

MARIST BICENTENARY MASS

Address from the Provincial



St Stephen's Cathedral, Brisbane QLD / Marcellin College Bulleen VIC / St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta NSW

This message, from Br Peter Carroll FMS, was delivered during the Bicentenary Masses in Brisbane, Bulleen and Parramatta on Saturday, 12 August 2017

On January 2, 1817 Marcellin Champagnat began Marist mission and life. And how did he do this? Not by making a grand proclamation, or by opening an educational facility, or laying the foundations for an imposing building. No! He did it, in reality, by forming community – by bringing together a small group to undertake, together, a special task. In one sense it was a most inauspicious beginning. But as we, in the Judeo-Christian tradition know so well, our God often does the unexpected, and uses the unusual to achieve his will. And so it's been for Marcellin and his followers. And it will be for us. Ours is truly a God of surprises.

In his bicentenary message, Brother Emili Turú, Superior General of the Marist Brothers, suggested that three words, or three realities, should shape our celebrations: *gratitude*, *forgiveness* and *commitment*.

GRATITUDE

Anniversaries and celebrations such as these prompt our memories and reminiscences, and these readily and rightly inspire a sense of gratitude. At its most authentic, gratitude is more than a passing sentiment or a stirring of emotion: at its deepest, gratitude is a journey and a discovery.

And when we look back, what do we discover? Essentially two key elements: Grace and Gift. The grace of God that has empowered us, and the gifts others have made of themselves in so many diverse ways. There is no better way to celebrate this occasion than to be gathered at Eucharist, the great sacrament of thanksgiving, with family, friends, colleagues, supporters.

When the Marist Brothers began 200 years ago, the fledgling group had virtually no material resources, and when the first 4 Brothers arrived in Australia in 1872, they likewise had nothing more than an invitation from Archbishop Polding and a place to start teaching students.

What has occurred over the last 200 years has been extraordinary. It has been achieved through a combination of divine providence and human tenacity and endeavour.

So today, on behalf of Br Emili, I want to express gratitude to:

- The Brothers, most of whom have served for long years and often, particularly in earlier years, in difficult situations.
- The men who were Brothers for a time, and who have remained supportive and loyal.
- The families and friends of the Brothers and our Affiliated Members, who have given love and encouragement, and so much more.
- Newer Marists – Members of the Association of St Marcellin, colleagues, teachers, school staff members, students of schools, young Marists, staff of our Centres, all have enriched Marist life and mission.
- Bishops, Priests, Religious women and men, who have been collaborators and permitted the Marists to evangelise in their own way.
- We have also had some marvellously generous benefactors and supporters all around the country; who have made donations, provided volunteer labour and given friendship and moral support.

All of these are represented here today – and to all of you, I express sincere gratitude. Marist life and mission would not exist, and would never have existed here or elsewhere, without you.
Thank you!

FORGIVENESS

Neither individuals' stories, nor the stories of groups or institutions, are uniformly positive. There are always failings and failures. Our journeys are always a composite of light and shadow.

Our Marist failures are now well documented. The Royal Commission has brought into the open the crimes of Brothers and staff members and our inadequacies in responding effectively and compassionately to survivors of abuse.

My predecessor, Jeff Crowe, and I have had opportunity to apologise publicly for these crimes and failures; I do it again today, and I do so willingly.

To those men and women who, as innocent children, were entrusted into the care of Marist schools and institutions, and who were abused and damaged, sometimes permanently, I offer our deepest remorse and apology. To their parents who placed them into our care and who, without doubt, have questioned and regretted their decision, I also offer our profound apology. To their families and loved ones who have journeyed with them in their pain, I also apologise.

There is no doubt that St Marcellin would share our shock, shame and sorrow; such abuse is the antithesis of his hopes and wishes. He had only condemnatory words for anyone who willfully hurt a child.

I also apologise to you – Marists, colleagues, supporters, and leaders and members of the Church. These crimes have shocked, hurt and embarrassed you. Justifiably, you may have questioned your commitment to the Marists and the Marist way. It is a tragedy that there are so

many primary and secondary victims of this history of abuse. But a special word of gratitude to you – for remaining: loyal, committed and hopeful.

However, my apology today needs to go beyond the arena of child sexual abuse. There are other ways in which we have failed to live out the high standards and noble goals set us by our Founder.

St Marcellin prohibited the use of corporal punishment. Somehow, after Marcellin's death, here in the antipodes and elsewhere, this instruction was forgotten or ignored. Unfortunately, in some places and at some times, Marist schools became hard and harsh environments, governed by fear and regimentation. Fortunately, that was not every students' experience; but for others it was. For this failure, I also apologise.

For his Brothers, Fr Champagnat wanted a family spirit. However, this has not always been the experience. Some have been hurt and as a result have carried disappointment for many years. Many were taken away from families at too young an age, many were given no or very limited teacher training and education, some had to wait decades before being granted the opportunity to study. Most worked extraordinarily hard in sometimes unforgiving environments. Those who had difficulty teaching and maintaining classroom control were regarded as failures. Community life could be hierarchical, hard, regimented. At times you have been ignored and taken for granted. For this, and to you, I also apologise.

We all know that life is pockmarked by difficulties and pain. For those times, and in those ways that we Marists have added to the burden and disappointed you, I am genuinely sorry and ask your forgiveness.

COMMITMENT

At this particular juncture in our Marist journey, we pause, we remember, we offer thanks, we recognise our failures and ask forgiveness, but we do not stop still. We start again, we look to the horizon and we commit to the future.

Ours is a challenging time. Our nation is one of the most secular in the world, faith in God is in decline, Christianity is under attack, the Catholic Church has lost credibility, the Marist Brothers and Religious generally are diminishing.

However, the environment in which Marcellin started his Marist mission was not so different. France had been ravaged by revolution, secularism was dominant, education was in tatters. And yet it was exactly in this situation, and because of it, that he began his work. Can we do any less?

Some years ago the famous Italian Jesuit, Cardinal Carlo Martini, wrote:

Everything has a meaning, and this meaning is luminous and life-giving. In other words, despite the darkness of humanity's current circumstances, despite the human tragedy surrounding us, despite the trials of the Church and the well-nigh absurd situations through which the world and we ourselves have to pass, at the bottom of everything there lives a Gospel, a Gospel which

assures us that there is indeed a luminous and life-giving reason for all these things, if only we know how to grasp it and let ourselves be transformed by it.

It is to such an endeavour that we Marists must commit.

To evangelise first and foremost by witness, to be present to the young and help nurture them and their faith, to assist them make life meaningful in a complex and fragmented world, to give creative expression to the Marian dimension of our Church, to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Redeemer – these are our commitments.

What more privileged role can we have?

It is said that St Marcellin had a dream – and that's true. But he had much more than that. What motivated, fired and empowered him? It was those three cardinal virtues – *faith, hope and love*: a vibrant and courageous faith in God, enduring hope that good will emerge from difficult situations, and robust, practical love for the young and the communities in which he was involved. Like Marcellin, these are what we need today and to which we must commit ourselves.

The proximity of the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption is why this particular date was selected for these Bicentenary celebrations. It's a fitting date because of our very nature as Marists, because it's the patronal Feast day of the Institute, and just as importantly, because it is pre-eminently a day when we commemorate Christian Hope: our beliefs that life continues beyond the transitory, that humanity is redeemed and divinised through faith in Jesus and that love endures forever.

Mary our Good Mother, first disciple of the Lord, woman of faith and commitment, accompany us on our journey into the future. You who have done everything for us, continue to bless and guide us, and instill in us the faith, hope and love we need to remain faithful to your Son, Jesus Christ.

All is gift!

Ad Jesum per Mariam!

***Br Peter Carroll FMS
Provincial – Marist Brothers Province of Australia
Leader – Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat
(Australian Conference)
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