Marist Way Theme – "Called to be Disciples of Christ in the Spirit of Mary"

This year's Marist Way theme is "Called to Discipleship in the Spirit of Mary." In the time of Jesus, a disciple conformed his mind and actions or his body and soul to those of his teacher or rabbi. A disciple would walk with or follow the rabbi throughout the day, picking up as much wisdom as possible. This was the disciple's way of saying yes or "I believe the teachings of the rabbi to be a true and faithful interpretation of the Torah and worthy of making them my own."

The Church proclaims Mary to be the first disciple of Christ and model of discipleship. At the Annunciation, she is the first to hear the intentions of the word of God to take on her flesh so that he might become enfleshed through her and take away the sins of the world. She conceived Jesus through her act of faith when she responded, "Let it be done to me according to your word." That was her way of saying yes, or I believe God will do what is seemingly impossible.

That act of faith is born from the question put to Archangel Gabriel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" Tradition asserts that Mary's question indicates she had made a vow of virginity. She asks how she can remain faithful to her vow to remain a virgin if she gives birth. Otherwise, her question makes no sense. She was already betrothed to Joseph; any girl or woman would assume she would conceive through her spouse. Jesus being born of a virgin makes it clear that Mary would conceive by the Holy Spirit coming upon her. That guaranteed Jesus' divinity. At the same time, his taking on our humanity is guaranteed with his assuming Mary's flesh and blood and being born from the Virgin Mary. By giving her consent, Mary already demonstrated her faith in what Jesus would one day teach, "With men, this is impossible but with God, all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26)

We believe that Mary conceived Jesus and that he took on her flesh and blood. I suppose you can say that Mary's body and blood became the body and blood of Jesus. The vocation of every disciple of Jesus is to become his body and blood and to perpetuate his incarnation for the transformation of the world in every age and place.

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we reaffirm our vocation to the discipleship that Mary models for the Church. That happens two times during the Eucharist, first, at what is traditionally called the Great Amen. That occurs at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer when the priest holds up the host and the chalice and prays, "Through him and with him and in him…" and all of us respond by singing or proclaiming, "Amen." The word amen is Hebrew, meaning I agree to that or simply yes. As a community, we are saying yes to the bread and wine, having become the body and blood of Christ.

We also reaffirm our vocation to discipleship in the spirit of Mary when we come forward as individuals to receive the body and blood of Christ at holy Communion. The great amen or yes we declared with the community now becomes particular to ourselves. When the priest or extraordinary minister holds up the host and the chalice and says, "The body of Christ" and "The blood of Christ," we cannot hide in the crowd. Each member of the believing community steps forward and says two things. First, amen or yes, this is the body and blood of Christ. We are also saying amen or yes to becoming what we already are through baptism: the body and blood of Christ. That is our way of imitating Mary and saying, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

Now, this is not to be taken lightly. Jesus' body was broken, and his blood poured on the cross. To become his body and blood means that in living and loving like Jesus, we will be broken like bread and that our blood will be poured out, if not literally, then certainly emotionally. That was what Mary experienced when she stood at the foot of the cross.

That is how we give birth to Christ in the spirit of Mary. That we are to give birth to and become Christ through our flesh and blood is what St. Paul had in mind when he said, “It is no longer I who live in me but Christ.” In other words, our emotions, mind, and heart are conformed to Christ so much so that we live for him, and he lives through us.

Think about that. Given our obvious failings with which we are all too familiar, such a recreation or rebirth into Christ sounds too good to be true and seemingly impossible to become. In the face of this mystery, we respond in the spirit of Mary by saying, “Let it be done to me according to your word.” Like her, we too are putting our faith in Jesus’ teaching that with God, all things are possible.

That is what it looks like to be a disciple of Christ in the spirit of Mary.