

## "Flesh to the Word"

One of the fruits of a life whose centre of gravity is God and the real needs of others will be that the Gospel will "take flesh" in the lives of people.

For a moment, let us put ourselves in the shoes of newly-ordained Jean-Claude Colin as he stood on the hill of Cerdon where the church stands. What was going on in the mind of this shy young priest as he looked down on the village below? Colin was a stranger to the place: the countryside was different, the people's accent was different, their mentality, way of life, interests, were all different. Yet later he was to say with some pride that he had learned to understand the Cerdonese people. And from being a preacher whose style was wooden and dead, he became the one whom the hardened men liked to listen to. He was the one to whom the bar keepers in the villages liked to go for confession. In time, he had begun to learn how to speak "a new language" or at least how to understand a different language. His transformation at Cerdon enabled him to give flesh to the words he spoke.

Contemplating the mystery of Mary in the Church can be an enormously liberating challenge. A great religious problem facing people before the time of Christ was the problem of God – "out there", beyond their reach, needing to be appeased, ready to judge and punish, and difficult to know or approach. In Christ, this "God problem" was solved. In Christ we have been able to see God. At one moment in time people have heard, seen, touched the very person of God. The Word of God has become flesh. And Mary, with her YES to God's invitation to be the mother of Christ, brought God to a level that the world can understand. Mary gave flesh to the Word. Today, it is Christ who is hidden and unknown to many. People need to see something of Christ, and they look to Christians to satisfy that need. The goal of the Marist is to give flesh to the Word, to make Christ come alive for people, to "translate the message of the Gospel in terms the world can understand." "Something new for our times..." It would be something new if in a world where so many people are searching to overcome the sense of alienation and separation, of emptiness and meaninglessness, there were a group of people who, because of Mary the first disciple of Jesus, took a stand for mercy, compassion, and communion of mind and heart. Then indeed the Word would become flesh, and small steps would be taken to make the world a place where people could experience the presence of the Spirit of Jesus.

1843

*Father Colin, giving vent to his ardour, said, "Ah, I wish people would stir themselves, that they would wake up.... Really, nowadays, good Lord, the clergy are dead, they are asleep.... Give a sermon: nobody comes."*

1839

*"How I hope (Marists) will always continue as they are at Lyon. They work among the masons.... They go into the prisons, they serve the workhouse.... Those are the tasks I like to see the Marists employed in. People say, 'The Marists go into the prisons, look after the poor.... Yes, that is what must be done; that is truly a work of God.' They request admission to the Society, and it is that which has won their affection. Let us not be numbered among those who only want to preach in the towns, to give fine sermons."*

*The Mayet Memoirs*

## Authenticity

Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.

It is often said nowadays that the present century thirsts for authenticity. Especially in regard to young people it is said that they have a horror of the artificial or false and that they are searching above all for truth and honesty. These "signs of the times" should find us vigilant. Either tacitly or aloud – but always forcefully – we are being asked: Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live?

*Pope Paul VI*



## To translate

Our methods are perhaps not always adapted to the needs of modern man who also has a hunger for God and a homesickness for his home, without knowing it or daring to realise it. Our words perhaps leave him indifferent.

Pope Paul VI

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A scene in Brian Friel's play *Philadelphia, here I come* depicts a young man about to leave his home in Ireland for a new life in the United States. The young man and his father are struggling unsuccessfully to find the right words to say as they farewell each other. In a corner of the room, the parish priest sits playing chess with himself, oblivious to the drama taking place between the father and his son. Suddenly, the young man turns on the priest and bursts out angrily:

*You could translate all this loneliness, this groping, the dreadful bloody buffoonery into Christian terms that will make life bearable for us all. And yet you don't say a word. Why, priest? Why, arid priest? Isn't this your job? To translate? Why don't you speak then?*

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We need to transmit the message of the Incarnate Word of God in terms which the world is able to understand.

Pope Paul VI

## Christ to the world

"Mary's role was to give flesh to the Word".

On those nine words, volumes might be written. What was Mary's role is exactly that of the Marist today - to continue "to give flesh to the Word", because it is only in human terms, in human example and human words that Christ will ever become actual to people in any age, including our own. Her spirit is essentially a prolonging, a keeping in being, of the Incarnation. She alone, of all humankind, gave Christ to the world. The Marist who endeavours to live by her spirit must be principally concerned with continuing just that work, to give Christ to the world. The Marist's role is to give flesh to the word.

Kevin Maher, sm



## Speak to us of God

One of the touching legends that sprang up around the memory of St Francis of Assisi tells how one day he walked up to an almond tree and said: "Speak to me of God!" and the tree blossomed.

The same command is addressed to us by the world, bluntly or subtly, but always insistently: "Speak to us of God!"

And just as Mary made the Word of God, till then hidden and unknown, come to flesh in Jesus, so Marists in our day are to make Christ come to life for the world. Marists are to speak clearly to the world of Christ – not merely by words but by actions.