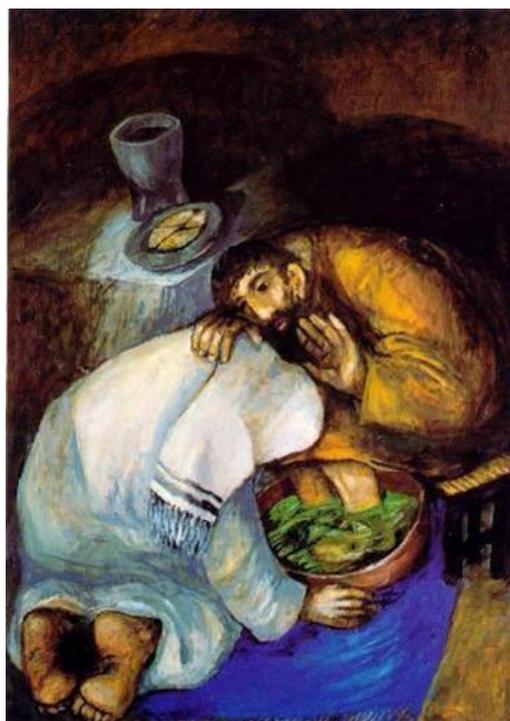


CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVANT LEADER

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SERVANT LEADERSHIP



Continuing our *common* reflection on leadership initiated in the previous info, we will now focus on “servant leadership”.

The 35th General Chapter defines clearly the type of leadership we need “*a leadership that will be there to strengthen and give support each step of the way, that will exercise authority and animation in an evangelical way which is one of respect, appreciating others, listening, discernment, co-responsibility...*”.

The life of the spiritual leader, must be focused on Jesus and on how he served, Jesus defined the meaning of his mission as “*I did not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many*” (Mk 10:45), or even more precisely “*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full*” (Jn 10:10). Making it possible for all to have fullness of life is the identity card of the life and mission of Jesus, Jesus understood and took on this “giving of life” in its most radical sense, even to the cross; but also in the daily living out of his apostolic life: healing, comforting, welcoming and sharing with sinners; freeing and proclaiming to all the Kingdom as the Good News of the Father.

In the same vein, Pope Francis, in his address to the Major Superiors, in May 2013, said: “*Always exercise authority by supporting, understanding, helping, loving, embracing everyone, and especially people who are lonely, excluded, desolate, in the existential peripheries of the human heart. Let us look towards the cross, wherein lies all authority in the Church, where He who is Lord becomes a servant giving of himself totally*”.

The service of authority in religious life demands a new leadership that is not based on power but on service. An authentic ministry from the source of humility and service, a mission understood as availability and giving, and not as a task to be carried out: “*I am among you as one who serves*” (Lk 22: 27). Shed the cloak and kneel before the sisters, be like the Master and ask that all “*do as I have done*” (Jn. 13: 15).

All of us, at certain moments of our lives, have been changed, encouraged and challenged by the Servant of Yahweh: sometimes when faced with our own suffering and that of others, sometimes, I would say for the majority of us, when we see the suffering of the Servant of Yahweh in the many crucifixions throughout history, and at other times we discover the Servant embodied in the attitudes of humility and degradation in those who are careful not to break the bruised reed nor quench the wavering flame that still has some light (Is 42:3).

Through the Word of God we know that the first person to fully embrace the way of being and the attitudes of the Servant of Yahweh was Jesus. Therefore, the invitation for us is clear: we are called to be part of his discipleship and to let His Being and His Word transform us. We know that our option for Him brings with it the consequences of being like him, as He himself says to us: “*If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant shall be there too*” (Jn. 12,26).

Jesus has called us and keeps on calling us to follow him, to share his life and his destiny, to experience his own feelings and attitudes. Although at this time we may not have leadership services, the call is for everyone, because all are called to live as the Servant did, to promote and facilitate life so that this service of leadership entrusted to some sisters may be a visible and credible witness, thanks to the life and mission of all. It is also important not to lose sight that we are all somehow “leaders to one another” in our everyday lives.

It is not easy to live as Jesus did, but it is the way we have freely chosen and what our last Capitular decisions asks of us. Let our allow our hearts to remain open to be changed by Jesus and His Word and to embody in our daily lives Jesus’ way of relating to others.

The following theme for reflection, is a fragment taken from: “Post-Vatican II Perspectives on Religious Leadership” by Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB, UISG Conference in the Assembly of May 2013.

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Listening and Availability: Superiors as Servant Leaders are present to their Sisters not only physically but with their whole being. A servant leader has the motivation to listen actively to their sisters and to support their decision and identify with them. The servant leader particularly needs to pay attention to what remains unspoken. This means relying on her inner voice in order to find out what the body, mind and spirit are communicating.

Empathy: A servant leader attempts to understand and empathize with others. Sisters are entitled to respect and appreciation for their personal development. She should not make herself the measure of judging others, but should accept them as they are.

Healing: A great strength of a servant leader is the ability to heal herself and others. A servant leader tries to help people solve their problems and conflicts in relationships, because she wants to encourage and support the personal development of each individual. This leads to the formation of a community environment that is dynamic, happy and free from fear of failure.

Awareness: A servant leader needs to increase general awareness and especially to grow in self-awareness, have the ability to see situations from a more integrated and holistic perspective.

Persuasion: Servant leaders do not take advantage of their power and status to coerce compliance, but rather try to convince those they are leading. This element distinguishes more clearly servant leadership from the traditional and authoritarian models.

Conceptualization: A servant leader thinks beyond day to day realities. This means she has the ability to see beyond the limits of the daily running of the community, and always takes into account the vision of the congregation before she has formed her own vision.

Foresight: Foresight is the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation. It enables the servant leader to learn from the past and to gain a better understanding of the current reality. It also enables the servant leader to identify the implications for the future.

Administration: Religious leaders have the task to hold their institution in trust for the greater good of the Church and society. Servant leadership is seen as an obligation to help and to serve others, Openness and persuasion are more important than the control.

Commitment to the growth of people: a servant leader is convinced that people have an intrinsic value. Therefore she should nurture the personal, professional and spiritual growth of the sisters through a well worked out plan for Ongoing Formation. She will help the development of gifted sisters unthreatened by their competence, as she has inner security and a healthy self-esteem.

Building community: A servant leader's priority is building a loving, prayerful and compassionate community. In turn, the community should serve the greater community, especially the poor and the oppressed.