

Breathing in the Spirit of Mary and Breathing It Out into the Church and the World

The Essence of Marist Spirituality – Part Five

I want to propose some other Marist spiritual practices. There are two occasions when the evangelist Luke tells us that Mary pondered all these things in her heart. The first was after what the shepherds had told Mary and Joseph at the birth of Jesus. The second time was after Jesus was found in the Temple. We can surmise from this that pondering all these things that her son said and did was not only confined to these two incidents. Whenever she became aware of what Jesus was doing, either publicly or through their private conversations, she reflected on or contemplated them, referenced the Torah for any insights, and constantly prayed for guidance and the protection of her Son.

This leads me to the second spiritual practice, devotion to the Scriptures. The Church tells us that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. Mary constantly sought to know better and understand her son. We do likewise by learning about the Scriptures, reading or watching podcasts providing reputable commentaries, participating in Bible study groups, or practicing *Lectio Divina*.

A third spiritual practice would be daily prayer with special attention given to the daily examen. The daily examen usually occurs in the evening. It is a review of the day's events, noting where Christ was revealing his will and our response, the circumstances that revealed his love for us, and where resistance to growing in Christ was experienced.

The goal of growing in holiness within the Christian context is to be conformed to Christ and one day say with St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me..." (Galatians 2: 19-20) Note that St. Paul says he has been crucified with Christ. Only then does he proclaim that Christ lives in him.

I mentioned in my previous essay that the Marists are to make the whole world Marist, but that won't happen unless our interior world is becoming Marist. Again, that means emptying ourselves of anything that would be anti-Christ, opposed to the values of God's kingdom, and prohibiting us from responding to God selflessly or generously like Mary when she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done unto me according to Your Word." (Luke 2:38)

We must undergo a conversion of our minds and hearts for that to happen. For a Marist, we can expect that the resistance to the conversion from sin, whether external or internal, will be intense, akin to being crucified with Christ. It will be costly, and it will be painful. That is why Fr. Colin advised that if a Marist should miss morning or evening prayers, he should never omit the daily examen. That is where the battle will be won or, sadly, lost.

The fourth spiritual practice would be the weekly celebration of the Eucharist and participating in the other sacraments when appropriate. Marist spirituality is ecclesial. In other words, Marists will be found within the Church, in good times or in bad, in sickness and in health. That is because Mary herself was with the apostles and disciples on the days leading up to Pentecost and afterward. Marist spirituality will bring us to Christ in his Church and not lead us away from Christ in his Church, his mystical body, where his incarnation is extended in time and space.

Ideally, living Marist spirituality (the Marist Way) will be lived in the context of community (Church), where support and accountability are found. Community life can be experienced differently and does not

mean living under one roof. Marist Laity can form a community with like-minded laity and gather for prayer and support in various ways.

Finally, Marist spiritual practice leads to an ardent love of neighbor, meaning ministry or service. That certainly includes the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and I would add social justice. I will say more about the latter in a future meditation. Suffice it to say that social justice is included in the Marist understanding of how an ardent love of neighbor should be expressed. It is rooted in the Magnificat: “He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.” (Luke 1: 51-53)

This listing of Marist spiritual practices is not meant to be exhaustive but illustrative of what breathing in the Spirit of Mary can look like and its effects when it is breathed out onto the Church and the world. Marist spiritual practices are common or ordinary because they are not unique to Marists. By way of analogy, all our students study science. What distinguishes one science student from another is their intent, meaning how they will or will not use that knowledge. For example, some will use their understanding of science to become biologists, physicists, or chemists. Other students will read, study, do homework, and take the same exams, but their lives will go in different directions.

Marists do the same religious practices as other Christians but with the intention of becoming like Mary. Other Christians may do the same practices, but their intent may be different. For example, a Franciscan will do the same spiritual practices but with the mindset of St. Francis.

What makes these spiritual practices uniquely Marist is the purpose for doing them, which is to practice being like Mary—to think, judge, feel, and act like her in all things. Marists do them with the mindset of Mary. The key is to persevere in doing them while being flexible as to which one(s) we choose and how often we can do them realistically. Here we will be wise to be led by the Spirit.

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 we can't be Mary if we don't breathe her spirit into our beings. To make that happen, we must engage in spiritual exercises with that intent.

Some may say all that is asking too much. It is too hard. I would say that it is easy as, let's say, breathing. We take breathing for granted until we suddenly find ourselves gasping for breath. For those who are not gasping for Christ, no spiritual exercises will be of any help. All of them will be too hard or too time-consuming. For those who find themselves gasping for Christ, I offer them to breathe in the spirit of Mary. See these Marist spiritual practices as a form of spiritual resuscitation for all of us, especially those whose souls are on their last breath.