

"Set out in haste"

The story of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary is a story which focusses attention on a key element of the whole Marist enterprise's life and spirituality. The life force of the Marist project is mission, and its spirituality is a spirituality of action. It is true that by its very nature the whole Church is missionary. Pope Paul VI called evangelising the Church's "deepest identity", and wrote that the Church "exists to evangelise". But while mission is every Christian's call, certain groups within the Church have taken on this call in a specific way. The Marist enterprise was a mission enterprise from the beginning, and this is strikingly evident in the story of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. The Pioneers first left for the *missions*; they were missionaries before they were religious; and they were missionaries for life. The daring and dynamism of the Pioneers is still at the heart of SMSM life today. It explains why one of the conditions for joining the Congregation is that the Sisters must be willing to leave their own country to live in another culture. It explains how in recent times, a 74-year-old Sister from the Tongan Islands was part of the first community of SMSMs to be set up in the Philippines. It explains how SMSMs are found in situations made difficult by violence and isolation: in Peru, Colombia, and in the middle of the Sahara Desert. It lies behind some of the questions the SMSMs put to themselves today for the present and the future: "How can we live as daringly as our Pioneers did?" "How can we be in the outposts of the missions?" "How can we be present to young people - and open the Gospel to them?" "How can we be inventive, creative, in the way we do our work?" "How can we help each other to keep up with a world that keeps changing?" The history of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary highlights the apostolic, missionary nature of Marist spirituality. Marist spirituality is a spirituality of urgency for action. It is not a spirituality which simply tries to find some balance in apostolic action, but a spirituality whose whole impulse is towards action and apostolic life. The Pioneers who joined the enterprise originally as lay women were captured by the same two things that fired those Seminarians in 1816: "the joy of being in the family of Mary" and a sense of "the great needs of people"; and like those Brothers and Priests who went before them, they were willing to go "anywhere in the world" for the sake of those on the margins.

September 18, 1848

On the Monday, the day before the close of the retreat, Father spoke to us as follows after the grace:...

"Let's wake up; let faith put life into us. The Society of Mary is a pre-eminently active body; it will achieve nothing unless we unite in ourselves the man of prayer and the man of action: the man of prayer who is completely permeated with the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the man of action, bent on securing this noble aim."

The Mayet Memoirs

Action

"Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah." (Lk. 1:39)

I was so happy to see this immediately modelled in Pope John Paul II. You must have seen the similarity. The day after he was elected Pope he went off to a hospital to visit an old friend. How real! How terribly real. But the Church isn't always that real; it is caught up in theology and a whole lot of abstractions; it is caught up in all kinds of righteousness and rituals; but Mary found a place of reality that humanity can begin to touch upon. A woman who goes to visit her cousin in pregnancy. She wasn't caught up in a salvation trip. Mary was caught up in life; and she knew what mattered in life were people, what mattered in life was the bringing of new children into the world; terribly earthly, terribly real, but she knew how to surrender herself to that, the day after she is told she is to be the Mother of God.

Richard Rohr



No baggage

The first positive response to the call in the New Testament was made by a woman. Mary of Nazareth, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, rose up in haste and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea carrying the Word in her body to share it (Lk. 2:39). Why the haste and the hurry when Elizabeth's baby was not due for three months? I understand the haste and the hurry as a symbol of total and enthusiastic commitment. If you love, you hasten to serve. There's a connection between the physical and the spiritual. Movement is a sign of life. If you're sick or loaded with baggage you can't run. Mary's song shows the free and joyful way she answered the call. Jesus, like his mother, and filled with the Spirit, was also in a hurry. In the Gospels, I notice that He feels a certain urgency about His mission. In the desert He must have searched deeply to study His mission and His attitude to it. His triumph over temptation tells me that He gave up all desire He might have had for earthly values, riches, power, wealth, glory; so being without baggage He was able to run, jump, leap. *"My beloved. He comes bounding over the mountains, leaping over the hills"* (Song 2:8). That's Jesus. Fully alive! He was so totally committed and full of love for His Father that He was impatient to complete His mission. That's the story of His life, always a prompt yes to His Father, to an officer, a beggar and an invitation to a party. I hear the urgency in His own words: "I have come to start a fire on earth and how I wish it was blazing already!" (Lk. 12:49); "I have a mission to accomplish and am in distress until it is finished" (Lk 12:50); and in a negative way to a non-starter: "Let the dead bury the dead" (Lk. 9:60). I see this urgency repeated in Paul, and in Father Colin who urged his followers to go out and build a new church; and I see this spirit in our first Pioneer Françoise Perroton who was actively impatient for the coming of the Kingdom. I understand the haste, hurry, urgency as a symbol of total commitment, so I say to Jesus: *"Take me with you. We will run together"* (Song 1:2).

Emma Martinuzzi, smsm

Pressing on together towards the fullness of the Kingdom, we wish to repond to the calls of today with the daring and zeal of the pioneers. We want to keep alive this daring - simple, joyful and prudent - based solely on the love and power of God - in order to announce the Gospel in its force and integrity, learning to adapt ourselves to different cultures and conditions of life.

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