

## ***A Manuel of Marianist Spirituality***



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### **PART ONE: Spirit as Life**

When God calls us to follow Jesus, “life in abundance” is generated in our spirit. Spirituality is the particular approach we take to living that inner life. The principles, practices, and methods we use to develop and enjoy the life of the spirit all form part of our spirituality. But before talking about spirituality, we need to understand something about spirit.

#### **SPIRIT**

Spirit is what gives life to a being. It is the energy that enables something to move itself from within. The life of our spirit is expressed in thinking, feeling, deciding, and acting. When we work or talk or think, this is a human expression of our spirit. In other words, spirit is what makes us alive.

We believe that our spirit can exist apart from our body, but we have no experience of it. Our experience of ourselves is that we are one being, one living body. We know the spirit can leave the body because we see it happen in people who die. When the spirit is gone, the body is dead. It has no life to move itself. So we know

that there is a distinction between the body and the spirit, because we see a separation in death.

It is helpful to make a further distinction concerning our spirit. As the animating principle of our being, our spirit is referred to as “psyche” or “soul.” The operations of our psyche can take place without reference to God, without embracing the reality of the Holy Spirit. Thought, memory, imagination, feeling, and decision – without an active relationship to God – are operations of our psyche. But when we refer to the inner depths of our being, open and awake to the Holy Spirit, we specifically name it *spirit*. Properly speaking, the operations of our spirit fuse the life of the psyche with the Spirit of God. There is new creation because there is a new life moving in us. Although this tripartite division of our being is not a widespread anthropology today, it is referred to by Saint Paul. “May the God of peace...sanctify you entirely: and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 5:23). Such a triple distinction in human nature is not necessary for good psychology, but it is necessary to understand Marianist spirituality.

We are meant to live all three levels of life in a harmonious unity. The spirit gives lightness to the body, and the body lends cohesion to the spirit. But the movement toward life – abundant and eternal – is centered in the spirit. The body tends toward enjoying life rooted in material things; the spirit tends toward a free and fuller life. *When the body serves the spirit, the body is drawn into fuller life with the qualities of the spirit. If the spirit is subject to the body, the spirit is limited by the impulses of the body.* For the spirit, such limitation spells diminution and eventually death. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:5-7).

[We will continue with *PART ONE: Spirit as Life* in the next series. Below, let me introduce a prayer style that will help you get in more touch with your ‘spirit’.]

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## ***Practice of the Presence of God***

When we want to be influenced by someone, we try in some way to get in touch with that person's presence. Father Chaminade insisted on the same principle concerning God...We need to be, in our daily living, in touch with God.

God is present everywhere as a creative and sustaining power. But there is more: God is present to us as a person who understands everything about us, who loves us, and whose presence brings us life in abundance. We can converse with such a God at anytime, anywhere.

Living in the presence of God does not mean we are always specifically thinking of God. It does mean we become so accustomed to God's presence and so familiar with God that our conduct and our attitudes are constantly influenced by that presence.

Father Chaminade taught us to acquire an attitude of living in God's presence by making acts of faith in that presence. These acts can take many forms. For example:

- We can offer ourselves to God as we wake up and get dressed in the morning.

- We can place ourselves in God's hands as an instrument of Providence as we begin our work or as we work.

- We can give ourselves over to living the virtues of Jesus when we need to be patient, to forgive, or to relate to a difficult person.

- We can make a deliberate act of trust that grace is at work when we meet difficulties or feel ineffective.

Living in God's presence gives us life in many ways. To the degree of our openness and receptivity, we receive divine goodness into our personality; we are governed by the wisdom of Providence; we find our worth in the God dwelling within us. The practice of the presence of God is fundamental to our whole life and work as Marianists.

*Begin today to make acts of faith in God's presence at some particular time or situation in your day. Set aside several times in your day to at least be present to God for a moment.*