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OLLOWING JESUS

The Gospels express the fundamental relationship of the believer with Jesus through the metaphor of discipleship. It means that there is authentic faith and a true relationship with Jesus only if we follow Him[[1]](#footnote-1). This presupposes a true encounter with Him, that is, a significant moment in life in which we feel his presence in a concrete and particular way, realizing He is close to us and loves us immensely. Following Jesus, Pope Francis says, is just that: going with Him out of love, behind Him, on the same journey, the same path.

The Synoptic Gospels have kept a statement by Jesus that is key to understand the fundamental meaning of discipleship: *“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me*”[[2]](#footnote-2). Jesus said this not only to his disciples but also to “the people”[[3]](#footnote-3), “speaking to all”, as Luke’s Gospel says (9:23). This means that discipleship is obviously not only for a select group, but also an invitation for all those who want to go with Jesus and be close to Him. Discipleship is a project every believer must undertake.

In other words, *knowledge* defines those who belong to Jesus, a biblical term that implies a deep relationship and communion of life, and *discipleship* – a link that is non-verbal and non-theoretic but regards our actions and our way of living – is a commitment with Him and like Him leading us to give ourselves unreservedly to the needs of humanity. Anyone who wants to be with Jesus has no choice other than discipleship. Participating in his light, belonging to Him, and unconditionally serving his cause are impossible outside discipleship. There is no true faith without following Jesus.



The first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles tell us how *early Christians* lived. They understood life as discipleship. They followed Christ in faith, accepting his person and doctrine; they followed Christ in worship, through prayer and by “breaking the bread”; they followed Christ in day-to-day life, living in fraternity and sharing the goods they owned; and they followed Christ through their apostolate, carrying the Gospel to the people and communities who did not know Him. They accepted Christ as the central value of their lives, and decided to live his same attitudes, carrying on the mission of proclaiming and bringing about the Kingdom of God.

For us Marists, lay and brothers, believing in Jesus means undertaking a journey and following in his footsteps. This is not just any journey. It implies leaving behind the mentalities and ways of life that differ from the ways of Jesus. Followers of Jesus live the fundamental attitudes He lived: service, solidarity, liberating action, forgiveness, obedience and total surrender to God and his salvation project. Followers cannot expect a better fate than that of Jesus. Discipleship implies selflessness, poverty and humility. Bearing the cross and serving others are the signs of the true follower of Christ.

Following Christ in the style of Champagnat today requires commitment to three fundamental Christian and Marist dimensions: mission, life sharing, and spirituality. It is a personal call to a specific way of following Jesus[[4]](#footnote-4). These dimensions are inseparable: we live our spirituality in and for the mission; the mission generates and animates our shared life, which in turn is a source of spirituality and mission[[5]](#footnote-5). For us, Marists, community and young people have a special place in our experience of discipleship. We are there for others offering the presence of Jesus, but also find Him in the brothers, young people, and community members we share with, in the Word and the Eucharist.

The following of Jesus takes place as we walk, taking risks along the way and assuming the consequences. Jesus spoke very clearly: people who start the journey but look back all the time to review their motivation are not worthy of God’s Kingdom. People learn and are enriched as they move on in the journey. Walking along with Jesus, we understand his teachings better.

1. Cf. Jesús Espeja, *Sacramentos y seguimiento de Jesús,* Ed. San Esteban, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mk 8:34b. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mk 8:34b. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. GAST 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. GAST 34 and 33: “The Marist mission is called upon to multiply itself until, in all the dioceses of the world, the children and young people experience God’s tenderness. We Lay Marists believe that God calls us to carry on this insight in history as *followers of Christ in the style of Champagnat*”. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)