Marist School is a Vocational School and a College Preparatory School

Part #2 – Fr. Bill Rowland, S.M.

In my previous article, I stated that an essential aspect of the identity of Marist School includes being a vocational school in addition to being a college preparatory school. When hearing that, I would venture to say most Catholics presume that I am talking about vocations to the priesthood and religious life. No, I am talking about the universal call (vocation) to holiness that the Sacrament of Baptism initiates in the life of the Baptized, most of whom are laity.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, the Risen Christ calls us by name, gives us a purpose, and sends us on a mission. Purpose and mission are linked. You can't have one without the other. What is the purpose of our life that Baptism reveals? It is this. Christ has called or chosen us to conform our lives to his. The purpose of our lives is best described with these words of St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20) The process of recreation or repurposing our lives will be painful and difficult. It will not be easy, and we cannot do this without divine assistance. Hence the necessity of being crucified with Christ.

St. Paul did not mean that his uniqueness as a person had disappeared into Christ or that his identity and freedom had been usurped. People still knew him as St. Paul. However, his attitudes, values, judgments, feelings, and actions were so identified and in conformity with Christ's that he could say it was no longer him but Christ who lives in him.

When Fr. Colin said that Marists are to aim to think, judge, feel, and act like Mary in all things, he meant that we would one day think, judge, feel, and act toward her Son like she does. How would a Marist express what St. Paul said? The mother of Jesus answered that question at the Wedding Feast of Cana, "Do whatever he tells you." It is another way of saying, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." All of that is contained in the mission of Marist School, "To form the whole person in the image of Christ."

Our mission in life, received at Baptism, is to participate in Christ's mission to the world by which it is sanctified or rightly ordered. We receive this mission during the anointing after Baptism when the priest prays, "He (Christ) now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life."

In Baptism, we are united to and become members of his mystical body, the Church, which is how the Risen Christ remains incarnate in time and space. To live as members of his body is to live an actively engaged life in the Church where we share everlasting life (divine life) by participating in the sacramental life of the Church.

On a related note, Marist spirituality is ecclesial or rooted in the Church. If there is a "proof text" for this insight, it would be found in Acts 1: 13-14. We are told that the apostles and disciples had gathered in the Upper Room to wait for Pentecost. With them were some women and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary herself was rooted in the life of the early Church. By extension, the Marists, too, are rooted in the life of the Church. That is why Marist School remains true to the teaching of the Church on matters regarding faith and morals and positions about social justice issues. It is also why we encourage our students to participate in the life of their parish.

Within the Church, the baptized carry out their mission to sanctify the world by exercising their ministry as Priests, Prophets, and Kings in the name of Christ. What does that look like?

Let's look at writers, philosophers, scientists, teachers, researchers, etc. What do they have in common? Ideally, they are passionate about communicating the truth, which is the work of prophets.

What do artists, poets, painters, creative writers, screenwriters, filmmakers, sculptors, athletes, etc. have in common? They are all passionate about creating beauty. Anything beautiful lends itself to expressions of gratitude, joy, and praise. Those sentiments are associated with worship, which is the work of priests.

What do law enforcement officers, lawyers, city councilors, representatives and senators, judges, and presidents have in common? They are passionate about creating just societies and promoting the common good, which is the work of kings.

I cannot emphasize enough how counter-cultural all this is. We live in an increasingly secular culture in which the existence of God is denied, seen as a threat to human flourishing, or as being indifferent to human beings. In addition, personal freedom or autonomy is the ultimate or supreme value that eclipses everything else in a secular world. "Don't tread on me," or, "it's my life, and I will live it as I want," or, “no one is going to tell me how to live my life” is the battle cry of secularism. Whatever joy is experienced is short-lived. There is nothing beyond this material world other than death in whose shadow the secular person cannot escape.

From that secular perspective, there is the temptation to see one's career, profession, or life's work as something we choose rather than discerning how we are being called. Still, it is not unusual for some people to also say that their life's work chose them as when they concede, "I could do nothing else with my life." They are admitting they had no choice other than the one they made. Here is a recognition that they are not in charge. Of course, that begs the question if they are not in charge, then who is? The secular mentality may speak about their lives being under the influence of a higher power they identify as being fate or one's destiny.

However, looking at this through the lens of Baptism, we know this higher power has a name and is a person: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God is truth. God is beauty. God is goodness and justice. Our passion for truth, beauty, goodness, and justice is a participation in the divine life, which is God's passion for the same.

The mission of Marist School is to form the whole person in the image of Christ. That mission is rooted in the Sacrament of Baptism, where we are united with Christ to be conformed to him. In the Sacrament of Baptism, we are given our mission in life: to participate in Christ's sanctifying the world by ministering to it in his name as Priests, Prophets, and Kings.

Marist School is where we prepare our students to do all this. The world has plenty of business people, financiers, attorneys, teachers, writers, scientists, etc. What the world needs and, in Baptism, what we have been called (vocation) to become are business people, financiers, attorneys, teachers, writers, scientists, etc. who are saints, men and women who are holy (conformed to Christ) and accept their mission to participate in and sanctify the world by ministering to it as Priests, Prophets, and Kings. That is why Marist School is a vocational school and a college preparatory school. Otherwise, it might as well be called Brookhaven Prep.

In my next article, I will explore why Marist spirituality insists that Marist School be a vocational school and a college preparatory school.