

The Marist Pilgrimage 2017
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For my reflection this evening, I am not going to focus on one event, but the Pilgrimage to date. So sit back and relax, I have informed the kitchen that we will probably not be eating until near 9pm.

Why did I undertake this Pilgrimage?

To bring the story of my Faith journey alive, something that has driven my whole life and career. This was the key reasoning behind my decision to undertake my Pilgrimage.

To tell you all the truth, the Pilgrimage at the beginning challenged my faith and at some stages really worked in opposite ways to what I had hoped for.

It is interesting that in today's gospel Jesus is asked - 'What sign will you give to show us that we should believe in you? What work will you do?'

I found myself asking the same type of question as I proceeded to question the whole Jesus/ Trinitarian God story. I am not talking about the historical Jesus, as that has been clearly proven to us; I am talking about the risen Christ messiah and this is based on the significant contrasts that faced us with every step I took.

The contrasts that I witnessed are as follows:

If Christ is the true messiah and God is omniscient, then why do the people in Jordan live such harsher lives than those in Israel. Why did God tell the Tribe of Judah that it was their land if he knew how they would treat the Palestinians as they do?

Why did only some recognise Jesus as the Messiah, whilst others undertook the barbaric acts of flagellation and crucifixion, that we all got a feel for during the visit to the Church of St. Peter's and when we undertook the stations of the cross through the narrow pathways that Christ would have walked.

Why is the whole of Jerusalem not one very special religious site, as opposed to a living functioning city that simply continues with normal life around these important historical settings.

The Contrasts continue when we arrived in Rome and witnessed the opulence of the Vatican and surrounding churches as we also did in Lyon. Why did these amazing basilicas need to be built, especially in a time when many people were suffering with starvation and disease.

I kept asking myself - where is God, where is Jesus today in these holy places? How do I recontextualise these events and places when I bear witness myself as a father, husband, teacher and friend??

Where will be the places of Pilgrimage in the future times?? Especially as we are still visiting areas that were established between 2,000 and 200 years ago.

And yet, the answer was right in front of my eyes all the time. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, I too was so preoccupied with what I was looking at, that I placed myself in my own wilderness. I was not recognising the Trinitarian God alive amongst the people I met and journeyed with.

Just like the storm at the Sea of Galilee, I have learned that it is when we open our hearts and minds to God that God will lead us to where we need to be, not want to be. Each day I prayed hard for this and gently the answers came very clear from amongst you as pilgrims.

The contrasts regarding God as an omniscient and omnibenevolent God, giving the Promised Land to the tribe of Judah - actually was best summarised by Fr Gary when he spoke about the positive relationships among people who live in harsher conditions. This is what God wanted - love and happiness amongst peoples. This concept was further manifested in the difference in security between the Israelis and Jordanians. The Israelis certainly appeared to be living in fear.

As for the barbaric act against Jesus - he said it many times himself and through his journey to the resurrection - to know God, we must undertake a journey of faith. It is clear that many people are afraid and unwilling to undertake a journey that will challenge their comfortable outlook on life. However, listening to us as pilgrims on this part of our faith journey, we have all challenged ourselves sometimes to the point of tears and frustration to achieve this relationship with God. However, the key to this was that this was NOT done simply as individuals.

The wilderness was a real light bulb moment. Whilst having this amazing experience, it wasn't amazing until I could share it with others in the group and especially my wife and children. Love is the same, it is not love until shared - hence the need for places of worship to share the happiness of loving God. These large, highly decorated basilicas are a reflection of this love for God and each other.

The unrelenting number of pilgrims from across the globe and all levels of society, is a living testament to Christ walking amongst us.

These past number of days have clearly highlighted the importance of a charism, such as the Marist way, to guide and support us on our faith journey to know God, through Mary by becoming Mary. As a mother, Mary is the director of love amongst our Christian family, therefore, it is important that we do the work of Mary to guide ourselves and others to recognise the living God among us, just as Marcellin did.

I always said that my first time going to the Holy Land and Rome would only be as a pilgrim, I am so glad that God gave me the wisdom to make this decision. An historical tour, was transformed into a deepening and reinvigoration of my own faith journey thanks to the elaborations by the Brs and the celebrations of the Masses by Fr Gary - the highlight of my Pilgrimage.

In our reading today from Water from the Rock read very well by James; we hear how Marcellin found happiness in sharing experiences and love within community life. Again, illustrating the fact that Love and Happiness cannot exist as an individual entity, it needs to exist amongst us. Where 2 or 3 of my people are gathered, I am there with them. Christ was certainly with Marcellin and the brothers and with us today, when one examines the amazing achievements that have and continue to happen.

I wanted to deliver this presentation so I could thank all of you - you have allowed me to share this amazing experience, therefore sharing love and happiness, which I believe is places of pilgrimage not just for the future, but the here and now - the love shared especially within our families, schools and communities is where God is present.

So our challenge is to work together to find ways in which we as Catholic Marists can awaken our communities to this living presence of God, especially by our own witness by being the Lighthouse we are commissioned to be. The Letter of 1823 that Br Michael very elaborately guided us through today, certainly is a precious gem as it gives us the key leadership skill portrayed by Marcellin himself that we need to emulate: LBW - Leadership by walking.

Whilst undertaking LBW, Forget about the negatives that we face when people talk about not being able to make a horse drink when taking it to the river - as I said to Br Andrew in a discussion - our vocation in life is not to force the horse, but make it thirsty. Therefore, I invite you all to follow the example of Marcellin and all those who have went before us that we have experienced on this Pilgrimage, in order to be present as leaders and find ways to make people thirsty for God.