come back to this fact in order to reclaim this identity. The spiritual path is nothing more than the process by which the gift received at the beginning becomes a reality in our history: becoming in a real way what we already are by gift. In the Church and in the Marianist family, all states of life need to develop a spirituality that has its roots in baptism. We must drink from the essential and common source. For us, moreover, the gift is also the Marianist charism, which gives a specific form to the experience of baptism.

What are we?

- Other Christs (anointed ones): "Indeed, all of you whom baptism has united to Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27).
- Beloved sons: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17)
- The Spirit who dwells in us and sends us on mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. He sent me to bring the Good News to the poor..." (Lk 4:18)
- Members of a People, of a Body, plural and cohesive: "Let us make a comparison: the body is one, yet it has many members; and all the members, in spite of their number, form one body. So it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free men. "All were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:12-13)

This is holiness. During the anointing with the chrism in the rite of baptism, we say:

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing in everlasting life.

Holiness, gift and task

We are holy and called to be holy. The seed of new life that was given to us in baptism must be cultivated. The task of our freedom is to welcome the gift and to create the conditions for it to develop. It is personal and community work, not individual work. Because a person is a saint only as a member of a people of saints. My holiness is linked to the holiness of others, and the holiness of others to mine. We are not holy alone. We need others to help us become what we are called to be. This fact must also apply to the complementarity of states of life and charisms. We are also called to live this in the Marianist Family. On the other hand, holiness lived personally and collectively is an essential component of the mission. It is fruitful.

Baptism, the spiritual source of synodality

Pope Francis has said that synodality is what the Spirit desires for his Church in this third millennium. To feel with the Church and to accept this call, we can say that synodality is what the Spirit desires of the Marianist Family at this time in its history. However, we must not forget that the authentic experience of synodality is not a question of organization, but the consequence of a profound spiritual experience based on the identity of the baptized.



THE WORD OF THE FOUNDERS

Blessed Mother Adèle de Batz

Sunday is the Feast of the Dedication, a wonderful feast. On that day, let us dedicate our entire person to our divine Spouse: our hearts, our bodies, our minds. May everything that is us be consecrated to him forever. We must look upon ourselves as a temple in which the Holy Spirit resides by his grace. We have been consecrated to him by the sacred rites of this sacrament. Ans does our Jesus not take possession of this temple every time we have the joy of receiving him? Let us therefore take every precaution not to profane this temple, which must be his alone. (Letter 253)

How true it is Lord, that holiness is the only thing necessary! (Letter 142)

My dear daughter, I believe that the path of fidelity in little things will be the safest for you. Great courage is needed to follow it with perseverance, but so many saints have adopted it; why should we not follow in their footsteps? Courage, God will work with and for you. What can we not do with the help of his grace? Great purity of intention, uprightness of heart, constant interior mortification, humble scorn of self: this is the sanctity to which you must aspire. Walk boldly along that route, dear sister, it is the surest road to attain the heavenly goal. (Letter 546)

Blessed Fr. G. Joseph Chaminade

At Baptism, every Christian receives the Spirit of Jesus Christ and is conceived, so to speak, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This divine Spirit will cause the person to grow to the age of the perfect adult, to a complete conformity with Jesus Christ (...) It is a truth that Jesus Christ was born of Mary, *of whom Jesus was born* (see Mt 1:16). We have all been conceived in Mary; we are to be born of Mary and formed by Mary to the resemblance of Jesus Christ so we may live only of the life of Jesus Christ, that with Jesus Christ we may be another Jesus, son of Mary (...) The Spirit of Jesus Christ works in us our conformity with this divine model only in proportion to our growth in faith. (CHL VII. 22,35-36)

Our purpose then, the end to which we especially and immediately tend, is our sanctification (...) In what does our sanctification consist? (...) Our sanctification consists in dealing death to the old self and bringing the new self to life (...) the new self is a perfect copy of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Working to make the new self live in us is nothing other than working to make Jesus Christ live there, to unite ourselves to him, to become, as he commands us, one with him. (CHL V. 23,5-6.13)

Let us count as synonymous the expressions saint and child of Mary! (Letter I, 188)

The main spirit of the Society, which is to present to the world the spectacle of a people of saints, and to prove by the fact that today, as in the primitive Church, the Gospel can be practiced in all the rigor of the spirit and of the letter. (Letter II,388)

To erect a powerful dam to withhold the torrent of evil, Heaven has inspired me to solicit from the Holy See at the beginning of this century the letters patent, giving me the title of Missionary Apostolic so as to revive or to reenkindle everywhere the divine torch of faith, while presenting to the astonished world on all sides, imposing masses of Catholic Christians of every age, sex, and condition, who, reunited in special associations, practice our holy religion with neither vanity nor human respect, in all the purity of its dogmas and morals. (Letters IV, 1076)



GIVING BIRTH

(Alessandro D'Avenia; On *The Annunciation* by Raphael Sanzio)

Christmas is everyone's birthday, so why else would we give each other presents?

I understood it better when I contemplated a masterpiece by Raphael exhibited at the Diocesan Museum of Milan on the occasion of Christmas. It is a wooden rectangle (*predella*) divided into three scenes. The artist, in full maturity, painted on the vertical part the empty tomb of Mary assumed into heaven, on the horizontal base the three Christmas scenes: annunciation by the angel (conception), adoration by the Magi and the shepherds (birth), and presentation in the Temple (introduction of the child into the community).

In the first scene, Raphael paints the most beautiful figure of the entire *predella*, that of a youth running into a girl's room. Both have their index fingers raised, a sign that they are talking.

In the center of the scene are not those two, but an empty space, which allows us to look through a wide-open window to the landscape behind, where we can glimpse a bridge leading to the towers of a city nestled in the hills.

What are the two in the foreground talking about? The messenger (*angelos* in Greek) asks her to be a mother and she asks for explanations because she is not yet married. In ancient myth, when a god desires a woman he takes her by force, not here: they converse. The empty space (Raphael's innovation: the pictorial tradition would have a character in the center) that separates the messenger from the girl is freedom: life proposes, the person disposes.

In front of the girl there is an open book (impossible in a shepherd's house in a remote Palestinian village two thousand years ago), a symbol of what makes it possible to cultivate listening, an image of the "inner life": the voice of life can only be heard if there is an open space within us, where we are not deaf to the calls so that life becomes absurd (a word that comes from "deaf"). For something to be born in me and through me, it is necessary that I know how to listen to the word hidden in my existence.

In fact, the raised index fingers of the two characters represent their *dia-logo*, that is, the offering and listening to the Logos, the word/reason of life: what am I doing here, why was I born? This dialogue between the young woman and Life opens up to the world, represented in the landscape and the city on the other side of the window.

The child is the threshold at which God stops: the limit of his omnipotence is freedom. He does not want puppets, but co-creators: here destiny is not violent, but a free choice. Believers or not, each of us responds in our uniqueness to a call to give birth to "something" called Jesus (which means "God saves"), that is, to freely and creatively generate something that saves the world. In fact, "to save" means to preserve from destruction, to make whole, complete, from an archive to a castaway: to save is to give life, to give birth.

But it is not possible to generate "salvation" without being fertilized, that is, listening to what life asks of me and only me. In the painting, in fact, God appears "at the window" waiting for an answer, and only then sends his creative breath (spirit) (winged like a dove) that becomes in-spiration. Inspired is the person who, having accepted one's life as it is, decides to make of it a masterpiece.

The city in the background, over which the dawn is announced, is the Perugia in which Raphael painted the panel, because every city in which someone discovers how to "come into the world" updates Nazareth: what can I single-handedly pro-create that will "save" (help to fulfill) the world? When I make the call in the morning, this is exactly what happens to me: I see teenagers called to "save" (fulfill) themselves and the world by generating "the word", that is, the word-action that dwells in each of them. I can only help them to discover it, because every person is an unpublished (never spoken) and unheard (never heard) verb-action that can only come into the world (be born) freely: Christmas is either the birth of that verb present in every person or a flight from reality.

**INTERCESSIONS** (It is recommended to adapt them to each context)

- For all the religious of the Society of Mary, that the Lord may give us the gift of living our vocation with passion and joy. In holiness. That we may know how to give ourselves generously to the mission and service of the poorest. (SM)
- Father, we, MLC, present to you the fruits of our meeting in Madrid. Help us to be faithful to the calls received in this moment of grace: to commit ourselves each day with greater strength and enthusiasm to our mission and to the service of the weakest wherever we live. (MLC)
- For the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, so that, renewed in our vocation, we may be ready to live fully the calls of the General Chapter as missionaries of Mary in the care of Life. (FMI)
- For the Alliance Mariale: that Mary may take care of us so that we may be more and more at her disposal each day and so that her Son may be known, loved and served. May the Lord grant us vocations and the grace to grow in fidelity to the gift received in order to serve him in the midst of our world. (AM)

THANKSGIVING

- We thank you, Lord, for our founders and for all those who, by their fidelity to the Marianist vocation, have made it possible for our charism to reach us alive and fruitful. Thank you, Lord.
- We thank you, Father, for the testimonies of those who faithfully follow you, evangelizing in their families, at work or in their neighborhoods, accompanying those who suffer, building structures of greater solidarity and denouncing injustice. Thank you, Lord.
- We thank you, Lord, for all the people who have given and continue to give their lives in the humble, ordinary and daily tasks to be a sign of your mercy and maternal tenderness among throughout our world. Thank you, Lord.
- We thank you, Father, for our Family joyfully gathered today on this feast of the Annunciation. We thank you for the gift of Mary in our lives, and that we can be collaborators in her mission to make your Son, our Savior, present in the world. Thank you, Lord.

Spontaneous prayers can be added.

PROPOSED CELEBRATION SCHEME:

Celebration of the Word (without Eucharist):	Within the framework of the Eucharist:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening song • (General presentation of the meeting) • Word of God: Lk 1:26-38 • Reflection • Time for prayer, reading some of the proposed texts. • Petitions and thanksgiving • Our Father • Concluding prayer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readings for the Feast of the Annunciation • Raphael's picture can be used, and a brief explanation can be given from this text at the beginning of the celebration, or at the time of the homily. • The proposed petitions and thanksgiving can be used. • Some of the texts of the Founders can be read either in the homily or after Communion.