

Reflection from the Superior General

These can be tough times. Along with so many other crises in our vulnerable world, the pandemic casts a cloud over everyone and everything. Also, in our little Society, the clouds sometimes seem to conceal the bright sun. When we seem lost in some darkness in our lives, the encouraging Feasts of the Ascension and of Pentecost, which we celebrate this month of May, can lighten our way.

One key aspect to the narrative of the Ascension is that Jesus is lost from sight in a cloud. (c.f. Acts 1: 6 – 15) Sometimes it seems that we Marists, too, are overcome by darkness and we are left looking into the sky, lost. In the Scriptures from the time of Moses on Mount Sinai, to the journey through the desert with the Ark of the Covenant, to the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, the cloud is a sign of the presence of the glory of God.



The cloud in the narrative of the Ascension is also a sign of God's glory. Jesus is manifesting the glory of God as he ascends to the Father. He leaves his instructions that the disciples are to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth". After the Ascension they are to "return to Jerusalem, devoting themselves to prayer, together with the disciples, including Mary, the mother of Jesus". This passage can help us search out the glory of God in the darker moments that we all face from time to time in our Marist lives.

The instruction calls us to be witnesses "to the ends of the world". Some of our confreres are being asked to leave behind cherished ministries where we have labored for years and this is painfully difficult for us. However, we remember in faith that the people we have been serving so generously, perhaps over many years, will always be loved and cared for by God. When the cloud seems to take the people away from us, we are called to see the bigger picture, even "to the ends of the earth".

When Jesus was lost from the disciples' sight, hidden by the cloud, they gathered and re-committed themselves to prayer. When our prayer becomes dark and the Lord of life seems lost in a cloud, we can be tempted to give up. This is the time "to devote ourselves to prayer". As brothers in the Lord we pray the Liturgy of the Hours together every morning and evening and we celebrate "the Eucharist which symbolizes and develops our union with Christ and our brothers (and sisters) and should be considered the high point of each day". (Const. 121). We are recommended "to spend one hour in private prayer each day". (GC2017, #32). Sometimes our personal prayer is as simple as piercing "the cloud of unknowing" with love, faith and hope expressed in the repetition of one word.

When we are at our best, our life together in community is a witness to our faith of the Risen Lord, ascended into heaven. It is no easy thing to live a robust community life, especially when trust has been broken or people seem to have gone their own way. We can have dark moments and want to abandon community life, in more or less subtle ways. Yet it is when the disciples are gathered, with Mary among them, that the Spirit of mission is kindled, both in the early church and in our Marist communities today.

The strong wind of Pentecost dispersed the clouds and the disciples were filled with the Spirit of God. We, like them, can learn a new language by our faithful perseverance in difficult times and go forth to proclaim the glory of God with the fire of the Pentecost. Everyone can hear this Good News "in their own native language". We can be "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world". Witnesses from northern Europe to the south Pacific.

Question: What names would I/we give to the clouds in my/our life right now, and how is my/our Marist vocation helping me/us to navigate our way?

Faternally,

John Larsen s.m.