

Star MESSSENGER

Dear Brothers

Last week, on the *Feast of the Presentation of the Lord*, the Church commemorated the 28th World Day of Consecrated life. The Gospel of the day was Luke 2:22-40 which tells of Jesus' first visit to the Temple, where Mary and Joseph met Simeon and Anna. Following are extracts from the Pope's homily.

"It is good for us to look at these two elders (Simeon and Anna) who were waiting patiently, vigilant in spirit and persevering in prayer. Their hearts have stayed awake, like an eternal flame. They are advanced in age, but young at heart. They do not let the days wear them down, for their eyes remain fixed on God in expectation (cf. Ps 145:15). Fixed on God in expectation, always in expectation. Along life's journey, they have experienced hardships and disappointments, but they have not given in to defeat: they have not "retired" hope. As they contemplate the child, they recognize that the time has come, the prophecy has been fulfilled, the One they sought and yearned for, the Messiah of the nations, has arrived. By staying awake in expectation of the Lord, they are able to welcome him in the newness of his coming.

Brothers and sisters, waiting for God is also important for us, for our faith journey. Every day the Lord visits us, speaks to us, reveals himself in unexpected ways and, at the end of life and time, he will come. He himself exhorts us to stay awake, to be vigilant, to persevere in waiting. Indeed, the worst thing that can happen to us is to let "our spirit doze off", to let the heart fall asleep, to anesthetize the soul, to lock hope away in the dark corners of disappointment and resignation.

I think of you, consecrated sisters and brothers, and of the gift that you are; I think of us Christians

today: are we still capable of waiting? Are we not at times too caught up in ourselves, in things and in the intense rhythm of daily life to the point of forgetting God who always comes? Are we not too enraptured by our good works, which runs the risk of turning even religious and Christian life into having "many things to do" and neglecting the daily search for the Lord? Don't we sometimes risk planning personal and community life by calculating the odds of success, instead of cultivating the small seed entrusted to us with joy and humility, with the patience of those who sow without expecting anything and those who know how to wait for God's time and let him surprise us? We must recognize at times that we have lost the ability to wait. This is due to several obstacles, of which I would like to highlight two.

The first obstacle that makes us lose the ability to wait is neglect of the interior life. This is what happens when weariness prevails over amazement, when habit takes the place of enthusiasm, when we lose perseverance on the spiritual journey, when negative experiences, conflicts or seemingly delayed fruits turn us into bitter and embittered people. It is not good to ruminate on bitterness, because in a religious family, as in any community and family, bitter and "sour-faced" people are deflating, people who seem to have vinegar in their hearts. It is necessary then to recover the lost grace: to go back and, through an intense interior life, return to the spirit of joyful humility, of silent gratitude. This is nourished by adoration, by the work of the knees and the heart, by concrete prayer that struggles and intercedes, capable of reawakening a longing for God, that initial love, that amazement of the first day, that taste of waiting.

The second obstacle is adapting to a worldly lifestyle, which ends up taking the place of the Gospel. Ours is a world that often runs at great speed, that exalts “everything and now,” that is consumed in activism and seeks to exorcise life’s fears and anxieties in the pagan temples of consumerism or in entertainment at all costs. In such a context, where silence is banished and lost, waiting is not easy, for it requires an attitude of healthy passivity, the courage to slow our pace, to not be overwhelmed by activities, to make room within ourselves for God’s action. These are lessons of Christian mysticism. Let us be careful, then, that the spirit of the world does not enter our religious communities, ecclesial life and our individual journey, otherwise we will not bear fruit. The Christian life and apostolic mission need the experience of waiting. Matured in prayer and daily fidelity, waiting frees us from the myth of efficiency, from the obsession with performance and, above all, from the pretence of pigeonholing God, because he always comes in unpredictable ways, he always comes at times that we do not choose and in ways that we do not expect.

Sisters, brothers, let us cultivate in prayer the spirit of waiting for the Lord and learn about the proper “passivity of the Spirit”: thus, we will be able to open ourselves to the newness of God.

Like Simeon, let us also pick up this child, the God of newness and surprises. By welcoming the Lord, the past opens up to the future, the old in us opens up to the new that he awakens. This is not easy, we know this, because, in religious life as in the life of every Christian, it is difficult to go against the “force of the old”. “It is not easy for the old man in us to welcome the child, the new one – to welcome the new one, in our old age to welcome the new one – ... The newness of God presents itself as a child and we, with all our habits, fears, misgivings, envies, – let us think of envies! – worries, come face to face with this child. Will we embrace the child, welcome the child, make room for the child? Will this newness really enter our lives or will we rather try to combine old and new, trying to let ourselves be disturbed as little as possible by the presence of God’s newness?” (C.M. MARTINI, *Something So*

Personal. Meditations on Prayer, Milan 2009, 32-33).

Brothers, Pope Francis directs some searching and relevant questions to us. Can we wait in hopeful expectation? Are we neglecting our interior life journey? Are we weighed down by contemporary culture, false expectations and superficial standards?

The pope encourages us, at whatever age we are, to be restless, moved by the Spirit. If we, like Simeon and Anna, live in expectation, safeguard our interior life, live in conformity with the Gospel, there is no doubt we will embrace Jesus, who is the hope of life.

Year of Prayer and Province Prayer Resources

You might know that the Pope has declared 2024 ‘**A Year of Prayer**’. It is a year of preparation for the ‘Year of Jubilee’ which follows in 2025. The above homily fits perfectly as an introduction to, or ‘launch’ of this special year. What can we as individual religious and communities of faith do to celebrate this year and make it real?

As I’ve travelled around the Province, I’ve been impressed by the extraordinary range of rich prayer resources we have developed over the years. Some Brothers, such as Henry Spinks and Rom Gibson, have produced creative prayers with a strong Marist flavour. In this *Year of Prayer*, I have asked Michael Akers to bring the best of our prayer resources together so that they are available across the Province. This is a task he is commencing now. If you have suggestions, ideas or resources, you’re invited to contact him at michael.akers@marists.org.au.

World Day of the Sick

This Sunday is the **World Day of the Sick**. We will all have many people who we will call to mind in our thoughts and prayers this Sunday. We will pay tribute to the invaluable work that Catholic health institutions undertake all around the world.

Br Tony Shears

Tony has been in the Intensive Care Unit of St Vincent's Public Hospital, Sydney since the early hours of Sunday morning. He is still unconscious and on a breathing machine. Fortunately, there have been some improvements in his condition, though any recovery will be slow and arduous. His brother, Bill, came to Sydney last Saturday and has been made warmly welcome at Marcellin House Randwick. Bill, Darren and I are very grateful for the many inquiries and messages we've received, and of course for your continuing prayers. Thank you brothers.



A new Marist School in Western Australia

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia and the Diocese of Bunbury are opening a new school at Madora Bay. We Marists are delighted that the authorities have decided to name it *St Marcellin Catholic College* and to have it as a school within the MSA network.

In this week's [MSA Newsletter](#), Br David Hall, Chair of the MSA Board, wrote: "MSA is pleased to welcome this new learning community to its family of 56 schools across Australia and we look forward to supporting Catholic Education Western Australia in the development of the new community. MSA exists to support the Catholic Church's evangelising mission to make Jesus Christ known and loved and to ensure quality education in the Marist tradition. Our Regional Director, Darren McGregor, is looking forward to supporting CEWA and foundation Principal, Anita O'Donohue, in the privileged role of establishing this new faith learning community."

Updates to the 2024 Brothers' Communities Directory

Bianca is currently in the process of updating the 2024 Brothers' Communities Directory. **If you have changed your mobile number or email address in the last 12 months**, please send your new details to Bianca by Wednesday 14 February.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peter Carroll'.

Br Peter Carroll
Provincial

Marist Brothers Formators Program starts at Manziana, Italy

Br Raphael Fakaia has settled into Manziana - however, he stated that he is struggling to adjust to the winter temperatures at present. Good luck Rafa!



Acceptance into the Postulancy

On Friday 2 February, the 8 new Timorese postulants were formally accepted into the postulancy program at Casa Marista, Teulale, Baucau. Brothers Greg McDonald and Robert Speare joined the postulancy community to mark the occasion. The Feast of the Presentation was a suitable day for the celebration and the evening began with a simple prayer that acknowledged the young men's commitment. Each postulant received a small replica of our Province's Star of the Sea icon and a simple cross - worn on the wrist. The community offered its blessing and promised to support each of the young men as they discern their vocation and call to Marist life.

Following the prayer, the community celebrated with a simple meal prepared by the Stage 2 postulants. No meal in Timor goes without large servings of rice (in Timor they say: "no rice, no life"); fortunately the Stage 2 postulants skills at cooking on the barbecue have steadily increased over the past 12 months. Consequently the rice was accompanied by some perfectly cooked sides of pork.

Parabéns (congratulations) to the young men, our prayers are with you.

Matthew Green
Formator (postulancy)



Congratulations!



Orlando Teme, Belzito Mendonca, Pedro Gomes, Diogo da Costa.

Br Matthew Green, Alfredo Keke, Pedro Coa, Felipe Seno, Marcelo Ximenes, Br Paul Kane.



Marist Bridge Builders Spotlight: Timor Leste

ARTICLE BY MICK HEELAN, YOUNG MARIST

“By acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity... Let us dream as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same Earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of their beliefs and convictions, each of us with their own voice.” - Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti (2020), §8

Marist Bridge Builders is an international volunteering program which enables Marists to contribute their time and professional skills in an overseas Marist mission.

I am privileged to currently be undertaking a five month placement in Timor Leste, working as a physiotherapist at the Katilosa Foundation for people with disabilities. Some of Katilosa’s key works are their inclusive education school and physio service, disability advocacy and community-based rehabilitation. With formal physiotherapy training unavailable in the country and the job not professionally recognised, my primary role is to train local staff in physio assessments and treatments for people with disabilities.

Unfortunately the children and adults assisted by Katilosa receive no other medical or allied health care. Seeing severe manifestations of disabilities which would have been entirely preventable back home, such as limb contractures in cerebral palsy, has been particularly confronting.

Undertaking a longer-term volunteering placement in a developing country has always appealed to me as both an opportunity to grow in my own character and faith and contribute to our calling from God to serve humanity. Pope Francis has stressed the importance of the Church “having the smell of sheep” from journeying alongside those relegated to the margins. In our capitalist world where money is the main game, people are invariably seen as a means to an end and thus those living with disabilities are seldom afforded the opportunity to reach their full potential. I believe that as people of Jesus we have a mandate to uplift those who are rejected and marginalised by society. Their contributions must be heard if we are to truly become a universal church as opposed to a clerical one. This is true for people with disabilities as it is for women, LGBTQI+ people and people of colour.

Living with Br Paul Gilchrist, Br Peter Corr, Br Greg McDonald and Margie Beck has been a wonderful introduction to missionary life and is enabling me to grow spiritually, learning from their collective wisdom and compassion. I am so proud of the Marist approach to mission, with its focus on sustainable capacity-building and concrete contributions to the quality of life of those whom they serve.

I wholeheartedly encourage any Australian Marist who is interested in overseas Marist volunteering to explore: www.maristassociation.org.au/volunteers

To find out more about Katilosa and support their work, visit:
www.australianmaristsolidarity.net.au/project/katilosa/



Marist Bridge Builders Spotlight: Timor Leste

ARTICLE BY MICK HEELAN, YOUNG MARIST



Top Left: Home visits are an important part of Katilosa's service, especially for children who live too far away to attend school. While this girl's cerebral palsy is too severe for her to walk, we are working on function in her arms so she can be more independent.

Top Right: The School's physiotherapy clinic. We're helping this girl with cerebral palsy learn to walk.

Above Left: Mick having lunch with Adelino and Maria, Katilosa's two physiotherapy assistants, after a morning of home visits.

Left: The Timorese brothers know their way around a keyboard and a dance floor.



Scripture Reading: Mark 7:31-37

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” ³⁵ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Reflection:

In the first-century Jewish and Gentile world the deaf man’s affliction would have meant his being cut off from the possibility of social engagement, education, effective employment, and probably friendship. In some ways his general alienation would have been even more total than that for lepers, who at least often had the company of each other. The people who brought him to Jesus may possibly have been family. If they were friends, their friendship in this case would have spoken of a wonderful sensitivity and compassion to this man’s situation.

The actions of Jesus may have been his way to communicate with the deaf man and to elicit in some vague way his permission, and perhaps even some opening to faith within a Gentile context. Also, there seemed to have been a real sensitivity in his taking him away from the crowd. The man was deaf so verbal communication was impossible. To secure the man’s undivided attention he took him away from the distracting crowd. Putting his fingers into the man’s ears and touching his tongue were presumably his way of conveying his intention of doing something to the man’s hearing and speech. Spittle was sometimes seen in antiquity as a therapeutic agent. By spitting he was possibly letting the man know that he was about to heal him. Jesus looked up to heaven in a gesture of prayer to his Father. He sighed, possibly because of his recognition of the

alienating effect of the man’s condition. The word ‘Ephphatha’ was an Aramaic word, Jesus’ own language. It would have probably been unintelligible to the man, but, since he could not hear, that was irrelevant. For some reason, the detail had been preserved in the tradition.

Jesus’ action of healing may have had a different meaning in Gentile territory. Among his own Jewish people, it served to illustrate the intervention of God in their history and to interpret, in action, his initial proclamation of the Kingdom. Jesus did not see his sortie into Gentile territory as a missionary enterprise. If anything, it was simply to get away from the pressure mounting on the other side of the border.

This is another incidence of Jesus caring for those who are suffering from sicknesses and disabilities of one kind or another. That someone could be interested in them and especially to be able to cure them was really a gift from God. Despite that fact that a great number of people are neglected in the world today who need care and help, there are still a great number of people who are dedicated to the poor and the sick. This is a gift from God, both for them and for the people they help. Let us remember to pray for all those volunteers and professionals who quietly and compassionately care for those who have some form of disability, often bringing a sense of hope for an uncertain future.

6th Sunday of Ordinary Time | 11 February 2024

Scripture passage: Mark 1:40-45

The Gospel of the healing of the leper tells us that if we want to be authentic disciples of Jesus we are called to become, united with Him, instruments of His merciful love, overcoming all types of marginalisation. To be “imitators of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 11:1) when faced with a poor or sick person, we do not have to be afraid to look them in the eyes and to approach them with tenderness and compassion, and to touch them and embrace them. If evil is contagious, so is good. Therefore, it is necessary for good to abound in us more and more. Let us allow ourselves to be infected by good and let us spread good. Pope Francis

AGAINST EXCLUSION

In Jewish society, the leper wasn't just a sick person. He was, before anything else, impure. A stigmatized person, without a place in society, without welcome in any part, excluded from life. The old book of Leviticus said it in clear terms: “The leper will wear torn clothes and keep his head uncovered... He will go about warning in a loud voice: Impure, impure. As long as his leprosy lasts, he will be impure. He will live apart and stay outside of the village” (13,45-46).

The correct attitude sanctioned by the Scriptures is clear: society must exclude lepers from the common life. It's what's best for everyone. A firm stance of exclusion and rejection. There will always be in society those persons who are superfluous.

Jesus rebels against this situation. On one occasion a leper came up to him, surely warning everyone about his impurity. Jesus is alone. Maybe the disciples have fled away in horror. The leper doesn't ask «to be healed», but «to be made clean». What he seeks is to see himself freed from impurity and social rejection. Jesus is moved, extends his hand, “touches” the leper and tells him: “I am willing. Be cleansed”.

Jesus doesn't accept a society that excludes lepers and the impure. He admits no social rejection toward undesirables. Jesus touches the leper in order to free him from fears, prejudices and taboos. He cleanses him in order

to say to everyone that God doesn't exclude or punish anyone with marginalization. It's society that thinks only about its own security and thus raises barriers and excludes the unworthy from its bosom.

Only a few years ago we could all hear the promise that the highest leader of the State made toward its citizens: “We will clean the street of even the smallest delinquents”. Seemingly, in the interior of a clean society, made up of good people, there is a “trash” that is necessary to get rid of in order for us not to be contaminated. A garbage, certainly, that can't be recycled, since our jails of today don't think about rehabilitating anyone, but exist to punish the “bad” and defend the “good”.

How easy it is for us to think about “civil security” and forget the suffering of a few delinquents, drug addicts, prostitutes, beggars, and homeless people. Many of them haven't known the warmth of a home or the security of a job. Trapped for ever, they neither know how to nor are able to get out of their sad destiny. And we, the exemplar citizens only think about clearing them from our streets. Seemingly, all very correct and very “Christian”. And also very much against God.