Dear Friends,

We have entered into Lent, and this holy season provides a lens through which to look at the Marist theme for this year: “Doing the work of Mary – Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5) Those were the last words of Mary recorded in the New Testament. At the wedding feast in Cana, she tells the servants and, in turn, the Church: “Do whatever he tells you.” To do the work of Mary is to do whatever the Risen Christ tells us.

During the season of Lent, the Risen Christ tells us, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9: 23) Bishop Robert Barron from the Diocese of Winona-Rochester **in** Minnesota puts it this way, “Unless you crucify your ego, you cannot be my follower, Jesus says. This move – this terrible move – has to be the foundation of the spiritual life.”

“How am I to do that?” you might ask. Well, let me suggest a spiritual practice that will help you to crucify your ego. It is called the Mass! Why do I say that? From time to time, people complain that the Mass is boring and all kinds of reasons are given: poor homilies, uninspiring music, too monotonous, poorly planned, poor sound, unfriendly parishioners, etc. The list goes on.

Magicians who excel at their craft will talk about their ability to use misdirection when fooling their audience. It refers to their ability to have the audience focus their attention exactly where they want them to look while the real magic takes place where they aren’t looking.

Can the celebration of the Mass be deficient for all the reasons I just mentioned? Yes, it can; but, the ego can misdirect the soul to focus on all of those things, important as they are, all the while diverting its attention from what is really important: forgetting about ourselves and what we want and focusing instead on lifting our minds and hearts to God in prayer and worship. Instead, we choose to focus our attention on what we want, on what we think is more important: our work, our relationships, our problems, our worries, our joys, etc., and before you know it, Mass is over, and we leave wondering why we came in the first place.

Do you want to crucify your ego? Then go to Mass and for the next hour forget about everything you think is so important and demands your undivided attention. That is the ego misdirecting your attention to focus on the externals while what is really important is happening right in front of you and goes unseen and unappreciated.

Immediately you will experience resistance. You won’t like it. It will require a struggle and persistence on your part. You will long to return to your fantasies and daydreams because it is so much easier to give in. That is because our egos want to be the center of the universe with everything and everyone revolving around its needs. That is the ego misdirecting you and focusing your attention away from what matters. To ignore or reject those demands of the ego will hurt. It will be painful. It will feel like some terrible loss. It will be akin to being, well, crucified!

Looking for spiritual practice for Lent? Do the work of Mary which is to do whatever he tells you. And what is Jesus telling us to do during Lent? Let’s recall the words of Bishop Barron: “Unless you crucify your ego, you cannot be my follower, Jesus says. This move – this terrible move – has to be the foundation of the spiritual life.”

There you have it. Do you want to practice crucifying your ego this Lent? Great!

Go to Mass!