"Hail Mary, Full of Grace."

> *"…it is my wish and that of my Son that there be another Society…one consecrated to me, one which will have my name, which will call itself the Society of Mary, whose members will call themselves Marists."*

I am very much aware that the Gospel I selected for our meditation, the Annunciation, is one we more readily identify with Advent and Christmas. I want to suggest that the Annunciation is an invitation for all of us to take seriously the call to be full of grace and to reflect on its implications for our lives.

The Archangel Gabriel appears to Mary and reveals that she is to be the mother of the long-awaited Messiah. The angel greets her with the salutation, "Hail Mary, full of grace." You might say that the angel was revealing Mary's name to her: a name personally selected by God, known only to God, and now revealed to Mary. Mary is "full of grace."

People in love give each other a very personal name known only to the couple and only used by them. The name reflects an intimacy and fondness born out of their mutual love. We should not be surprised, then, when God, who is love, reveals His name for Mary, which is expressive of his fondness for her and reveals who she is before God. That is how God knows her. God knows Mary as "full of grace."

Our founder, Fr. Jean-Claude Colin, and the founding Marists were struck by the fact that this name, Society of Mary, whose members would be called Marists, had never been used before in the history of the Church. From this realization came the insight that God was doing something new for the Church through the Society of Mary. The founding Marists understood that they were not to continue what was already being done by others but to begin something entirely new.

When you look at what the Marists did then and now, it would be difficult to find a particular ministry that is distinctively or uniquely Marist. The Society of Mary undertook works that many other religious and diocesan priests were engaged in, including parishes, parish missions, running of schools and seminaries, and foreign missions. If what was new and distinctive about the Society of Mary cannot be found in what we are doing, it must be found somewhere else.

What makes the Society of Mary distinct or unique is found in the spirit of the Society of Mary that finds expression in its ministries, be they in parishes, high schools, hospital chaplaincies, military chaplaincies, or foreign missions. Fr. Colin defined the spirit of Mary this way. "If therefore they are and wish to be true sons of this dear mother, let them continually strive to draw upon her spirit and breathe it: a spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of neighbor; and so they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things…" We Marists believe this insight into the spirit of Mary did not originate with Fr. Colin. It is revealed to him by Mary herself, and these are the key components of who she is before God and what we Marists are to become for the Church.

If what we Marists do is done in the spirit of Mary, then whatever that is will become her work. Then, we will be faithful to her name that we are privileged to bear. The spirit of Mary does not belong solely to Marists but has as its goal to make the whole world Marist and full of grace.