“Let them (Marists) continually strive to draw upon her spirit.” Why it Matters?

The fundamental and original insight about the Society of Mary, as articulated by Fr. Colin, was that Marists are to be the presence of Mary in the Church. She was heard to have said concerning the Society of Mary, "I was the support of the newborn Church; I shall be so in the last times."

Being her presence goes beyond imitating her virtues to identifying with her. Fr. Colin wanted Marists to "think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel, and act like Mary in all things." Paramount for Marists is that they think, judge, feel, and act like Mary toward her Son. Being Mary is the essence of Marist spirituality.

How is Mary present to the Church? In Article 49 of the 1872 Constitutions of the Society of Mary, which was painstakingly written by Fr. Colin and reflects his mature thinking about the Society, it is written, "*…let them (Marists) 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…"*

What difference does it make acting in the spirit of Mary? Why should it matter?

I recall hearing about an older man who came to a restaurant every day without fail. He would sit at the same table and order the same meal, but he was demanding and rude. None of the servers wanted to wait on his table. One decided she would. She suffered the same way as the others but always remained considerate, polite, friendly, kind, and attentive to her most difficult and unappreciative customer.

One day, he didn't show. Neither did he show up the next day or the next day. Everyone wondered what had happened. Weeks passed, and one day, a well-dressed man with a briefcase in hand came to the restaurant and went directly to the waitress. He explained that he was the attorney for the man whom she had served and who had recently died. He told her that the man had left everything he had to her in appreciation for her kindness that he didn't deserve.

It is written that love covers a multitude of sins. Perhaps this one act of love on his part, his very last act before he died, saved him from eternal punishment. The waitress could have served the man without any warmth or kindness, more like a robot to protect herself from being wounded by his remarks. However, she waited on him in a spirit of kindness and attentiveness that some would have reserved only for the best customers. In doing so, she made herself vulnerable to being hurt and wounded by his nastiness. That is what the spirit of the most ardent love of neighbor looks like in action and why it matters. Someone's eternal salvation may depend on it.

That is also what it looks like to be "*as if hidden and unknown in the world."* The Kingdom (Reign) of God often begins small, like a mustard seed but grows with God's grace. The waitress went about doing ordinary tasks associated with serving customers: taking orders, bringing the meal in a timely fashion, responding to additional requests, and promptly bringing the bill when asked. Compared to great and heroic deeds, these were small and insignificant. They effortlessly blended into the hustle and bustle of an ordinary day in a typical restaurant. She did this day after day, unaware of the cumulative affect her attentiveness had on this customer, who showed no outward sign of the inward transformation (miracle) that was taking place. This is the preferred way for how God's grace works, in ordinary ways, *"as if hidden and unknown in the world,"* but no less effective and life changing. St. Theresa of the Little Flower expresses the same idea when she says we should do little things with great love. Both are two sides of the same coin: strategies for winning souls for Christ.

You do not have to be explicitly a Marist to "*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…"* When I served in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, I considered then Bishop Stanley Ott to be very Marist in how he

conducted himself. I think Pope Francis is also very Marist in reaching out to the most marginalized. Recall how Jesus commended the faith of a Roman Centurion that surpassed that of his Jewish listeners. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

We Marists, religious or lay, make a conscious decision to think, judge, feel, and act like Mary in all things, believing we have been charged to act in the spirit of Mary. There is good reason for being given that mandate. When it is assumed that everyone will get something done without specifying who will be responsible, usually, no one gets it done. Marists have been called to get it done in *"a spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of neighbor..."* Sometimes, God will choose others to remind us that it makes a difference when we act in the spirit of Mary, should we ever find ourselves asking if it matters.