

PART FOUR: Principles of Marianist Spirituality

There are some laws of the life of the Spirit that must be respected if we are to grow to maturity. They are not imposed from the outside; rather, they are principles drawn out of the very nature of the spiritual life. The following are six such principles that are repeated often in the statement of Marianist spirituality. These principles help to shape our attitudes and to guide us in carrying out our mission. They likewise give us a precious insight into Mary's way of making us one with Jesus, as she continues to generate his transforming presence in the world.

1. The *quality* of our presence is more important than our work.

We often hear it said that what we are is more important than what we do. Yet we so often measure our importance only by what we do, and we ignore the presence communicated in our work. Every achievement carries with it an aura which is more important than the accomplishment itself. Kahlil Gibran puts this well in *The Prophet*:

Work is love made visible. And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy. For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake bitter bread that feeds but half a person's hunger.

This is why we want to do all our work with the virtues of Jesus. Our work should be the virtues of Jesus made visible. The most important effect of our work comes from the quality of our presence in doing the work.

-Presence means being with someone in a way that *makes a difference*. The difference may be subtle or even go unnoticed, but something changes.

-Our presence can be *superficial, or more profound*. I care, interest, love, or helpfulness marks our presence, others meet us on a deeper level and the change is more significant.

-Our presence can be *positive or negative* – that is, the change our presence calls forth in others can be toward good or evil.

-Presence is *not sterile or inactive*. It is a relationship which communicates what we are. Only loving and caring presence generates life.

2. The quality of our presence is determined by the virtues of Jesus in us: “*The essential is the interior.*”

The effect of our presence is determined chiefly by our attitudes, inner dispositions, and virtues. Presence transforms. Whether that transformation is superficial or profound, positive or negative, depends on the quality of our interior life. So we value the effect of presence that comes from within more than we do the changes made by external force.

When we speak of the interior life, we mean the very thing Jesus came to bring to us in abundance, that is, the spiritual energy that enables us and moves us from within. To the extent that we are alive, to this extent we are able to move ourselves. Life fills us with creativity and motivation and joy.

The direction of our life energy depends on how our personality (our psyche) is disposed. Our attitudes and our dispositions make us ready and inclined to act in a certain way. This is why we give a great deal of attention to taking on the virtues of Jesus, because they determine the quality of our presence.

3. The radical change that our Marianist vocation demands is *usually gradual and progressive*. It is seldom sudden, and it is never violent. It is Mary’s way of forming us.

It is important to keep this principle in mind; otherwise, we might become impatient and try to force things ourselves. There is also a danger that we do not recognize the change taking place, and consequently we give up our effort.

Because our growing in the virtues of Jesus and carrying out his works is usually gradual and progressive, persevering fidelity in the daily practice of these virtues and works is important. Jesus himself was formed and grew gradually and progressively by the action of the Holy Spirit through Mary.

4. Every effective grace is a collaboration. Living the virtues of Jesus and doing his works is always *a collaboration between God and us*.

Jesus himself said he is the vine and we are the branches. He stressed the fact that we cannot produce fruit without him. It is likewise true that grapes do not grow on the vine but are produced on the branches. When we give 100 percent, it must be always in union with God and Mary, who also are giving their 100 percent. Both the vine and the branches are necessary at every moment for fruitful results.

5. Conformity with Jesus in his virtues and his works *always demands a double action:*

- a dying and a coming to new life,
- eliminating vices and developing virtues,
- denying the old self and developing the new self,
- putting something to death and bringing something to life.

Both actions must be exercised together for a balance in our spiritual life. The tendency to stress one or the other too much – to the point of disorder – is the result of not exercising them together.

6. A virtue is not complete *until it is expressed in service.*

For this reason we have been saying that we must assume the virtues and the works of Jesus. If a virtue is really of Jesus, it will move us to service. If the service is really of Jesus, it will come from virtue. Virtue that is not expressed in service is sterile; works that do not come from the virtues of Jesus end up being destructive.

All these principles will be found stated in various ways throughout the description of Marianist spirituality. They are given here together as a help to understanding the method of Marianist spirituality.