The Marist Way of Promoting Lay Leadership – Part III

Finally, I want to speak about what it means to be baptized and conformed to Christ the King (leadership). What does this mean in our contemporary context? Well, in the Bible, a king leads his people to God. Examples from the Bible include Moses, David, Solomon, and many others. Then there is Jesus, the King of Kings.

In the Old Testament, an upright king was one whose good example led people to serve and worship the one true God. He ensured that the kingdom was rightly ordered so that its values reflected the values God cherished, with justice and compassion toward the poor and the stranger being most highly prized together with right worship. That was how Israel was to fulfill its mission. Israel was to be a beacon whose light would draw all the world's nations to know, love, and serve the one true God.

The Christian family is a type of kingdom. Parents exercise Christ's kingship when they treat each other with love and respect and teach their children to be just and compassionate, beginning with each other, especially the poor. That includes parents being alert for any sign of racist or discriminatory attitudes revealed in speech or behavior in themselves or their children. Racial slurs or microaggressions such as, "They got accepted into college because they are a minority," should be corrected as soon as such words are spoken.

That is what exercising Christ's kingship (leadership) can look like in the context of the family. That ties into leading the family to grow in holiness. That is God's desire for his people, Israel, for the Church and the family, which is the Church in miniature.

> "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light and made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Isaiah 61:6)

Included in the exercise of Christ's kingship is leading or guiding people to discern how God calls them to serve his purposes or their vocation or mission, which gives their lives meaning. For example, a son or daughter may be drawn to be an attorney, a doctor, an engineer, a business major, or an artist. A parent exercises Christ's kingship by leading their child to consider the question, "What kind of attorney, doctor, engineer, or business person, or artist does God want you to become to serve his purposes?" Whatever direction one's life proceeds, there should always be the thought, "How can I use my work to serve God's purposes?" Included in such discussions should be an encouragement to consider the priesthood or religious life.

Whenever the laity exercise leadership in parishes, such as serving on different committees or teaching catechism, exercising ministry to engaged couples and youth, organizing a prayer group, protecting the unborn, or giving voice to the marginalized, they are exercising Christ's kingly (leadership) ministry to which they were called when they were baptized.

The above examples involve power associated with exercising Christ's kingship (leadership). Yet, Fr. Colin listed power as one of the famous three no's Marists were to avoid, the other two being greed and pride. The power Fr. Colin had in mind was that which seeks to dominate, manipulate, and use other people or material resources to serve one's ego.

The devil had that in mind when he tempted Jesus to turn the stones into bread. The temptation was for Jesus to use his extraordinary powers to give people what they wanted, not what they needed. He could use his power to build his own kingdom that would quench the ego's thirst for fame, popularity, and influence. Those earthly kingdoms eventually use the twin powers of sin (wrongdoing) and death (coercion, threats) to

maintain their existence. Jesus explicitly rejected using his power for that purpose when he said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." That is another way of saying, "Man does not live by bread alone but on the word of God," which was Jesus' answer to the devil.

Jesus gives us an example of how he used his kingly power (to lead, influence, and change others for the better) when he washed his disciples' feet at the Last Supper. Peter led the way, trying to dissuade Jesus from doing such a menial task beneath someone of his stature. Jesus rebuked Peter, took off his cloak, thereby emptying himself of the trappings associated with an inflated ego, and washed their feet. Afterward, he said to them,

> "You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." (John 13: 13-15)

When Jesus was crucified, he put an exclamation point on the centrality of using the gift of power (leadership) to serve (love) others and not one's own desires. He emptied himself of all earthly indicators of success and worth when he died on the cross, on which hung a sign that read, "King of the Jews."

It is this power of self-emptying love that Christ the King wields that a great leader of armies such as Napoleon was compelled to acknowledge far surpassed his achievements gained on the battlefield:

> "In fact, learning and philosophy are of no use for salvation; and Jesus came into the world to reveal the mysteries of heaven and the laws of the Spirit. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires, but upon what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him…" [1]

In baptism, we have been united with Christ and empowered to exercise his kingship by wielding the power of his love. That means carrying our cross in imitation of Jesus by loving others, even our enemies when there is nothing in it for our egos but everything in it for those we serve (love).

Fr. Colin, of course, looked to Mary for inspiration to follow her son, given that the Church regards her as a model of discipleship. 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…"*

While Mary's role in salvation history is critical, she recedes into the background once Jesus begins his public ministry. However, she appears at crucial moments, especially when Jesus dies on the cross. She is present at Pentecost, along with the other women. Upon careful meditation on those Scripture passages, you can see why Fr. Colin would associate Mary with humility, self-denial, intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of neighbor. These are spiritual gifts from God; as such, they come from God through Christ. Due to Mary's intimate relationship with Jesus, these virtues are also characteristics of his. We are called to share a similar intimacy with Jesus when we are baptized.

The whole Church, but Marists in particular, are called to conform themselves to Christ by cultivating these virtues that closely united the mother of Jesus to her son and who resembled him in these ways. Living these virtues will bring us to Calvary, like Mary. Wielding the power of Christ's love in the spirit of Mary is to serve Christ the King. He extends his reign through his disciples (church), with the laity being the most numerous

[1] https://captainjamesdavis.wordpress.com/2015/05/17/napoleon-bonapartes-testimony-of-jesus-christ-and-christianity/

and potentially having the greatest impact on the world.

Marist School is a kind of kingdom where there are seemingly endless opportunities for the laity to exercise Christ's kingship (leadership) as teachers, coaches, counselors, campus ministers, buildings and grounds crew, administrators, staff, alumni, parents, and the Board of Trustees.

With the hiring of the first lay president, the laity has assumed the mantle of advancing the mission of Marist School, which is to form the whole person in the image of Christ through instruction grounded in religious values, the teachings of the Catholic Church, and the spirit of the Society of Mary. Marist School is truly a lay ministry serving the mission of the Church in the spirit of Mary under the direction of the Marists.

Teaching our students is to teach them to own their baptism and to respond wholeheartedly to their call to discipleship (holiness), most of whom will do so as members of the laity. Marist teaches our students to be the leaders to which they were called by Christ when they were baptized. To lead is to extend Christ's reign or kingship by serving (loving) others so that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. As soon as they step onto our campus, students are given opportunities to lead (kingship) by serving (loving), especially those most neglected, thus fulfilling the mission the Risen Christ gave them in baptism. There is no time like the present for them to learn how to become faith-filled, global-ready servant leaders. That is what Marist School is all about.

Our students will frustrate us when they fail and leave us in awe when they exceed our expectations. As Fr. Hartnett, S.M., former teacher, principal, and president of Marist School, said, "We teach teenagers, not angels." Forming our students in the image of Christ grounded in the teachings of the Church and the spirit of Mary will always be a work in progress. That is true for our students, as it is for all of us.