Estimated Reading Time: 6:30 Minutes

As for the Marist Fam, We Will Serve (Worship) the Lord

Part Six: The Society of Mary and Worship

In light of the previous meditation, you may better understand why Marist School emphasizes Marist families being active in their parish or church. The minimum expectations for being an active Catholic are contained in the Precepts of the Church.[1] Attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (worship) is the first precept.

For Fr. Colin, being active in the parish or church is to be a Marist. Mary was embedded in the Church at Pentecost; so, too, should Marists be embedded in the local Church. That remains true even when the Church is buffeted by scandal. Marists find solace and courage in Jesus' promise to stay with the Church till the end of time (Mt. 28:19-20) and that not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it. (Mt. 16:17-19)

The decline in Catholics attending Sunday Mass cannot be attributed solely to the sexual abuse scandal, doctrinal debates, church practices, or the pandemic. Of course, they are contributing factors. However, this trend indicates a crisis of belief (faith).[2] Ironically, faith is meant to provide the foundation for the Church to withstand such storms. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock." (Mt. 7:24-27)

One of the purposes of a Marist education is to teach our students to grow in their love for Christ. Where do we find Him? The Church is where we encounter Christ. Everything about the Church, its buildings, schools, universities, hospitals, social ministries, prayers, worship, liturgical practices, sacraments, service, preaching, vestments, music, stained glass windows, and the witness of the clergy, religious, and laity have as their purpose to mediate Christ. He calls each of us to be his disciple and to a task with our name on it. That is why to love Him is to love the Church, his mystical body, through which the incarnation is extended through time and space and reveals his intentions for us.

The Church, the community of believers, laity, clergy, and religious, make up the mystical body of Christ. The baptized become our Lord's eyes, hands, and feet by which he continues his saving work. We encourage Marist students to serve as Eucharistic ministers, readers, greeters, retreat leaders, chaplains, and altar servers, participate in mission trips, attend Mass or church services on Sunday, and promote social justice. That is why we teach our students how to recognize their unique call (vocation) from Christ and respond by saying with Mary, "Let it be done to me according to your word." That is important because that is how they will find true happiness, which I will discuss later.

Yes, we want them to love the Church, flaws and all, just as they are to love their neighbor, flaws and all. I am aware that her sinfulness makes her unattractive, marginalized, rebuked, and the object of scorn and ridicule by her modern critics, believers, and unbelievers.

Still, the Church remains the Body of Christ, through whom the Risen Christ is present as the suffering servant whom the prophet Isaiah described, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering,

---

[1] The Precepts are as follows: 1. Attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, 2. Confession of serious sin at least once a year, 3. Reception of Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season, 4. Observance of the days of fast and abstinence, 5. Providing for the needs of the Church.

[2] Here, I am speaking about faith in who Jesus is, what he taught, what he accomplished, what he promised, and how he is continually present in the Church, his mystical body on earth, through space and time. This means becoming his disciple and conforming our lives to his. That includes accepting a mission with our name on it.

and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem." (Isaiah 53: 2-3). That, I would say, describes the Church today. Here is the clincher. To love Christ is to love the Church, warts and all.

Christ took on the sinfulness of the Church, which was included in his suffering and death on the cross. Those who viewed his mangled body on the cross could not see his divinity. Those who look at the suffering of the Church today, especially when self-inflicted, would deny that the Church is a divine creation. For many, it is just another human and corrupt institution that they can join or drop out of for whatever reason. That should not surprise us. People rejected Jesus' claim to be divine because they saw him as another flawed human being. The Church should expect to suffer the same fate as did her Master.

As Marists, we stand with Mary at the foot of this cross. We do this when we worship at Sunday Mass, which Catholics believe is the unbloody reenactment of the sacrifice of Calvary. Miraculously, that moment in the past crosses the time barrier and is present to us here and now.

At the consecration, the Holy Spirit is invoked to come upon the bread and wine, which also symbolizes our longing for the Spirit to come upon and change us. The Spirit comes, not as tongues of fire, but like the dewfall.[3] From that perspective, every Eucharist is a mini-Pentecost. The Spirit comes down and changes bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ so that we might be changed and become more perfectly what we receive at Holy Communion, the Body of Christ.

Each of us is sent from Mass to become saints, like Edith Stein, and to do Christ's work that he has entrusted to no one else. The goal of the Christian life is for our will to be in sync or harmony with Christ's. We want to be able to say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I but Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 20:2)

At some point in our lives, we also want to say, "Lord, it is good for me to be here, meaning I am at a place in life where I am meant to be or that I have fulfilled my purpose (vocation) in life, and now you can "let your servant go in peace." (Luke 2:29) Jesus' joy was to do the will of his heavenly Father, and he calls us to imitate him, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11) That happiness comes from another world beyond this one. That is the pearl of great price Jesus spoke about, which the merchant sold all he had to possess. (Mt. 13:445-46)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was present at the first Pentecost. Now she is present to the Church in these times of unbelief through a movement of laity and religious that bears her name, Marist. Rather than turning inward and focusing *only* on what is wrong in the Church that needs to be reformed or renewed, she also focuses our attention outward on unbelievers and the Church's most ardent critics. They are hurting and need to be embraced by a Church that recognizes her imperfections, sinfulness, and frailty.

The Church is in no place to lord it over others because their failures, sinfulness, weakness, or imperfect faith mirror her own. In that sense, both stand on common ground in need of a savior, Christ. By witnessing our faith in Christ through the quality of our lives, the Gospel can be born and even born again in those who have long abandoned that as being possible, let alone even desirable.

Paul was acutely aware of his weakness, which he felt impeded his efforts to bring others to Christ. He asked Christ to remove whatever he had that got him acute pain and, most likely, embarrassment. The response he received is also appropriate for those who are embarrassed by the sinfulness of the Church and only want to be seen with a Church without blemishes.

> "Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,

[3] Eucharistic Prayer II

> for power is made perfect in weakness." I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12: 7-10)

The many weaknesses and sins of the Church keep her humble and ever dependent on Christ. That is the humility that is required for authentic worship. Otherwise, "we cannot adore God and acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the "nothingness of the creature" who would not exist but for God. (CCC #2096)

That is what the Church with a Marian face looks like. A Marian Church is conscious of having been brought low (humbled) by her many weaknesses but also having been raised up by the divine compassion and graciousness, [that is] slow to anger (condemnation) and abounding in loving kindness[4] with which she embraces those who need the same. She runs in haste to accompany those who have lost their way to lead them back on their way to God, "[so that one day they may] praise and exalt him and to humble themselves, as she did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things [for them] and holy is his name." (CCC #2096)

Marists are called to think, judge, feel and act like Mary in all things, and that includes cultivating the same disposition before God as her: humble, grateful, and joyful (praise). If we nurture that disposition six days a week, going to Mass or church services on Sundays will be what we want to do, not what we have to do. Worship will become second nature to us because that is what we have been doing through prayer and service the other days of the week leading up to Sunday. We will automatically remember to keep holy the Lord's Day and give glory to God (worship) because, like Mary, our spirit continually rejoices in God, our savior.

"If it is displeasing to you to serve the LORD, choose today whom you will serve (worship), the gods your ancestors served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve (worship) the LORD." (Joshua 24:15)

As for the Marist Fam, we will serve (worship) the Lord.

Gotta worship somebody!

Amen.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

[4] Psalm 103:8