The Marist Way of Living the Gospel at School *and* Home – Part IV

Throughout my reflections, I have used the expression, the Marist Way. What does that mean? When this expression was first introduced, some parents thought it meant either the Marist School way of doing things or the highway. Let me assure you that is not what we Marist religious intend by the expression the Marist Way!

Let me tell you the story of how the Society of Mary began. Sometime between 1815 and 1816, the idea of the Society of Mary was first presented to a young diocesan seminarian in Lyons, France named Jean-Claude Colin. He was invited to join a group of seminarians who intended to found a Catholic religious order called the Society of Mary. Its purpose was not to imitate Mary but to embody her presence in the Church. The men and women who embraced this call understood themselves as bringing a different spirit, the spirit of Mary, to the 19th-century Catholic Church in France. It was a spirit that would be humble in bearing, respectful towards all, reconcilers and bridge builders with those alienated from the Church, shunning honors and prestige, preferring to be in the background so much so that they would aspire to be as if hidden and unknown in the world. When Jean-Claude Colin heard this description of the Society of Mary, he said, "This suits me." He had found his spiritual home. He would later go on to write the Constitutions of the Society of Mary and be regarded as the founder.

On the front entrance to Marist School is an image of the Blessed Mother, whose hands are extended at her sides with her palms open. That is a universal gesture of welcome and hospitality. This school is her home, and she invites you to make Marist School your spiritual home away from home. It is also a sign of ownership. Once you pass beyond her statue and onto this property, all you see is hers. That is a fancy way of saying that educating your children is her work because this is her school.

What kind of person does the Mother of Jesus want to graduate from her school? To answer that question, I am going to quote you from the mission statement of Marist School:

> The unique mission of Marist School to form the whole person in the image of Christ is created by blending three distinct traditions: the pursuit of academic excellence, the heritage of Catholic education, and the spirit of the Society of Mary.

To form your child into the image of Christ is also the mission of parents. You accepted this when you had your child baptized.

> *Celebrant:*
>
> You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in practicing the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?
>
> *Parents*: We do.
>
> *Then the celebrant turns to the godparents and addresses them in these or similar words:*
>
> Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?
>
> *God Parents*: We do.
>
> *Celebrant:*

> N., the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name, I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of his cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead and invite your parents (and godparents) to do the same.[1]

That makes Marist parents and the Marist faculty and administration partners in the spiritual formation of your children. That means we work together to encourage your children to strive for spiritual excellence. The Church has a name for those who achieve spiritual excellence with God's grace. They are called saints. Our goal for your children is to aid them on their journey to become members of the communion of saints. That call to Christian holiness is rooted in their baptism.

As important as it is for the doors of Harvard or the University of Georgia or Georgia Tech to be opened one day to receive your children, those doors pale in significance compared to the gates of heaven that open to admit only those who have reached the spiritual excellence of sainthood. However, it is not a question of being a successful entrepreneur, athlete, artist, doctor, ***or*** saint. Instead, it is a question of simultaneously being a successful entrepreneur, athlete, artist, doctor, and a saint.

We at Marist want to help you, who, as parents, are your children's primary teachers of the faith. We want to be partners with you in the ongoing transformation of your children into saints. We propose to do this in the spirit of Mary.

What does the spirit of Mary look like in practice? The spirit of Mary becomes flesh in those values important to us Marists. We have identified them as being the following: hidden and unknown in the world, instruments of divine mercy, one in mind and heart, trust in God, tasting God, doing the work of Mary, saying no to greed, pride, and power, the spirit of Nazareth and Pentecost, being called by a gracious choice, ardent love of neighbor, union with God, self-denial, humility, hospitality, inclusiveness, and service. Each year, we focus on one of these and make it the central theme for that year. Throughout the school year, our students, faculty, and parents will explore what this means and how to make the work of Mary their own.

As parents, you are the religious leaders of your families. That means religious symbols should be displayed in your homes, as is the case here at Marist. We begin each school day with prayer thoughtfully composed by a student, faculty member, or a Marist religious. Our Marist families can imitate that practice when they say grace before meals, whether at home or in a restaurant or begin a trip in the car with a prayer. We offer the daily celebration of the Eucharist, monthly school-wide Masses, and, once a term, a Family Mass. That practice is meant to be imitated in our Marist families, where worshipping on Sundays should be non-negotiable.

Spiritual reading, participating in some form of an adult religious education program, and even a retreat for adults should mirror and support the religious education and retreat experiences that your children experience here at Marist. That could include participating in the many spiritual programs Marist offers parents and alumni during the school year.

Opportunities to serve ought to find a way onto your family calendars as they make their way onto the Marist School calendar. Remember, your children watch and imitate what you say and do. That's why you are careful about what you say and do in front of them. If you want them to become saints, show them how it's done. That is what effective leaders do.

While you are with us, I invite you to reimagine your family as a Marist family: not in the sense of imitating the Marist School way of doing things but, rather, imitating the Marist Way of living the Gospel.

---

[1] The Rite of Baptism for Children