Where will you find Marists? In the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ!

Part Five: The Society of Mary and Worship

I want to return to the sad reality with which I began this series of meditations. You will recall that I started by noting this disturbing trend: "21.1% of American Catholics attended Mass every week, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. It was projected that figure could get as low as 12% by 2030. However, in light of COVID-19, that figure could be reached by 2023 or 2024."[1] Like salmon that swim upstream, Marist spirituality will find us swimming against that tide and remaining in the Church even in its darkest moments. Why? Because Jesus said he would.

> "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt. 28:19-20)

Where Jesus is, so also will be his mother. As Marists, we are to think, judge, feel, and act like her in all things, especially toward her Son. Consequently, Marists will be with her who is with her Son, who is present in the Church, which St. Paul describes as being the Body of Christ. The Church is the extension of the incarnation in this present age, in these last times. So, Marists will be found in the Church, in Christ, and obeying his mother, whose last words to the Church were, "Do whatever he tells you."

And what does the Risen Christ tell us to do? "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Mt. 28:19-20) He says nothing about leaving the Church because of its sins and failures. Instead, he talks about adding to its numbers, expanding, and growing.

That is because the Church is strong enough to withstand the human frailty of its members. We should expect that since the Church is the body of Christ, whose earthly body took on the sins of the world and rose from the dead. Our sins could not destroy his physical body, which was transfigured into his Resurrected body. They should not be able to destroy his mystical body, the Church.

In addition, the Church exists for the salvation of souls, meaning sinners. That is also the primary end of the Society of Mary, which is "their (members') own perfection."[2] We should not be surprised that there are sinners among the Church and the Marists, all at various stages of being conformed to Christ. There will be relapses from time to time. Should that prove to be too disconcerting, I suggest looking at the saints, both in heaven and on earth, for instruction, companionship, and inspiration, lest we lose hope and forget that Christ assures us, "Not even the gates of hell shall prevail against us." (Mt. 16:17-19)

Fr. Colin was very realistic about the failings of the Church in his time, which resembles ours in many ways.

> "The Society of Mary's origins lie precisely at a moment of extraordinary change in the history of Western civilization: the great cultural shift of the Enlightenment.

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[1] Shaw, Russell, *The Future is Here for US Catholics*, The Boston Pilot, July 13, 2022, www.thebostonpilot.com/article.php?ID=189623.

[2] Constitutions of the Society of Mary – 1872, Article 11, #2

> The world in which men and women lived was evolving into something quite different: a world that no longer assumed that God had an intimate part in their lives; a world that was jealous of its freedom and independence and hypersensitive to any authority. At base, it was a world, which was becoming more and more allergic to the Church as it was perceived, and Colin seemed to have an intuitive grasp of what was around him. Given his temperament, he could easily have joined those who saw this as the end of the world and the time for Divine Judgement."[3]

He did not, and neither do we. Instead, he talked about the need to begin the Church anew. He was not talking about starting a new church as if that would be capable of escaping the sins and human frailties of the Church as he and we know it. He was speaking about reforming the Church so it would have a Marian face and be more welcoming to its harshest critics and detractors, thereby more effectively proclaiming the Gospel.

Since Jesus took his flesh in the womb from his mother, he undoubtedly had her physical features. When speaking about a Marian Church, it is still a Church that looks to and resembles Christ. That is consistent with Mary, who directs our attention to her but through her to her Son to "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5)

While a young curate at the parish at Cerdon, Fr. Colin became convinced that the Society of Mary came from God. In prayer and meditation, he realized that Mary's presence during the birth of the early Church was pivotal to his understanding of how the Society of Mary should be present in the Church today.

In the Upper Room at Pentecost, which we celebrate as the birth of the Church, the apostles were named first. Luke also reports that there were present "some women, Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." (Acts. 1:13-14) She is not recorded as having said anything, but her presence and how she was present say it all.

That became a model for how Fr. Colin would understand how Mary was intervening at this present moment in history. She wants to be with the Church as it struggles to serve better and evangelize this modern era. The Society of Mary, then, was called upon to think, judge, feel, and act like her. Marists are not to imitate Mary but to be Mary, to channel her presence so that she can be present to the Church as she was when the Church was born at Pentecost. The Church was threatened during those formative and challenging early years with doctrinal disputes from within and persecution from without. The Church today is threatened by scandals and doctrinal controversies from within and from without by growing unbelief.

The Society of Mary remains committed to the Church and wants students from a Marist school to love the Church, warts and all. Before that can happen, Marist students must love Christ, present in his Church, who first loves them and eagerly waits for His love to be returned.

[3] https://www.acertainway.info/origins/something-new-for-our-times/new-world-new-church/