Marist School President Fr. Bill Rowland, S.M. shared these words with the Marist School community during the Schola Brevis assembly on the first day of school, August 19.

I want to welcome our new and returning faculty and staff. I also want to welcome our returning students, especially our new students, to Marist School. It is intimidating to come to a new school, especially one with a campus as large as ours is. I want to thank our Peer Leaders and members of our campus ministry for their efforts to help our new students to feel welcomed and an important part of the Marist Fam.

Each year, Marist School focuses on a theme that captures an aspect of the spirituality of the Society of Mary as described by our founder, Fr. Jean-Claude Colin. This year, the focus will be on "Doing the Work of Mary." What could that look like for you in Foundations grades or in high school?

I recently watched a comedy routine about a customer at a restaurant who did not have a reservation. The receptionist told her they were booked for the entire evening and no tables were available. The customer demanded to be immediately seated because she was an influencer on social media and had a large number of followers. The receptionist pretended to be impressed, looked at her, and said, "Nobody cares."

I strongly advise you not to get caught up in measuring your self-worth or popularity by the number of followers you have on social media. If you ever give into that temptation and find yourselves lamenting the lack of followers, remember nobody cares, and neither should you.

Here is what we care about at Marist. The Society of Mary believes that the education of youth is a work of Mary and that she wants her students to be taught her way, the Marist way. One of the lessons she wants to teach her students is how to be leaders.

Remember when the mother of Jesus learned that her cousin Elizabeth was three months pregnant? Mary immediately left her village, her relatives, friends, and her comfort zone and traveled to be with her cousin. Mary teaches us that leadership involves taking a risk on behalf of someone in need. Sometimes that means going it alone, without any followers.

Remember when Mary attended a wedding at Cana with Jesus and some of his disciples? She saw that the newlywed couple had run out of wine. Wanting to spare them any embarrassment, she swung into action, and the first thing she did was to bring this to her son's attention.

Mary teaches us that leadership recognizes that there are limits to what we human beings can do on our own. Mary was not embarrassed to acknowledge that this was beyond her abilities and to humble herself by asking for her son's help, confident he would respond. Mary teaches us that good leaders kneel before God first before standing in front of those whose cooperation and sacrifice will be needed.

She also teaches us to intervene, to do something when things are going wrong, such as when students are being bullied or forced into acting against their will. While Mary is associated with being gentle and humble, that did not translate into her being timid. Mary teaches that real leaders will be bold and intervene decisively when it is necessary to make right what is clearly wrong.

Finally, Mary turns to the servants at the wedding feast and says to them and, in turn, to the Church, "Do whatever He tells you." Mary teaches that the most important work we can do in life is whatever her son tells us. She also teaches that the most influential leaders are those who renounce greed—the acquiring of wealth for its own sake, power that dominates and manipulates others, and pride, living for the praise and approval of thousands of fickle followers.

Should you acquire wealth, be in positions of authority and enjoy the admiration of others, remember, those are gifts or blessings from God. They are not to be used in whatever way you see fit. Rather, you are to do with them “whatever He tells you.”

I just described the vision of leadership the mother of Jesus desires for you to make your own, remembering that the only followers that matter are those who follow her son as she did and still does.

What is the work of Mary? Each one of you is to become a work of Mary, and that begins while you are at this school and continues when you graduate. You are now and always will be a work in progress, as are we all.

Class of 2023, it is your time to lead. I just showed you what that looks like. Now, you show us how it is done.

Let’s make it a great year, Marist!