

## Breathing in the Spirit of Mary

### *The Essence of Marist Spirituality - Part Four*

In my [previous essay](#), I said that the essence of Marist spirituality is being Mary. To become Mary, Marists continually strive to draw upon her spirit and breathe it: a spirit of humility, self-denial, intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of neighbor..." Over time, this spiritual inhaling (prayer, contemplation) and exhaling (an ardent love of neighbor or service) will enliven our souls and inform how we relate to the Church and the world. As we conform ourselves to Mary, we will inevitably be conformed to Christ. Why? Because to think, judge, feel, and act like Mary is to think, judge, feel, and act like her toward her son. Fr. Colin asks Marists to conform their lives to Christ as Mary did. And you can't be Mary if you don't breathe her spirit into your being.

Okay. That sounds all good, but how do we do that? How do we breathe in Mary? Good question. I want to warn you that the spiritual practices I will label as Marist are generally the same as the prayers and spiritual practices that the Church recommends for all the faithful. That being the case, what makes them Marist?

The first spiritual practice is to develop a relationship with Mary. Now we enter into the realm of the Communion of Saints. As we pray in one of the prefaces for funeral Masses, life is changed, not ended when we die. There is a bond between the Church suffering (purgatory), the Church triumphant (communion of saints), and the Church militant (Church on earth). That bond is the love of Christ who unites all of us into his mystical body, the Church.

Consequently, the saints in heaven, for whom Mary is their queen, do not turn a deaf ear to us here on earth. They assist the Church in three ways. First, they are examples for us to emulate and inspire us to grow in holiness by imitating those virtues for which they are noted. Second, they intercede for us. Third, they serve as our companions. In other words, they can become spiritual friends to whom we turn for advice, encouragement, and consolation.

With that said, it makes sense that a Marist will accept the offer of her maternal care. I say that because, from the cross, Jesus gave her a new vocation or purpose when he said to the disciple John, "There is your mother," and to Mary, "There is your son." John represents the Church. Here, Jesus is redirecting Mary's motherly affections toward the Church. Marists, a name given to them by the gracious choice of Mary, enjoy an intimacy with the mother of Jesus. Such a gift is not a sign of privilege but a responsibility. Marists are called to live up to her name, to become her so that the Church will have a Marian face like Jesus, whose facial features resembled his mother.

I should add that Jesus resembled his mother in other ways. Is it not true that some individuals resemble a parent so much that people say, "In seeing you, I see your mother or your father?" That resemblance can also refer to that child's overall demeanor, including their thinking, gestures, or choice of words. Don't we sometimes say, "You sound like your mother or father?" When people saw Jesus, no doubt he resembled his mother in the ways I just indicated.

However, how many parents find themselves wanting to be like their son or daughter? Luke tells us that Mary pondered what Jesus was teaching or doing. That was the stance of a disciple. In the time of Jesus, a rabbi would attract disciples. They would stay with the rabbi and listen to what he taught, how he thought and observed (pondered) how the rabbi prayed, and put his teaching into practice by interacting with others. They wanted to think, judge, feel, and act like the rabbi so that they would become another version of him. Because Jesus was the son of God, Mary, too, wanted to learn how to think, judge, feel, and act

like her son, whom people addressed as “Rabbi.” When people saw Mary, no doubt they recognized Jesus in her physical appearance. Mary also resembled her son in the other ways I just described. That is why we can say that if we model Mary and seek to think, judge, feel and act like her in all things, we can’t help becoming more like Jesus simultaneously.

Being Marist is not only for our personal growth in holiness or salvation but, instead, for the salvation of the world on whose behalf the mother of Jesus is intervening, particularly through the Society of Mary. Marists are given her name for the sake of mission.

As mentioned above, Jesus gave Mary to the Church when Jesus said to John, “There is your mother.” With that said, Mary is not only a symbol but a real person who wants to be engaged in our lives. Praying to her, learning about her, desiring her companionship, and wanting to model our discipleship after hers are all ways we cultivate a reliance on the maternal care that she happily offers us.

While the Marists do not promulgate a particular Marian devotion as do some other Marian congregations, Marists encourage prayers and devotions to Mary, celebrate all the Marian feast days, and further express our affection for her when singing the *Salve Regina*. Again, we are doing what the Church is doing.

The first spiritual practice is to develop a relationship with Mary. I admit this can be problematic for those, especially women, for whom Mary is unapproachable. This is because Mary is associated with being on a lofty pedestal too high for them to attain. In addition, the Immaculate Conception and the virgin birth are seen as not being within their realm of experience. These concerns or obstacles can be surmounted but not here and not now. If that describes you, then, for the time being, let me say that Mary loves you and leave it at that. Start there and see where that takes you.

In the **following meditation**, I will propose some additional Marist spiritual exercises.