



Audience of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to the participants of the General Conference of the Marist Brothers

24.03.2022

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome.

I thank the Superior General for his words and I greet all of you who are taking part in the General Conference of your Institute, a very important event that brings you together every eight years, between two General Chapters.

It is therefore a significant moment of reflection, of reading the signs of the times, and also of checking how the journey is going and how you are following through on the directions set by your last Chapter. Not to look backwards but always forward! Like those at the helm of a boat: they do not look at the wake behind them to see if they are on the right course, but look ahead, keeping an eye on two or three



points of reference to orient themselves. I imagine that you too have checked your course using a few fixed points. The first such fixed point is the Word of God. We are in Lent, and Mother Church calls us to return things to their right order: God and God's Word come first. This is easy to say, but hard to do! Especially when the Word asks us to "look further ahead", to "look beyond", as the title of your Conference says. Beyond what? Beyond a worldly mentality, beyond short-term interests, beyond a partial perspective, in order to take in the horizon of universal brotherhood. Always beyond...

It seems to me that this is precisely the perspective you have chosen for your work over these days, for the sake of giving the best possible service to your family - that of the Marist Brothers - which is multicultural and multi-ethnic, and which therefore is asking you to cross boundaries, not so much geographical, but in terms of mentality. This does not mean detaching yourselves from your roots, absolutely not! There is no contradiction between fidelity to one's roots and universal openness, it is continuity, it is normal growth. On the contrary, according to the example of Christ the Lord, it is precisely by remaining faithful till the end to the commitment of love we have with the people entrusted to us that our service becomes fruitful for all, through the power of God's grace. It is for this fruitfulness that we look ahead with a strong sense of purpose.

For Marist Brothers, this means remaining faithful to the service of educating and evangelizing young people, according to the charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat. He knew how to "look beyond", and to teach young people to "look beyond", to open themselves to God, to the horizons of Gospel love.



He was guided by the example of the Virgin Mary, our “Good Mother”, as he used to say: Mary was an insignificant woman from a remote village, but her heart looked beyond; she looked forward to the Kingdom of God, she was open. And this shines through in the Magnificat, where God’s plan of salvation resounds through the voice of this humble servant. What could be more beautiful and more effective than the *Magnificat* for educating a girl or boy to be open to God and God’s plan of love? The *Magnificat* contains a vision of life and history; it is a school of faith and prayer, which frees people from being closed in on themselves and from any spiritualising. It shows the joy of believing, hoping and loving inspired by the Gospel of Christ.

All this, dear brothers, is your birthright, it is the essence of your roots and your heritage. It demands that you always combine it with a consciousness of the changing reality of the world and of the characteristics of today’s generation. For example, young people are showing sensitivity and an interest in ecology. Here there is a great field for education, because unfortunately a worldly mentality - allow me the pun - also pollutes ecology, cheapens it, makes it ideological and superficial. Instead, God’s horizon is that of an integral ecology, which always holds the environmental and social dimensions together, the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. Children and young people are ready to become stewards of creation, but they need to learn that this is not just some slogan, it is not just about criticism. Rather, it is a way of life; it requires patience, strength of character, temperance, and justice. In short, no-one is born a steward of creation, but becomes one through formation in such values.

This is also your birthright. And the example I have just given regarding ecology can be applied to other



fields, such as social and political commitment, the field of communication, or even more basically that of study and work, viewed from the perspective of integral human development. But above all, as religious, spiritual education, the basis for integral growth, is what you are good at. Spiritual education flows from who you are as religious. Jesus Christ is the Master of life and truth, the way to follow to become fully human, and the Holy Spirit is the interior Master who forms Christ in us. What a vocation, what a mission, brothers, to cooperate with Christ and the Spirit as you accompany young people on this adventure! It really asks too much of us, poor sinners that we are. But God, as our Mother reminds us, loves to do great things with the little ones and the poor, as long as they humbly welcome God into their lives and accept God's Word, ready for whatever may be asked of them.

This is what I wish for you and for all your brothers and sisters throughout the world. To look beyond so as to educate others to look beyond, with Mary, in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. Make no mistake, this is a powerful critique of the Enlightenment concept of education that emphasises rational ideas, ideas, ideas... No. Educating others to look beyond and teaching them how to look beyond runs counter to the whole fixed, "enlightened", ideological concept of education. Education, rather, encompasses the whole person: head, heart and hands. And this means 'looking beyond'.

On life's journey and in your service may the Holy Spirit always guide and comfort you. And may my blessing accompany you too. Please, do not forget to pray for me as well, because my work is not easy!

Franciscus

