The Marist Way of Promoting Lay Leadership – Part II

I want to touch on the other two aspects of being conformed to Christ and sharing in his ministry as prophet and king (leadership). Let's look at what it means to be a prophet. We are familiar with the great prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Elijah, Elisha, and many others. A prophet speaks for God in good times and in bad, in sickness and health, when it is popular and when it is not. Most of the time, prophets got in trouble, such as Jeremiah, who was thrown into a cistern, Daniel was thrown into a lions' den, a whale swallowed Jonah, and Jesus, who is the very Word of God, was crucified. Now, that's a job description that won't attract many takers.

However, many people throughout history committed themselves to some great project, knowing it would bring them much suffering but concluded that they could do nothing else with their lives. This great task is what they were made for, and accomplishing it, including the pain they endured, brought them satisfaction and even joy that made the suffering worth it.

The prophet Jeremiah captured that sentiment when he said, "I say to myself, 'I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more.' But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it." (Jeremiah 20:10). In other words, "I must be true to myself by being faithful to what God has called me to do. I can do nothing else with my life and, deep down, nor do I want to."

We can say the prophets preached God's word. While the ordained clergy preaches from the pulpit, the laity preaches at work, home, and even the car! These are the pulpits from which the laity preaches. What does that look like? At baptism, parents promised to be the first teachers of the faith. That includes teaching their children how to pray, participate in Mass, and serve, ensuring they receive religious instruction and the sacraments of penance and confirmation. Parents can augment this by including religious gifts for their children's birthdays and Christmas, encouraging them to be involved in their local parishes, and having religious symbols in the home. Of course, setting an example is the best teaching technique.

A prophet also speaks God's word publicly. The laity should be ready to talk about Christ when the occasion warrants it. The laity should look for and even create opportunities when they can speak about (witness) their faith in Christ. Wearing a symbol such as a cross or a fish invites people to ask what that means. The door has been opened for you to preach (witness) about your faith.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter IV, "The Laity", promulgated by the Second Vatican Council on November 21, 1964, puts it this way:

> **The state of life that is sanctified by a special sacrament, namely married and family life, has a special importance in this prophetic office**…In it, the married partners have their own proper vocation: they must be witnesses of faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children…Hence, by example and by their testimony, they convict the world of sin and give light to those who seek the truth. (#35)

For a description of the Marist Way of exercising the baptismal calling to be a prophet, go to my reflection on the Marist Way of Promoting Social Justice, Part 7, "As if Hidden and Unknown in the World."

During our life, we should have suffered because of our witness to Christ and our belief in him. If we cannot say that then we are not true prophets or his disciples. "And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let

him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple'" (Luke 14: 23-27). Remember the words of Mary, "Do whatever he tells you."

You don't have to travel far to meet opposition because, sadly, it can happen at home. Sometimes a spouse does not support or will criticize the other spouse's going to church on Sundays or becoming involved in parish activities. Teenagers, by their complaining, can make going to church on Sundays a modern version of the way of the cross. College students can suffer from their peers' indifference and even hostility to any talk about religion. The workplace can offer similar reactions to any expression of religious belief. When conversing with coworkers, mention your support of the unborn and then duck.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter IV, "The Laity," puts it this way:

> "**Christ is the great prophet** who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, **he fulfills his prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power but also by the laity. He accordingly establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and the grace of the word (cf. Acts.2:17-18) so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in daily family and social life**. They show themselves to be the children of the promise if, strong in faith and hope, they make the most of the present time (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5) and, with patience, await the future glory (cf. Rom. 8:25). **Let them not hide this hope then, in the depths of their hearts, but rather express it through the structure of their secular lives in continual conversion and in wrestling 'against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of iniquity'" (Eph. 6:12). (#35)**

A Marist school will promote lay leadership by equipping its students (laity) with the knowledge about their faith, skills, and confidence to exercise Christ's prophetic ministry so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in daily family and social life. There is no need to wait until they are adults to be prophets. There is no time like the present to do what Christ has called all the baptized to become: conformed to Christ as prophet.

The following reflection will discuss the call to exercise Christ's kingship.