

SYRIA: MARIST BLUES

Letter from Aleppo

Those living in Syria and those following the news closely know very well that from Syria there comes nothing now but announcements of deaths: of children, adults, young people, women, men... Everyone is menaced, attacked, trapped, assassinated, kidnapped, killed, massacred...

Nothing, not one piece of good news, nothing that brings a glimmer of hope, not one word... nothing, nothing other than the shadow of death which prowls about, snatching up bodies and souls...

Our social ceremonies are the burials...

Our meeting places are the churches and mosques...

Our prayers are for the deceased...

Our greetings: "Allah yr-hamna" "May God have pity on us"...

Need we paint such a dark picture, a picture of fear and shame so that others take pity on us?

Up to what point will we be able to resist? Why continue to stay in the country? What is waiting for us tomorrow? What will be our fate? Where will be our next destination? How to protect our children? Where to go with our aged and sick persons? Are those who have

fled this hell happier than we are? Who has allowed that we suffer this horror? Who is its agent? Why us? Why all this stubborn determination to transform the man and the woman that we are into an object of butchery?

Where to find a word of hope? What words of consolation?

What clothing to choose other than mourning?

What tears to shed other than those of Goodbye?

Goodbye, my country, Goodbye, my beloved,

struck the Marist Blues head on by taking the life of Dr Amine, a Marist, a true, committed man of service and goodness. Dr Amine was returning to Aleppo after a short stay with his children. He was returning to the country for his sick and for those who needed him. For him and for so many others killed blindly and gratuitously, our Marist hearts bleed...

More and more, the innocent and impoverished people are paying a very dear price for an international and local blockade. The city of Aleppo continues to be divided... The sole perspective of the inhabitants is to know if today they can provide themselves with bread, water, perishable supplies, milk for the children... It must be said that tomorrow is no more in our imagination... There is only today. Tomorrow is so far away and may be so different that it no longer exists for many of us.



Goodbye, my love, Goodbye, my son, Goodbye my daughter, Goodbye, papa, Goodbye, mama...

Have we become a word for goodbye?

On Saturday 10 August, the hate and violence

We are faced with other great questions: winter and return to school are fast approaching... Will those lodged in the public schools be obliged to evacuate the places, to move again, to leave...

The parents are afraid of sending

their children to class... What guarantee of security does it give them? If a mortar were to hit one of the schools... If the roads are blocked...

In front of this grim picture, the Marist Blues struggle to remain, as far as possible, an oasis...

The people come to us to share their concern, ask for advice, calm down their bodies and spirits, to find out if it is still possible to rely on someone... Some take more than two hours to come.

The 40 children of the "Learn to grow" project have just taken 3 weeks of holiday. This will allow the teachers to catch their breath, to keep training, and to prepare themselves to confront a new school year... In order to help the parents organise this holiday time, we have offered them two days of formation.

The youth of the "Skills School" project continue ... They are preparing a feast to celebrate with their parents the end of the summer activities.

So that the horizon may not be completely closed and so that they maintain confidence in better days, we have just launched a new project... This is how "I learn English" has taken off. It concerns the dozen young adolescents who are lodged with the Marists...

Last Sunday, the Maristes Blues shared the joy of the celebration of the solemn first communion of a dozen children displaced from the quarter of "Djabal el Saydeh"

Although food supplies are becoming more and more rare (oil, cheese, milk are almost non-existent and if they are found they are inordinately dear), we struggle to keep up the weekly or monthly food baskets for "Sallet el

Djabal", "Oreille de Dieu" and the displaced.

We have added to the food baskets some bread which is accessible to families only after a long wait, sometimes an entire day, in front of the bakery, in the interminable queues at the risk of being wounded by shooting or shells.

The "Blessés de guerre" project continues to save innocent lives which suffer the consequences of this madness.

We wish to end with the plea Pope Francis formulated during the angelus of Sunday 25 August 2013:

"That the sound of weapons cease in Syria".

Br Georges SABE
For the Marist Blues



HE GAVE US THE NAME OF MARY

Australian Marist Schools Conference



Every two years, the members of the leadership teams of our Marist schools in Australia come together for a major conference. Between 28 and 31 July, over 200 Marists gathered in Cairns for an event that was given the theme "He Gave Us the Name of Mary". It was an inspirational Marist event, and made even more so by the presence of the Superior General, Brother Emili Turú.

During the days of the Conference, Brother Emili led the participants on an extended reflection and discernment which was inspired by his Circular. Using the three icons of the Annunciation, Pentecost, and the Visitation, he emphasised the central importance of interiority, community and service for all Marists. The symbol of the "apron" became a motif for Conference, and with it the call for us as Marists to be the "Church of the apron". As part of the final commissioning liturgy, each person was presented with an apron to take home as a reminder of this essential Marist characteristic.

A number of other people made presentations and led workshops which addressed Marian Scriptural themes as well as practical ways in which Marists in schools and youth ministry are being the Marian face of the Church. On the final day, the Provincial, Brother Jeff Crowe, crystallised what it meant for people to be the Marcellin-figures in their school communities today.

During the Conference, the Province launch of the Second International

Marist Mission Assembly also took place. The participants considered the theme of the Assembly – New Marists in Mission – and discussed ways in which the local preparatory phase would take place between now and May 2014.

A highlight of any of these Conferences is always the quality of the prayer and liturgy. This was certainly the case for this year’s gathering, culminating in a beautiful Eucharist at the Cathedral

of St Monica in Cairns, led by the local Bishop and priests from our Marist schools who were attending the Conference.

The 200 Marist educators – lay, priests, brothers, and sisters – left with the Song of Mary on their lips, uplifted by their days together and inspired to carry on their mission of evangelisation and education in hopeful and daring ways.



ASIA MISSION AD GENTES

First Chapter of the Marist District of Asia

The first Chapter of the new Marist District of Asia was held in Thailand from 2nd to 7th of August. The administrative unit, until now has been known as the AMAG Sector (Asia Mission Ad Gentes). Brothers and lay people who work in Thailand, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Philippines and two other countries attended the meeting. Brothers Emili Turú, Superior General, Joe McKee, Vicar General and Chris Wills, director of the Secretariat: Collaboration for Mission, International also participated.

The District, dependent on the General Council, has as Superior Brother Juan Castro, who is assisted by a 4 councilors: Brothers Ismael Valls, Eugenio Sanz, Andrew Chan and Michael Potter. Below we report the impressions of Brother Juan Castro about the challenges of Marists in Asia.

We just had the visit of our General Superior Brother Emili The motive: Our Ad Gentes Sector, began a new stage in his development. From our beginnings, as a Sector to becoming a District. Emili’s opening speech was short but full of challenges. He talked about being provocative, challenging the entire Institute, this is your mandate he repeated. You are an international District, formed to be

a laboratory for the entire Marist world. In some respects this words made me feel like a mouse of India... used for experiments. But that was not what he meant. I think his voice was an echo of the expressions of Francisco to the young generation of Argentina. "I want people to go out!" he explained. "I want the Church to go out to the street! I want us to defend ourselves against everything that



is worldliness, that is installation, that is comfortableness, that is clericalism, that is being shut-in on ourselves. The parishes, the schools, the institutions, exist to go out! If they don't go out, they become NGOs, and the Church can't be an NGO..." "Make a mess go to the streets. Challenge the bishops, challenge the structures." Emil's voice resounded in my ears..."Be provocative"... "Your way of life should challenge all Institute"... and I felt small, weak, and fragile. How can we be able to answer these challenges?

Emili himself gave us the principle lines of action with which we can answer the call to grow and to be provocative. Mysticism, Community, and Mission (...to the ends of the world...)

Mysticism sounds to some, remote from the way we know our Institute moves. Marist apostolic Spirituality is centered on ministry but Emili reiterated, "Yes prophets but also contemplatives." "Yes, apostolic, but also spiritual."

My mind went back to Saint Marcellin Champagnat moving from one village to the other, attending the needs of young and old, building the community. Yes, but at the same time being contemplative discovering that Mary was the one who had done everything for the us. He was always in action but as aware of the Presence of God in the Hermitage as in Paris. This contemplative attitude for Marists has been for us a weak point that needs reinforcement. And now Emili

asks us, lay and brothers Marists in mission, to deep in our hearts this attitude here in Asia where the great religions were found, where the Buddhism takes roots among the people with the attitudes of benevolence, respect to any kind of life, silence ad contemplation.

Three years ago when the general Council met with us, they expressed this thought by inviting Sister Mary Sujita Kallupurakkathu, SND to talk about Challenges for the Apostolic consecrated life in Asia. She said: "Asia offers to the world a deeper understanding of mysticism based on her centuries of spiritual pursuit and her accumulated spiritual heritage. She is familiar with a life of passionate search for God and prophetic renunciation. The greatest challenge and opportunity. Before us as Asian religious is to be mystics who are impelled by a passion for Christ and his mission of compassion. If we are serious about being a transforming presence in Asia, then we must embrace a lifestyle that witnesses to our people, regardless of their cultural and faith traditions, the age-old Asian values of true holiness, contemplation, renunciation and asceticism, detachment and simplicity...."

I reflect that for me, at this moment, this is the point where we in the Marist District of Asia have to deepen in our lives the presence of the Spirit calling us to be one with God.



MADAGASCAR

Sekoly Champagnat - Our Marist college

Since 1959 we have been conducting a school in the capital of Madagascar, Antananarivo. It is situated in the quarter of Anatihazo. It bears the name of Sekoly Champagnat.

At the time of foundation, this was one of the marginal quarters of the city, where the poorest families lived. Since then the city has grown, driving the poor further away. However, the quarter keeps all the marks of poverty: simple houses, paved streets, without water fountains, easily flooded during the rainy season,

muddy in the wet season, dusty in the dry. Every day, thousands of persons, especially youth, wander in all directions. The insistent and spontaneous question is this: What are they doing, what do they live on, especially since the country is going through a crisis without precedent:

political, economic, social. Elections are planned in two months. The candidates are 41, including the putschists. A recent article in the newspaper of the Catholic Church headlined: 92% of the population live below the threshold of poverty, a population made up 60% of children and young people under the age of 20.

Our school, known under the name of SEKOLY CHAMPAGNAT, accomodates in the classes of primary and the first secondary cycle 1600 pupils.

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