

COMMISSIONING SPEECH

ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE HUNTERS HILL

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 26, 2015

Brothers, Family, Colleagues, Friends, Marists all,

I know that Br David will thank all who have been involved in this Eucharist at its conclusion, but I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to all of you for being here. I know that the mid-weekend of a school vacation is not the ideal time to have such a gathering, so thank you for your efforts to be present.

In particular I'd like to acknowledge my Sister Annemaree who is the real rock in our family and our cousin Julie, both of whom have travelled from Brisbane, and also the many others who have travelled distances – and I won't attempt to name individuals. Also to the Brothers who are Chapter delegates and will travel from here to Mittagong after the function to begin work tomorrow!

I'm very pleased that Fr Ray is our celebrant. Ray celebrated our mother's requiem Mass back in 2007 and before that I'd had the pleasure of spending some time with him in Chicago when we were both on sabbatical.

When I arrived in Sydney from Brisbane in February 1977 to start my Postulancy Brother Kieran Geaney, the Provincial of the time, was there to meet the 22 young men starting out to explore Marist life.

He gave each of us a simple black and white card. On the back he had written, 'Welcome to the Marists' dated and signed it. On the front was a photo of what I discovered was a group of Brothers gathered around the sanctuary of the old Dundas Scholasticate Chapel. Below the photo was a statement taken from the 1967 General Chapter document on Religious Life. It said: 'Ours is a call to show the world a new way of living: simple, joyful and fraternal'... to show the world a new way of living: simple, joyful and fraternal'.

I've kept that card because I've always believed those 3 words are a very apt credo for us as Brothers...

Simple – which is known as one of the primary virtues for which St Marcellin wanted his Little Brothers to be recognised: as in the 3 violets of modesty, humility and simplicity which so many of us wear as a pin.

Fraternal – which is the call to be brothers to each other, to those we minister to and with, to the Church and well beyond the community of believers

Joyful – which should be the natural outlook, the default position, of those who truly believe in the good news of Jesus.

Interestingly in so many of his public comments, Pope Francis has called the Church to embrace similar values: to proclaim the gospel with joy, to embrace simplicity in life-style, and to adopt an inclusive approach and an expansive compassion that will take us to the marginalised and maligned.

For a Brothers statement that was written 50 years ago, it still rings true today.

And of course there is also timelessness about the fourth significant word in the statement: 'new' – a new way of being. It is an idea with which we are very familiar. Every General Chapter in recent decades has called us to the new: listening to new calls (1993), a new Pentecost for the institute (2001), and most recently a renewed sense of consecration, a new way of being Brother, a new relationship between Brothers and lay Marists, and of course going in haste to new lands.

The call to the new is not itself new!

And this is not surprising given our Christian call to ongoing conversion and renewal.

The first reading tonight from Isaiah was selected because it captures so well the gift of newness given by God, but more specifically because it was the theme of our recently held inaugural Association Mission Assembly. Pope Francis has said that whenever authentic renewal takes place, *“new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different*

forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world". Certainly our Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat is one of those new and fresh expressions of the Christian way, of St Marcellin's vision; one that he would be very pleased with and proud of.

Every generation is called to renew itself and to walk closely in the footsteps of Jesus, ensuring they are not drifting from the true spirit of our Faith and calling. St Irenaeus wrote, "By his coming Jesus Christ brought with him all newness". And it is this newness that we rely on to renew our lives and communities.

As Brothers I firmly believe that our way of life as consecrated religious is as relevant and important now, today, as it has ever been; in fact, more important than ever! In an age like ours where noise is so persistent, activity so constant, where violence lurks so near the surface, consumerism is so prevalent, where faith in God is regarded as irrelevant or as a quaint relic of the past, and even people of faith can be infected by rampant secularism – there needs to be an alternative view of life and the world.

And that is our contemporary challenge, our privileged call as Marists and Religious.

Our call is not to build an empire for our own aggrandisement, but to build community to embrace the many; not to trust in competition to deliver results, but to act in compassion to make a difference, not to promote

individualism but to enable communion. Our way of life should help to shatter the contemporary illusions based on the prevalence and priority of self-sufficiency, self-importance and self-centredness.

The newness that we seek will be found in returning humbly to the sources of our life and spirit, to re-discovering the essentials and to recovering the original freshness of our call.

This is not to deny the challenges that we as Brothers and an Association face. I don't need to elaborate on what they are. We have to admit the fragility of circumstances, acknowledge errors of the past, and reconcile our past to our future. This can only be achieved by facing realities and attending to the issues of today.

Tonight as Provincial and leader of our Association I don't stand here with any well-crafted plan or elaborate strategies, with any slogans or logos, I don't claim to have the answers to daunting questions; in fact I'm not sure I even have all the questions.

But I do believe strongly that we will together work, collaborate, share; that we will together identify the key questions and challenges for our time and that we will together map out a path into the future. This is what St Marcellin did; he worked with others; he built community. So we will take up the challenges of today and, in the words of Br Michael Herry's song: we will follow Christ as Mary did, for this is the pearl we seek – together.