

# Reflection from the Superior General

Aged 99, Father Jim Esler sm recently died in Australia. RIP. As a younger man Jim had been an outstanding lawyer, both civil and canon. He gave his final and personal testimony to a visiting confrere, himself in his 70's, about what Marist-ness meant to him: *"An unassuming modesty and simplicity, rare today maybe, but absolutely necessary as apostles of Mary's way. It takes a life-time (99 years) to acquire, so don't give up. You are still young. Learn it from, and live it with, the little people you meet and serve each day"*. Jim Esler, priest and Marist, "went in peace", a Simeon-like figure, encountering Mary and Joseph and their Child, and proclaiming "the light to the gentiles" (Lk.2).



If you or I were asked today what it means to be a Marist, what testimony would we give? What would we say and how would we say it? We have many documents – the Scriptures, the Constitutions, the Chapter Statements and so on – all of which have their importance. Our most eloquent testimony is that of our profoundly beautiful Marist lives and communities dedicated to prayer and service, especially among those people who are "hidden and unknown" through no choice of their own.

Like Fr. Jim and so many other holy Marists we need to keep nourishing the sources of our Marist vocation over the years through reflection, prayer and attentive listening, hearing daily the echoes of the Word who took flesh in the womb of Mary. We can easily take Mary's call for granted or regard it superficially, glibly citing phrases we learned during our novitiate long ago. Fr. Nicolas, a former Jesuit Superior General, coined the phrase: "the globalization of superficiality". We are always called to search for ways to live our Marist vocation ever more profoundly even if we are, like Fr. Jim, 99 years old!

Many of us serve with great joy and generous availability as Marist priests, accompanying people as they enter more deeply into the mysteries of the life of Christ, celebrating the Liturgy of Word and Sacrament with them. However, at a time when some of us are being asked to step back from Liturgical leadership for many reasons - perhaps Covid-restrictions, or ill-health or retirement - we can experience a real sense of grief and painful feelings that we are no longer so useful. This can be especially difficult if we have so identified as being priests that the robust expression of our Marist religious and community life has been somewhat dimmed. The vocation of our Brothers in the Society of Mary inspires us fraternally to re-imagine an overly clerical understanding of our Marist lives. We were always meant to offer the Church of our world today much more than simply being a Society of priests "on call" for needy parishes and dioceses. By creative faithfulness to our Marist religious life we are sacraments of the Risen Lord.

When we rejoice in our blessed Marist vocation we will want to welcome others to join us in walking along Mary's Way. Last week, as part of our Year of Marist Vocation, more than seventy Marists gathered for a Zoom-webinar to reflect together on the themes for this year: "enrich, encourage, assist". It was a moment of grace as we reflected on our own vocation and encouraged each other to be a welcoming presence in the Church. (If you would like to join in the next Zoom-webinar during this Marist Vocations' year, circle April 29, 2022, into your calendar).

This month of February opens with the Feast of Light, the Presentation of the Lord, the celebration of Religious Life in the Church. Wherever we find ourselves today, how could our individual and communal testimony to Marist life shine ever more brightly?

A blessed February to you all and special prayerful-congratulations to Marists who celebrate jubilees around this time of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple! Fraternally,

*John Larsen s.m.*