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MARIST ASSOCIATION OF SAINT MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

Dare to Imagine a Life Shaped by Grace

2026 Marian Lecture

On the evening of Tuesday 12 May, over 550 people gathered online and in person and in small groups across the country for the Marist Association of Saint Marcellin Champagnat's annual Marian Lecture.

This year's lecture was delivered by Anglican theologian Rev. Dr Sarah Bachelard. A Rhodes Scholar who studied at Oxford under Rowan Williams, she is the founder of Benedictus Contemplative Church and a teacher of philosophy, ethics and spirituality. She is also a member of the World Community for Christian Meditation, she is the author of several books, including *Pools of Grace*.

She delivered a compelling and deeply human Marian Lecture, inviting listeners to consider what a life shaped by grace might look like in a world marked by striving, anxiety and fragmentation. Drawing on personal experience, scripture, philosophy and contemporary Catholic thought, she offered a vision of Christian life that is expectant, merciful and true.

Dr Bachelard began with a candid account of her own crisis following her PhD, years marked by exhaustion, self-doubt and the pressure to "*be exceptional*." Her turning point came unexpectedly while sitting alone at Darling Harbour in Sydney, where she realised she could simply "*be*" - a moment she described as an experience of pure grace.

"I could relax and be simply human, a human being among others, no better and no worse," she recalled.

This awakening opened her once again to faith, not through doctrine but through a renewed capacity to love others without fear or self-protection. Grace, she emphasised, is everywhere yet often unnoticed. Drawing on poets Gerard Manley Hopkins and Denise Levertov, she described grace as the shimmering presence of God in ordinary life, and the human struggle to remain open to it.

She explored two pathways that deepen receptivity to grace: failure and loss, which dismantle self-reliance and contemplative prayer, which slowly loosens the ego's grip. Both routes lead to what she called "*poverty of spirit*" - a radical openness, exemplified by Mary, whose *fiat* "Let it be with me" becomes a model for Christian availability.

Sarah concluded the lecture highlighting, to live expectantly, mercifully, and truthfully, is profoundly counter-cultural;

"It requires courage to resist the pressures of efficiency, polarisation and denial. Yet grace continually invites us into a new way of being, toward maturity in Christ and participation in the healing of the world."

The host of the lecture, Dr John Kyle-Robinson, Regional Director of Marist Schools Australia, thanked Sarah for her words and extended the collective gratitude of all gathered for the way in which she invited everyone to journey into a new way of being, toward a maturity in Christ and participation in the healing of the world.

Further Information: Mark O'Farrell – Marist Schools Australia mark.ofarrell@marists.org.au



Photo: Rev. Dr Sarah Bachelard delivering the 2026 Marian Lecture



Photo: Dr John Kyle-Robinson welcoming the studio audience for the 2026 Marian Lecture at Southern Cross Catholic College, Burwood.