

MISIONEROS MARISTAS

CASILLA 345, TARIJA, BOLIVIA

Tel: (591)4/6644983(H)|4-6658316(O)|65813351(M)

Email: johnhopkinson@yahoo.com.mx

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September 12th 2016- Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary

Dear Friends,

Today we three men of our Marist Community and Team find ourselves in the provincial town of Luque outside of Asuncion, capital of Paraguay. It is here that we are participating along with another 220 delegates in the 10th Latinamerican Encounter of Comunidades Eclesiales de Base [Base Church Communities –CEBs]. We have been here in Paraguay since September 7th, having first been active in two prior meetings: that of the regional articulators of which we are the ones responsible for the Andean Region of CEBs [Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador & Peru], followed by the annual meeting of the assessors of each of the Latin American countries where we have evaluated the journey of the respective CEBs throughout the continent and come up with proposals and orientations for the coming years that we hope will inject new life into the process of CEBs. As Marists we are aware that today [Sept 12th] as we begin the Latinamerican Encounter is our special day being the feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary –our patronal feast as Marists. We began this great coming together of CEBs here in Paraguay on September 8th –the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and it was our Marist Team that commenced the process, having been responsible for organizing the opening liturgy. We chose as its focus *Mary and the Wedding Feast of Cana* found in Chapter 2 of the Gospel of John. This provoked a very profound and beautiful sharing by the participants and set the tone for the days ahead and what we hoped to experience for our communities and our people, with the assurance that Mary –this young peasant Woman of Nazareth –would be accompanying us.

In our 4 days of meetings with the 35 assessors from the various countries of Latin America we become aware of the common commitment and visión that each of us share: that of a Church that is People and a People that is Church –that unites one’s faith to life and one’s life to one’s faith; that mode of being Church that Jesus desired and that the Apostles left us –Christ centered and one characterized by communion and participation....and thus, a sign of hope in today’s world.

We find ourselves among a group of very close friends who have dared to believe in another possible world and way of being Church and who for the past 15 years have met with this passion to together discern and assume strategies or lines of action to realize this utopia. Among the 35 figure women and men, militant members and animators of their base communities, ordained ministers, lay missionaries and religious, leading Latin American theologians, sociologists, pastoralists, liturgists, communicators, lecturers, etc. One is truly energized and filled with joy as we come together, sharing our journey and seeking guidance and encouragement to continue the process. We have a common sense of being Church and conscious of our historic responsibility today. We are committed to the implementation of the 2nd Vatican Council and to that of the General Councils of Bishops of the Latin American Church [Medellin 1968, Puebla 1979, Aparecida 2009] in face of efforts to derail the process or to turn back the clock, leaving us with a Church that

today does not respond to the hopes and aspirations, the pains, anxieties and sadness of today's world as expressed in the opening chapter of the document *Gaudium et Spes –the Church in Today's World* of the 2nd Vatican Council. As a Marist Team we humbly contribute to this process and can say that we are received with such tender affection and appreciation.

From here in Paraguay on this September 12th as we inaugurate now the 10th Latin American CEBs Encounter we look back on some recent happenings back home in Bolivia. Today Bolivia is still trying to recover from two weeks of blockades and confrontations, instigated by a group of miners who belong to various mining cooperatives. These "*cooperativistas*" –as they are called- supposedly were protesting the new mining law decreed by the government in an effort to curb the corruption in the industry and to guarantee that these mining co-operatives pay their just taxes. To a large extent these so-called "*cooperativistas*" –now converted into grand capitalists- have over the years and against existing laws, sold their mining concessions to transnational corporations who simply exploit and invert less than 20% of their gains from production in form of salaries for the poor miners and production costs; 80% of the profit going tax-free outside the country for the benefit of these transnationals. Once again in Bolivia since the coming to power of a popular government we see how foreign interests and governments consistently try to destabilize the country and our government. The political right of Bolivia who form the minority opposition join forces with these to create situations in the country in efforts to bring about new political and social crisis and turmoil in efforts to overthrow the legitimate and democratic government that is in power and has the massive support of the Bolivian people. The former ruling class and oligarchy that make up the Right are assessed and supported by these foreign concerns and the social media. In the present context we have come through 3 days of national mourning following the brutal assassination of one of our leading government ministers who in all goodwill went to dialogue with the "*cooperativistas*". They took him hostage, and brutally attacked him, tortured him and having stripped him naked beat him to death and later throw his mangled body by the roadside. Another 5 deaths were as a result of the confrontations. In addition in their blockades of the roads and highway they used dynamite and explosives and wrecked and burnt several of the vehicles that had been stranded for days. An intensive investigation of what has transpired is under way by the judicial authorities and some arrests have been made of those materially involved and the intellectual authors of this attempt against the state.

Some brief news concerning our Marist Community. Firstly, some bad news. In the past 2 months we have had 4 break-ins: our office downtown, vehicle & 2 at our rural retreat house. In each case the culprits escaped and are unknown. The good news: after some health concerns among members of the community, all are presently up and running. We realize that Juan in 2017 will celebrate 40 years as a Marist missionary at the service of the Latin American Church and we have hopes of the possibility that he can get to his native Australia at the end of this year so as to celebrate the event with those who have supported him over these years and shared with us to make our Marist mission possible. We pray that economically we can continue the missioning.

Know that you are constantly held in our prayers and thoughts.

With all our love: GILBERTO|ARMINDA|JUAN JOSE|GILBERTITO|MARIAN-JAVIER|NAIR|LUPO|PACO -JUAN