



A parent's care

Mary is most present, even if most hidden, in the Church. She is there as disciple, and she is there as mother. She is there especially like a mother who watches over all her children with tender and compassionate love. At this time, when we are endeavouring to restore the feminine to our image of God, our understanding is enriched by that figure of the woman who highlights the feminine qualities of God. Of course, this does not mean that Mary is the feminine God. But it does mean that in Mary the woman we can see a reflection in human terms of the maternal qualities of God, especially the qualities of mercy and compassion. The mystery of compassion lies at the heart of the Old Testament. The very first self-portrait made by God was of a "God of tenderness and love, abounding in mercy and fidelity, showing kindness to a thousand generations" (Ex.34: 6). This is the God who allowed Abraham to bargain over the Israelites, forgiving them even if only ten just men could be found in the city (Gen.18: 16-32). It is this same God who spoke to Moses as a friend, assuring him, "I have seen the misery of my people" (Ex.3: 7). This is the God who cannot bear even one person to be lost; and in an effort to emphasise this compassion, the Scriptures describe God not only as a tender father, but also as a tender mother who has carried the child in her womb. In Hebrew, the word for compassion is a plural form of the word for "womb", and it signifies yearning love, like that of a mother for her baby in the womb. Compassion is what a pregnant mother experiences – the love that is with, suffers with, and is yearning to bring to birth; then yearns to see the child grow to independence. It means waiting, watching, never forcing, yet always being ready.

In this sense, Mary reflects the inner, maternal compassion of God. As a mother, she gathers, she is compassionate, she unites at all costs. These are the qualities that Jean-Claude Colin saw as particularly

necessary in these times, and as particularly evident in Mary. She is the woman who gave birth to Jesus, who nursed Him and then let Him grow into independence. She is the woman who was present at the birth of the Church, bonding the believers to the Risen Jesus, and watching, waiting, gathering and uniting as the church grew to independence. These attitudes of gathering, uniting and suffering with are the attitudes that Jean-Claude Colin would like Marists to learn from Mary: they are the attitudes he would like to see Marists bring to all their relationships.

The Mayet Memoirs

The retreat of 1844 was conducted at Lyon in the usual devout and exemplary fashion. The elder Father Epalle gave the conferences and his brother, Bishop Epalle, took part. At the end of the retreat, Father Colin spoke a few words in the Chapel, among which I noted the following: "We are now in the age of Mary. ... What gratitude should we show to Mary for having chosen us to spread her Society, this Society comprising the three branches, because Mary intends to cover the whole earth with her mantle."

A mother's love

Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb? yet even if these forget, I will never forget you. See I have branded you on the palms of my hands. - Isaiah 49:15

'A mother's love does not depend upon any particular quality in the son, or on any similarity in thinking, or on any type of behaviour, but simply on the fact that this person is her son. Nothing can hide this reality. For a mother, an unbelieving son is not an unbeliever, but a son. That is what we must be if we have a mother's heart like Mary had. To react as a Marist before an unbeliever, is to accept him and not

to see in him the unbeliever but to see James, or Paul, or Andrew, a person whose heart and desires can be understood by God alone.

- Jean Coste, *sm*

A place in the heart

Her love for her children is not the possessive type of love that can stifle rather than quicken. Yet, her love remains a mother's love: it never gives up on her children; it favours especially those children who have lost their way and who seem least deserving. And so, Mary is the Mother of Mercy: she has found a place in her heart for all; she has a special concern for sinners who have lost their way, and her favourite place is to be hidden in the midst of the family of humankind, to be able to identify with them all in their needs, to be able to speak to all as from heart to heart without pretence.

- Edwin Keel, *sm*

Good qualities

When Isreal was a child I loved him, I myself taught him to walk, I took him in my arms. I was like someone who lifts an infant close to his cheek, stooping down to him I have him his food. - Hosea 11: 1-4.

I think the values and qualities of a true Marist are those which will be very effective in meeting the needs of the future Church. The idea that most captures for me what a Marist is, is that of a mother. We are called to be like Mary in showing forth the qualities and concerns of a mother, dedicated to her family and their welfare. This means that our first concern is for the needs of others, no matter how great or trivial. To a mother, no task is unimportant, from preparing lunches or dressing scraped knees; not because she may enjoy these sorts of things, but because her family depend on her and need her and she has a responsibility towards them. A mother would think nothing of leaving a sink of dishes to nurse a child with an illness or visit one in hospital. It also amazes me how wives are prepared to leave friends to follow their husbands to a different part of the country, or even a different country, because of his job. I think we should look on our bishop like

this, and be prepared to go and do whatever he wishes.

Compassion

An image that springs to mind... It is the hand outstretched that cools the fevered brow; it is the voice that says, not: "I see your problem", but rather: "I am with you in your trial and I understand what you are experiencing."

I like to think that my mother exhibits this virtue.

It is the hand that prepares the lunch each day that soothes a troubled spirit. In fact compassion is there when you arrive home from work or school each day, just as compassion was a carpenter's wife and the mother of Jesus.

For me compassion is a virtue of sharing. It is the ability to see another's need and to respond to it. Compassion allows us to enter into something of the experience that another person is having.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions

Attentive solely to the Lord, and aided by the prayer and example of Mary, they strive to become, in their Founder's words, ever more effective "instruments of divine mercy".

- Constitution 11

