

6. HIDDEN AND UNKNOWN

By Fr. David Kennerley, SM

A Prayer

Jesus, Son of God, you came among us as a humble servant, and testified that we are at our best as your disciples when we bend low to wash the feet of others.

Mary, help us as your Marists, to be appalled by any temptation in us to dominate others or to be accorded privileges. May our only concern be that Christ is proclaimed.

How Best to do Good Today

The Acts of the Apostles tells us, “*All the apostles joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers*” (1:14). Jean Coste, (the Society of Mary’s foremost historian and leading expert on Father Jean Claude Colin), noted that Colin only referred to this text three times and concluded: “The upstairs room is a model for certain special moments in Marist life; it is not the place in which Mary’s presence in the Church becomes the symbol of a whole mode of existence” (*Forum Novum*, July 1996 p.251).

What struck Colin more was the attitude, the stance, that Mary maintained in the early church away from prayer. Mary as the mother of Jesus had an intimate knowledge of him. That naturally gave her a position of status and authority in the group. As Colin perceived it, Mary ignored taking any personal advantage, favour, from this unique position and simply blended in amongst *the women... and the brothers*. She freely chose to be “hidden and unknown” so as to all the better support and encourage the apostles to assume and fulfil their role.

Don’t get Colin wrong! Although choosing to avoid the spotlight, Mary still sought to achieve a great deal of good. In his words, “Jesus Christ was the object of all of Mary’s thoughts and affections. After his death, her sole thought was the extension and development of the mystery of the Incarnation” (FS 60.1). He then added, “That is the sign by which precisely, you can recognize a Marist.” So, for Colin, remaining unimposing enabled Mary to achieve the greatest degree of “extension and development” of Christ, of the Church. This then, is not a docile image of Mary. It is an image of Mary encouraging and promoting others, making room so that others play their part in the church, both apostles and disciples, then and now.

Particularly for ourselves today, Marists give weight to being hidden and unknown **in the world**. The image here is of Mary still being ever active and always in relationship, but not simply in the Church. Marists are to have a ‘missionary’ attitude in all their encounters with others but especially amongst people on the periphery of the Church and those outside it, the disaffected, the indifferent. Indeed, the interior self-forgetful stance of hidden and unknown is to be the chief characteristic of Marists in all their relationships and in all we do. In practice it means avoiding all negative, controlling actions and authoritarian antics whereby I assert myself and ‘my way’ over and against another person or group.

The motivation for making such a consistent taxing effort is to do our very best not to be an obstacle to Christ making some entry point or headway with those we encounter. Taken to its ultimate logical conclusion, hidden and unknown means not needing to even see any sign that ‘we’ve got somewhere’ with someone or a particular situation. Ultimately, hidden and unknown means leaving the fruit of our efforts over to God. This is the simplicity Colin encouraged, “Seeing only God, acting only for God” (FS 59.5).

So, humanly, hidden and unknown means avoiding any number of negative behaviours. Conversely, it also means that by taking this mode of engagement seriously we will be practicing and growing in innumerable positive qualities, virtues!

Perhaps the end of Mary Karr's poem, "*Who the Meek Are Not*" offers us an encouraging image for practicing hidden and unknown:

"...To understand the meek
... picture a great stallion at full gallop
in a meadow, who
"at his master's voice" seizes up to a stunned
but instant halt.
So with the strain of holding that great power
in check, the muscles
along the arched neck keep eddying,
and only the velvet ears
prick forward, awaiting the next order."

An Insight

"The Marist in a certain sense is like the person in the prompt-box. What matters is the stage. On it you have the various actors playing the drama, but you also have someone that nobody sees in the prompt-box. He is there only to speak at the last moment if the actor does not remember, does not say what he is supposed to say. The person in the prompt-box makes the dialogue easier but nobody will look at him, and if he happened to go on to the stage, he would spoil the drama. That in a certain sense is the Marist – the Marist in the prompt-box is only to help others and God dialogue together." (Jean Coste, New Zealand Retreat)

The Practice

"The Church no longer exercises the powerful influence on society it once had. A new generation has risen which is often not only without faith, but even without knowledge of Christ and the good news He brought. We live in a world which turns more on banks, governments, corporations, and markets than on the Church. Today it is lay people, not clerics, who are in positions of greatest influence and they are more in touch with their culture. The attitudes of more people are changed over the back fence, in pubs, offices, canteens, and coffee-bars than in churches.

As true sons and daughters of Christ, Marists wish to be authentic children of the Church and to follow where the Holy Spirit is leading it. Marist spirituality is a missionary spirituality with a global vision. It is not a closed circuit spirituality playing to an ever diminishing audience" (Frank McKay, *Maristica* 4, Marist Laity, p.80ff).

Questions

1. In meeting people, hidden and unknown means being as open and accepting of them in both thought and deed. How realistic an approach is this in terms of having a positive impact on someone? Think of some of your own experiences.

2. Hidden and unknown in the world, challenges our lifestyle. In order to give credible witness to Christ and his Gospel, it asks us to live lives of simplicity, modesty, humility. What do you make of this and what might it mean for you in practice?