



What Does It Mean to be a Spectacle of Saints in the 21st Century?

By Bro. David Betz

As Marianists, we know that Blessed Chaminade, according to Jean Baptiste Armbruster, S.M., “...considered himself the servant of a Church that needed to be reconstructed as a People of God, a people of saints.” (p. 149) He had a desire to form men and women to be witnesses who proclaimed the Good News. Chaminade wanted these men and women to be seen in the community and through their words and deeds to enter the process of multiplying Christians in post-revolutionary France. Our Blessed Founder wanted his followers to be a “spectacle of saints.” What does this mean for us today?

If we look at the definition of spectacle, it means something exhibited to view as unusual, notable, or entertaining. For us, Marianists, I believe that in our present day if we want to be true to our Founders’ desire, we must look at being saints that witness to something that is viewed as notable. And just as in Chaminade’s time, this something notable is the Good News or the Reign of God. This Reign of God is the prophetic message that Peter spoke about in his 2nd Letter, Chapter 1:16 –19. It is a message that is reliable, and we are called to be attentive to it in our hearts. We are being called to witness to justice, to peace, to the dignity of others, to respect others, to be welcoming and inclusive. We are being called to demonstrate God’s Law of Love meaning that we love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul and to love others as we want to be loved. And a primary tool to achieve this witnessing to the Reign of God has been our Characteristics of Marianist Education: 1) Educate for Formation in Faith; 2) Provide an Integral, Quality Education; 3) Educate in Family Spirit; 4) Educate for Service, Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation and 5) Educate for Adaption and Change. And it has been these Characteristics that has led our other ministries such as parishes, retreat centers and universities, to develop characteristics specific to their work. But of course, this work is being done under the auspices of Mary who we honor as a model of faith in our lives as Marianists.

Let me now explain one way that allows us to be a witness or a spectacle to God’s Reign. We, Marianists, pride ourselves in being welcoming and showing hospitality. We talk about inviting people to the Marianist Table as a sign of our inclusivity. I have found this similar to what Fr. Bryan Massingale in his book, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, describes as “The Welcome Table.” The Welcome Table is an image from a black spiritual that Fr. Massingale cites:

I'm gonna sit at the welcome table,
I'm gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days,
Hallelujah.

I'm gonna sit at the welcome table,
I'm gonna sit at the welcome table one of these day.

I'm gonna walk the streets of glory. . . .
I'm gonna tell God how you treat me. . . .

I'm gonna feast on milk and honey. . . .
I'm gonna drink at the crystal fountain. . . .
We'll give thanks at the welcome table. . . .

Fr. Massingale describes how this song is a symbol of hope and how the African American community when they were enslaved saw that the welcome table was a sign of hospitality and embrace. But it is a hospitality and embrace specifically to those who have been excluded and oppressed. It calls for a “...pursuit of justice especially for those who are excluded from practical membership in the human community.” (p. 139) And there is another part that is important: those who sang this song actively sought the invitation to sit at the welcome table. They were not passive. They took part in concrete steps to achieve their participation at the welcome table. “Thus the “welcome table” metaphor expresses a conviction of inherent dignity, worth, and agency...” (p. 139) So, I am saying that as Marianists when we say that we are welcoming, we must consciously find ways and challenges ourselves to be inclusive and to pursue justice for those who are marginalized in our society.

See:

Armbruster, Jean Baptiste, “The Roots of Marianist Missionary Spirituality,” in *The Promised Woman, Proceedings of the International Symposium on Marianist Spirituality*, Ed. Lawrence J. Cada, S.M., (Dayton, OH, North American Center for Marianist Studies, March 1995, pp. 145 – 189)

Massingale, Bryan M., *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Book, 2010)

Characteristics of Marianist Education, 25th Anniversary Edition, (Society of Mary, Marianists, Province of the United States, 2020)