

## A Marian Church

Perhaps now we are able to understand some of the richness in Colin's words about "beginning a new church". Some writers suggest that many aspects of the Church today simply reflect the characteristics of modern society: a preoccupation with systems and organisations, with competition, achievement, power, control, success, words, and logic. In this sort of society and Church, it is hard to find a place for compassion, silence, contemplation and relationship. So it is easy to see what a significant change could be made in this society and Church by a group of people – including men – who live by the spirit of the woman Mary, and who in a very real sense honour the feminine within themselves, in the Church and in society. In this sense, it becomes very enriching to speak of "a Marian Church" or "a Church with a Marian face". If we think of Church simply as "the place where we can be *saved*", then it is difficult to see where Mary fits in, because there is only one Saviour and Mediator – Jesus Christ. But if we think of Church as "the place where people *grow in life*", then it is easy to look on Mary – woman, mother, disciple – as one who teaches us how to be disciples of Jesus, and how to keep the Gospel values always in focus. A Marian Church is a Church which makes a choice for compassion over competition; an option for relationship over dogmatism; for humility over power; for service over dominance. It is a Church which pushes its boundaries to include all, rather than one which defines its boundaries to contain the chosen. And it is a Church which includes the feminine in its attitudes, which can too easily become over-masculine. The Church with a Marian face does not feel the need to create bigger and bigger things to ensure that God is properly honoured. It is a Church which understands that small things can be, and often are, the most significant things. We live in an age that worships size and numbers. Yet history shows again and again that it is not the big things but the small beginnings that are of greatest importance. No one who remembers the events of the student uprising in China's Tiananmen Square in 1989 will forget the photograph of the lone civilian standing calmly and defiantly in front of the line of tanks. What remains in the memory is not the impression of the fragility of one person in face of the power of the tanks, but precisely the opposite: the immense power of that solitary individual, and the uselessness of the tanks to produce anything of lasting value.

September, 1850

*Then Reverend Father [Colin] spoke to us of how fortunate we were to bear the name of Mary, and of the zeal with which we should imitate her. "She did not create a great stir during her earthly life," he said, "but how much good she did and still does for the Church! There is our model. Let us clothe ourselves in her spirit."*

*The Mayet Memoirs*

## Marian Church

I would like to plead for a Marian Church; not for a church which multiplies processions and blesses huge statues.... rather a Church which "lives the Gospel after the manner of Mary."

**The Marian Church** follows Mary into the mountains, going off with her to encounter life; she visits men and women, and, though things may seem to be sterile, she is on the watch for what is coming to birth, for possibilities, for the life which beats in things.

**The Marian Church** rejoices and sings. Instead of bemoaning its fate and the world's woes, she is in wonder at the beauty there is on the earth and in the human heart, as she sees what God is doing there.

**The Marian Church** knows she is the object of a gratuitous love, and that God has the heart of a mother. She has seen God on the doorstep, on the lookout for the improbable return of a son; she has seen him throw his arms around his neck, place the festal ring on his finger, and himself organise the home-coming feast. When she pages through the family album, she sees Zaccheus in his sycamore, the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman, foreigners, the lepers, beggars and a common prisoner at his place of execution. So you see, the Marian Church despairs of no one, and *does not quench the smoking flax*. When she finds someone on the side of the road wounded by life, she is moved by compassion, and with infinite tenderness tends their wounds. She is the safe harbour, who is always open, the refuge of sinners, "*mater misericordiae*", mother of mercy.

**The Marian Church** does not know the answers before the questions are posed. Her path is not traced out in advance. She knows doubt and unease, night and loneliness. That is the price of trust. She takes her part in the conversation, but makes no claim to know everything. She accepts that she must search.

**The Marian Church** lives in Nazareth in silence and simplicity. She does not live in a castle. Her home is like all the other homes. She goes out to chat with the other villagers. She weeps with them, she rejoices with them, but she never preaches to them. Above all she listens.

**The Marian Church** stands at the foot of the Cross. She does not take refuge in a fortress or in a chapel or in prudent silence when people are being crushed. She is vulnerable in her deeds as in her words. With a humble courage she stands alongside the most insignificant.

**The Marian Church** lets in the wind of Pentecost, the wind which impels one to go out, which unties tongues. In the public square, not for the sake of hammering doctrine, nor to swell her ranks, she proclaims her message: the promise has been kept, the fight has been won and the Dragon crushed forever. And this is the great secret which she can only murmur: to win the victory God has laid down his arms. True, we are in an intermediate time, the time of human history. And that history is a painful one.

Yet every evening at the end of Vespers the Church sings the Magnificat. For the Church knows where her joy is to be found. And look: God has not found our world or its afflictions, its violence or its wickedness uninhabitable. It is there that He has met us. And there, on the Cross, we have seen the "mercy", the open heart of God.

There at the foot of the Cross a people was born, a Marian people. *Seeing his mother and near her the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother: 'Woman, this is your son.'* Then to the disciple he said: *'This is your mother.'* From that moment, the disciple made a place for her in his home.

Brothers and sisters, let us belong to this people. Let us make a place for Mary in our home. Let us enter with her into the "humble and heart-rending happiness" of loving and being loved. And, in the words of Thérèse of Lisieux, the Church will be in this world "a heart resplendent with love".

*François Marc, sm*

*Our religious consecration unites us in a special way with the Church in all its mystery... Very special bonds unite us to the other branches of the Marist Family, as we attempt to foster in the Church the spirit of Mary, which is our common heritage.*

*Marist Brothers' Constitutions n.10*