

## *A place to stand*

One of the first lessons given to someone beginning to learn the art of pottery is how to "centre" the clay on the potter's wheel. It is delicate work, and it takes time to ensure that the solid and unformed lump of clay is balanced and centred on the wheel. But no shaping of the clay can take place until this is done; and unless it is done properly, no matter how long it takes or how difficult it may be to do, any subsequent shaping of the clay will end in failure.

The Maori people of New Zealand are a people for whom land and ancestry are extremely important. They have a word in their language which expresses one of their deepest realities. *Turangawaewae* means literally "a place to stand". It symbolises many things: the place where a person belongs, the place where a person comes from, the homing point to which a person returns if he or she may actually live elsewhere. *Turangawaewae* is the place where one feels connected with one's ancestors, where one finds identity, where one can find a psychological and spiritual vantage point from which to make sense of a constantly changing world. Even though we in the industrialised world have largely lost our sense of the land, we too appreciate how important it is to know where we come from and where our roots are. Without this "place to stand" we are in danger of losing our balance, our identity, and even perhaps our soul.

This need for a centre point, or a place from which we can view reality is also true of our life in the Spirit. Marists find their own place to stand, their centre point, their vantage point, in Nazareth. On one occasion, Jean-Claude Colin said: "I place myself in the home of Nazareth and from there I see all that I must do." At Nazareth, even before the birth of the Church, the Kingdom existed in the ordinary life of a simple family. By inviting us to go often in spirit to Nazareth, Colin helps us to learn what is essential. Nazareth teaches us the value of the simple life of small beginnings. Nazareth reminds us that real values lie so often below the surface and are hidden from sight. Nazareth also reminds us that true, unclouded judgements can be made only when personal prejudices are stripped away and a person is alone before God.

*On 29 June, 1845 Father Colin, speaking of new foundations to be made, said to us: "Gentlemen, Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, the Blessed Virgin was born in Nazareth. The Society of Mary came to life in the small town of Belley (unknown spot) and in the little hermitage near Saint-Chamond, in isolation and solitude. Let us remember our origin: let us begin without noise. It is not necessary to make noise in order to do good; and afterwards, when the time comes, then...."*

*The Mayet Memoirs*

## *Nazareth*

In the Constitutions of the Society of Mary he wrote: *Marists must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things.*

This is no pious sentimentalism. It calls upon us to surrender our narrow, selfish, and comfortable point of view, and to adopt the point of view of another, and one that is most challenging and demanding.

The sad fact is that we human beings are blind.

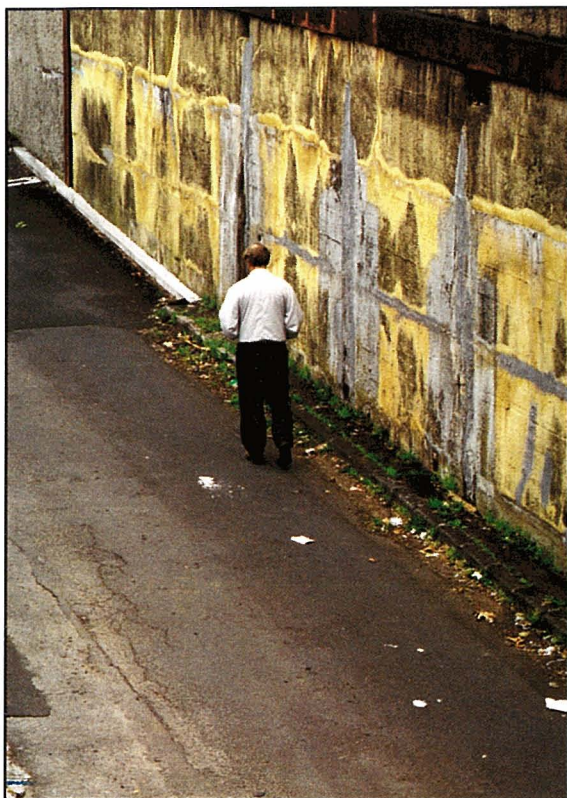
How many miracles of Jesus were cures of blindness!

We are so often blind to our own dark motives, and these motives blind us to the true nature of the world, human persons, and our own existence. But how do we get out of ourselves and beyond ourselves? As long as we stand in our own place, we risk being caught in our own interests and ulterior motives. But if we could see things from another's point of view... But whose?

Father Colin suggests one that he felt was most reliable - Mary's. And so he tells us to go to Nazareth and see things as Mary does.

*Edwin Keel, sm*





## Getting centred

Gradually a Christian can find a "private room" literally anywhere. A Japanese Christian with a background of the tea-ceremony refers to this as the art of "creating holy space". T.S.Eliot learned to create it in a dingy lane. He was a busy man who wrote much and was regarded as England's greatest man of letters in the post-war period. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. A friend of his relates how he met his need for prayer alone with the Father. When he was working in his London office he used to slip out for 30 minutes at midday and pace slowly up and down a dead-end lane. In 1921 he had written *The Waste Land*, a poem about the weary self-consciousness of the brave new world that now lay desolate in the aftermath of World War I. That was written just after his own breakdown. But an older Eliot, in a London made still more desolate by the blitz of the Luftwaffe, in a world made almost unbelievable by Auschwitz and Nagasaki, could pen sentences of vibrant hope and optimism. He had learned from Jesus how to refresh his spirit by meeting alone with the Father.

Paul Glynn, sm

## Stay still

Nazareth represents an experience of life: a time when things seem too ordinary, and nothing happens. Or when we are faced with silence. Many people cannot bear being alone for very long, and many of us take care that we are never really alone. If we have no one with us (and sometimes even if we do have someone with us) we reach for the television, a telephone, a radio, a cassette recorder - anything to divert, distract, entertain, cheer us up, make us forget that we are alone. Blaise Pascal wrote: "I have often said that the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." (*Pensées* no. 136) Jesus' life is punctuated by periods of solitude: forty days in the desert, periods of early morning prayer, his time of solitary prayer in Gethsemane - to say nothing of his thirty years at Nazareth. They are long periods of solitary prayer - days and hours, not minutes.

## Good soil

The present era is one of an even greater commitment to evangelization, and the resources with which to do this are plentiful and growing. We need to keep in mind, though, that "it is primarily by her conduct and her life that the Church will evangelize the world... by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus - by the witness of poverty, and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity." (*Pope Paul VI. Evangelii Nuntiandi*) So to be an apostle in the Church today as a Marist it is necessary to be one who has experienced the saving power and love of the Lord. The Marist is one who can stand alone in the Lord's presence. He or she will be able to enter Nazareth and from there gain power and strength. Nazareth then is the soil in which the Marist takes root, and it is only from there that we see what we have to do.

*Treasuring in our hearts and pondering the words and actions of the Lord, striving to remain sincere before God and man, we shall reach that simplicity of soul which our Founders discovered in the house of Nazareth.*

*Marist Sisters' Constitutions n.7*