Inclusion and Diversity, A Work of Mary and a Work of Marist School – Part Two

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

A prayerful reflection of Mary's role in the early Church can be instructive in how Marist School will promote inclusion and diversity. In some artistic renderings of Pentecost, Mary is pictured in the middle of the community, gathered in prayer while waiting for the Holy Spirit. That is significant. Some scripture scholars describe the early days of the Church as being more contentious than we are accustomed to believing. The role of the mother of Jesus was to be like a bridge, keeping the different factions from leaving the community. That is one way of understanding why Mary is pictured in the middle, surrounded by the apostles and disciples on Pentecost. She served as the guarantor of unity. That is also a priority for Marist School.[1]

I am going to quote from Fr. George M. Smiga, whose reflection on Pentecost, adapted from his book *The Holy Spirit in the Bible*, can show us how to look at inclusion and diversity through the eyes of faith:

> Luke tells us that the tongues as of fire came to rest upon "each one" of the gathered apostles (v.3). This indicates that the gift of the Spirit comes to us as individuals. The personal gift of the Spirit does not negate the communal nature of the Church. Yet, this passage insists that being Church is not like making sausage, where all our particular talents and skills are ground together into an indistinguishable mix. Each individual's unique gifts are essential in spreading God's reign."[2]

Where we read individual, read, instead student clubs, activities, or affinity groups. The Spirit is at work through the unique gifts of each group or club and is the means by which the reign of God can advance when properly ordered to serve that purpose. By not attending to the values of inclusion and diversity, we open the door to having an evil spirit enter the sheepfold whose work is to sow the seeds of disunity and to scatter the people of God who make up the Marist family. Regretfully, Marist is all too familiar with that sad dynamic and its disastrous effects undermining the mission of the school. It is in direct opposition to the divine impulse, which is to gather all people, in their richness and complexity, in Christ.

That becomes apparent when the school community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist. Rich and poor, young and old, married and single, Black, Latino, Asian, and White, men and women, gay and straight, adults and children, the strong and the weak, etc., make up the body of Christ. What might be a source of division in other contexts is swallowed up into Christ in whom we all were baptized. Consequently, we are a new creation because we are adopted children of God and given a share in the divine nature of God, who is love. We have a new identity, namely, Christian. That identity supersedes all the other identities I just listed.

Our identity in Christ unites what might otherwise divide us. That reality is what enabled St. Paul to say, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28). That does not mean we discard the ways we identify ourselves that I mentioned above. It does mean those identities take a back seat to our primary identity in Christ. That is the point St. Paul is making in Romans 14:11, "It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'" Keep that in mind the next time you attend the Eucharist and

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[1] [214] It is a Marist's special joy to learn from Mary how to be present to many different groups in the school and local community. The local neighborhoods that Marist schools are a part of should be included in the concern, the prayer, and outreach of charity. *Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education: U.S. Province Schools and Sponsored Schools*.

[2] Give Us This Day, May 2023, page 299.

kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer or genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament when you enter a church. Rich and poor, young and old, kneel and genuflect to the One who is Our Lord and Savior and who commands that we love one another in all our diversity as he loves us.

I will end with this thought from 1 Corinthians, 12: 3b-7, 12-13. "There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."

In other words, there are gifts that the Hispanic Club, Black Student Alliance, Asian American and Pacific Islander Affinity Group, Girls Support Girls, and Lebanese Culture Club offer, from which the school can benefit. The extent to which the purpose of these student groups aligns with the Church's teachings, promotes understanding and enriches the life of the school community, we can say that they, too, are manifestations of the Spirit.

That is why inclusion and diversity are the work of Mary and the work of this school that is named after her. She wants to be a force for unity, understanding, and reconciliation for our school community as she was for the Church at Pentecost and during the early days of the Church. Still, the unity we seek is a gift of the Spirit for which we earnestly pray.

Some may have misgivings about inclusion and diversity, fearing these secular values have infiltrated Marist School and are incompatible with our Catholic faith.[i] Consequently, any attempt to blend them with our faith is impossible and doomed to fail. I am confident that our faith is strong enough to direct the values of inclusion and diversity to serve the mission of the Church and Marist School.

For this grace, we pray.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

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[i] The distinction between secular and the sacred is a human construct. From God's perspective, there is no such distinction because God is Lord of all. The extent to which diversity and inclusion speak about what is true, right, and just when it comes to living in a diverse society is the extent to which these values are rooted in God who is Truth.