

A MARIAN MODEL OF CHURCH

The Chapter stressed our Marian vocation. In particular, it urged us to internalize Mary's spiritual attitudes and translate them into a distinctive way of being and acting in the life of the Church. As Marianists, we find our illumination and inspiration for our style of ecclesial life in the figure of the Virgin Mary. We seek to accept people with her "warmth of welcome" (Rule of Life, art. 8) and invite them to grow in her characteristic attitudes.

Pope John Paul II and many other Church leaders have called for a "Marian model of Church." What is such a model?

It is a Church that lives the Gospel in Mary's style. The Marianist Family, as conceived by our Founder, aims to exemplify this style of being Church. A beautiful prayer written by Father José María Arnaiz for a meeting of Marianist Lay Communities summarizes key aspects of this Marian ecclesial style:

"OUR FATHER, we pray for our Marianist Family
with all its weaknesses and all its wealth.
Look upon us with kindness;
it is our mother and our family.
Give it your grace so that it may become
what it longs to be.

"A family which fosters life and enthusiasm,
in which all can express what they think and feel,
what they believe and desire;
a community of freedom.

"A family where people listen long and hard before speaking,
welcome others before judging them,
forgive much more quickly than condemn,
focus more on announcing the Good News than on denouncing the bad;
a community of mercy.

"A family in which the simplest brother and sister
understand what others are saying;
in which the leaders are highly educated and experienced,
but still know that there is much they do not know;
in which everyone is allowed to be himself or herself:
a family in which we learn wisdom.

"A family in which the Holy Spirit will feel at home,
since everything will not be pre-planned,
regulated and determined:
a community that fosters creativity and growth.

"A family in which the courage to risk the new
is more powerful than tried and true routines:
a community that looks to the future.

“**A family** in which all can pray in their own language,
develop and cherish their own culture,
appreciate the heritage and history in which they feel at home:
an incarnational community, one that knows the paschal mystery
and experiences a new Pentecost.

“**A family** of which people will say:
‘See how they love one another’,
rather than, ‘See how well organized they are’:
a living and growing community.”

“**Marianist Family**, you are small but growing,
fragile but full of hope,
hesitant but believing.
Lift up your eyes and see:
Jesus and Mary are always with you. Amen.”

Mary was the daughter of a colonized, humiliated, and impoverished people. In her Magnificat, she expressed her longing for freedom and justice in solidarity with the “little people” of her world, those who are excluded from power and influence. A Church modeled on her will be in tune with the dynamism of the poor and will know how to use simple means, available to everyone, to proclaim the freeing message of salvation. A Church that lives in her style will be characterized by solidarity, justice and social responsibility.

Mary was a woman who knew how to be herself, fully human, fully feminine, fully Jewish, in solidarity with the deep values of her oppressed people, in contrast to the Roman “globalizing” and homogenizing tendencies of her time. The Marian style of being Church will value and respect the service of leadership and authority in the Church, treasure communion among all and cooperate with directives of Church leaders. Still, it will avoid servility and merely blind obedience, any over-emphasis on hierarchy and uniformity.

We see Mary as a formative, educative Mother, one who refuses “to reject as bad what is not absolutely good” (*Constitutions* of 1891, art. 267). She magnifies the Lord for the unique and varied gifts granted to each of her children. In contrast, today we sometimes experience among some earnest Christians an almost totalitarian spiritual dynamism that bowls over everyone in its wake, is impatient of human processes, seeks to suppress human questioning and human variety in the name of a universal sovereign and triumphant spiritual ideal. A Marian stance within the Church contrasts with such an aggressive, evangelistic stance. It leaves everyone lots of room to grow.

The image of Pentecost, where the disciples were gathered with Mary in prayer and were sent in mission by the Holy Spirit, summed up the Chapter’s sense of our call at this time. The same image inspired the leaders of Marianist Lay Communities in their Third International Meeting shortly after the Chapter. This image inspires us to live a Marian style as the People of God. The Chapter was convinced that such a Marian style is a special, much needed contribution we are called to make, along with others who share similar yearnings, at this moment in the life of the Church.

From Circular No. 8 of Fr. David J. Fleming, SM