

Pentecostal fire

While Nazareth represents one point of reference in Mary's life, the second major reference-point is found in the mystery of Pentecost, when the Church came to birth with fire, and when the believers, gathered round Mary in a communion of mind and heart, gave powerful testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 2: 1-4, 42-47)

During the 18 years when Jean-Claude Colin was Superior General of the Marist Fathers, Mayet noted many occasions when he made reference to Mary, especially during the Retreats which the Marists made each year. On these occasions, what Colin referred to most frequently was the mystery of Mary in the Church at its beginnings. Even when he referred to Mary at Nazareth, Colin frequently linked this image to the image of Mary in the Church as it came to birth, as if one idea led immediately to the other, one pole connecting intimately with the other. On one occasion he said, *In all things let us look to Mary, let us imitate her life at Nazareth. She did more than the apostles for the newborn Church; she is the Queen of the apostles, but she did it without any stir, she did it above all by her prayers.* And even though he talked of the novitiate time for Marists as a "Nazareth" experience, he made it clear that this represented only part of the spirituality of those called to the Marist enterprise: *The Society of Mary desires that we, her children, should be missionaries of action, and missionaries of prayer.*

In the life of every Marist these two realities exist in tension. Somehow the Marist, like Mary, is to be contemplative in action, and active in contemplation. It is not a question of choosing one or the other, or of choosing one at one moment and the other at another, but of keeping the two realities in balance.

Even though Jean-Claude Colin's thinking moved from the image of Nazareth to the Church after Pentecost, sometimes even merging the two mysteries, there is no inconsistency here. He saw the Church in its broad historical sweep – from the beginning of time to the end of the world. If one had said "Church" to Jean-Claude Colin, what would probably have come to his mind would have been this picture of all the believers from the beginning till the end of time, gathered by Mary and round Mary, and all attentive to the Spirit who hovered over the world at the beginning, who descended in tongues of fire on the believers at Pentecost, and whose *power working in us can do infinitely more than we can hope for or even imagine.*" (Eph.3: 21)

In November, 1846 Father Colin said to us during recreation, "Gentlemen, the piety of the Carthusians and Trappists is one thing, that of the Marists another. The Carthusians and Trappists save souls by prayer. We save them by action joined to prayer. It is the same thing basically, but we follow a different line."

The Mayet Memoirs

Lighthouse

In the thought of Father Colin, Nazareth represents a lighthouse which every Marist ought to have clearly marked on his navigational chart of the spiritual life. However, we must also take into account the other lighthouse, which is Mary of Pentecost Sunday, inviting her children to accomplish in our century what the Apostles accomplished in the time of the early Church. Yet in the midst of all, I have the impression that another light was the profound source, namely the Holy Spirit, who hovers over the world, who gave life to the withered bones in the vision of Ezechiel, who overshadowed Mary, accomplishing in her the conception of God's son, who breathed upon the Apostles and made them witnesses of Christ, and who still continues to assist the Church today.

Nicolas Gauthier, sm

Key point

If we want a unifying principle of our Marist spirit, we could find it only in fidelity to the Holy Spirit.... It is the Spirit, acting within the Church and the Society, who sees to it that the Marists of today learn how to walk in the footsteps of Mary and of their founder.

In this sense, to live the Marist spirit is, in a word, to listen to the Holy Spirit telling us about our place in the heart of the Society of Mary.

To live the Marist spirit will amount, in effect, to being completely faithful to our vocation, that is to say, to the thousand suggestions of the Holy Spirit speaking to us about our particular situation.

Jean Coste, sm



In the house of La Neylière in France, where Jean-Claude Colin is buried, a fresco has been painted on the wall of the Chapel. The fresco depicts the central theme of the mystery of Mary in the church. The artist, Chantal Dessirier, wrote of this composition: *I did not want to do a realistic representation of the life of Mary; everyone knows that, and to do so would have tended to make the viewer become a spectator, seeing it as a picture book. I hoped rather that the visitor would enter into the scene....* The dominant image is the scene of Pentecost, with Mary and the Apostles fired with the gift of the Spirit. (*The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world*). In the background to the Pentecost scene are five major "memories" of Mary: the Annunciation (*I am the handmaid of the Lord*); the Nativity (*The Word was made flesh*); the Finding in the Temple (*I must be about my Father's business*); the Wedding at Cana (*Do what he tells you*); and Calvary (*Behold your Mother*). Of the Pentecost scene, Chantal Dessirier says: *Mary, in the Pentecost scene, is the keystone, she is the basis of the composition; everything rests on her. But through the use of colour, I was concerned that she should remain discreet and hidden. She blends in with the apostles, who stand out, if not by their height, at least by their colouring.* In fact, Mary is not in the centre of the apostles. There are seven on one side of her, and five on the other. The key of the early Church is Peter, the first Pope. Mary submerges into the community of which she is one of the members among the others. Without words, without any dramatic actions, she witnesses to the Lord simply by her life. The apostles look to her as a visible witness to the presence of the Lord. They draw their inspiration from her. Mary does not assume the role of leader, but she is truly the Queen of the Apostles by her silent, attentive, loving, prayerful presence. The fresco seems to underline the words of Father Colin: "What a model Mary is for us! She bears the title 'Queen of Apostles' and rightly, and yet she is more hidden than any of the apostles".

Because they bear the name of Mary, Marists desire to be like her and follow Jesus as she did. Contemplating Mary in the mysteries of Nazareth and Pentecost and her role at the end of time, they come to share her zeal for her Son's mission in his struggle against evil, and to respond with promptness to the most urgent needs of God's people.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.8