

INFO SS.CC. SISTERS N°9 – OCTOBER 20TH 2013

FOLLOWING JESUS: A RESPONSE IN FIDELITY



During the month of October in the various places in which we find ourselves, pastoral activity has just started up again and changes have taken place in community, all of which brings new challenges. In the past few months we have had the opportunity to have a rest and renew our strength in order to be able to continue contemplating, building community and proclaiming the Good News where ever we are sent. Info has also had a break, but is now starting up again to enter into communion with you and with the whole Congregation.

In harmony with the feelings of joy and thanksgiving which the Church is experiencing and in a special way which our Congregation has lived through recently, this letter coming now to you has also been inspired by the great event of the Beatification in Tarragona – Spain. Five ss.cc. religious have been publically recognized as martyrs in the faith. These brothers of ours have handed over their lives in martyrdom, in *fidelity* to Christ, to the Church and to our ss.cc. charism. Their eyes fixed on the Lord, they followed the Master until the end, sharing in his same fate “*if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you*” (Jn. 15, 20).

Fidelity: a fundamental attitude of women who are believers, disciples and consecrated

In the following months we are going to continue reflecting on certain attitudes which are very important for us as ss.cc. and which will be of great help to us on the journey which we are living as a Congregation. These attitudes will prepare our hearts so that we can hear what the Spirit is asking of us on this journey towards a “*new face of the*

Congregation”. On this occasion I would like to invite you to reflect on the theme of “*Fidelity*” as a fundamental attitude of women who are believers, disciples and consecrated. This reflection will be accompanied by the story of fidelity between two biblical women: Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1, 1-17).

The life of these two women is a hymn to fidelity, to trust, to responsibility; in short to love. Together they discover a God who is faithful, who will not abandon us, who is close, merciful, a God who protects and who gives life in abundance. It is the story of two women, one old and the other young; both are vulnerable and marginalized by society but both very concerned for each other; they set out on a journey seeking life; their journey is a question of life or death; it is a long and difficult pilgrimage marked by pain, by hunger, marginalization, renunciation and risk. They walk together, united by their search, in freedom, and responsibility, in perfect communion and collaboration with God's will for them *"I will go where you go and I will live where you live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God"* (Ruth. 1,16). They follow a God who is so distant and yet so close, so unknown and so much a companion; they go to Bethlehem without realizing it, God shows them the journey towards a land of plenty, towards a totally different situation.

Naomi was a woman of an advanced age who had nothing to offer Ruth her daughter-in-law. The two came from two very different worlds and had opposing beliefs. What then was the reason that motivated Ruth to follow Naomi? Naomi's life certainly marked Ruth's life forever. Naomi was a woman of God who was faithful to his word and to his love. Because of this Ruth was able to leave everything, to renounce her land, her culture and risk facing the unknown. She was able to look forward; to choose life; to give her life to the God whom Naomi served. What can I learn from Ruth at this moment in my personal life and in the life of the Congregation? Am I ready to leave my land, my customs and culture... and set off on a journey towards that which God and the Congregation is asking of me. On the journey which they are making together, Naomi and Ruth are inviting us to live an experience of loss, change, transformation and plenitude.

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Loss. These women who have lost everything find themselves alone, without any means of living. It is a crucial moment in their lives; a moment in which to choose life or death. They choose life by choosing God. We often say, "lose in order to gain". Often loss frees up the riches accumulated within us. It is faith in a God who has created us to give life and who is beside us even in loss. In moments such as these the Word of God becomes the way, the truth and the life.

Change. Naomi and Ruth are faced with great changes in their lives and they could do everything possible to minimize them, deny them and ignore them or they could see them for what they are; as an invitation from God to grow. Change and loss are two different things: loss takes something away from life; change adds something to life. Change is a possibility: we can oppose it or embrace it; it can be seen as a threat or as a grace. If we accept the challenge of change, then we are open to God's work in our lives. Change is a quality of growth: "to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often" (John Henry Newman).

Transformation takes place when we allow God to speak to our hearts

Ruth is not afraid of facing the unknown, opting to look forward. She is not afraid of losing everything in fidelity to the mother of her husband. This fidelity enables her to experience a full and happy life. Am I ready to lose everything out of fidelity to the one to whom I have

consecrated my life? “to entrust our happiness into the hands of one whom we know loves us, is perhaps one of the most beautiful experiences of abandonment and overflowing happiness” (Montse De Paz).

Transformation. This reality takes place when something within us changes and we realize that we are not the same as yesterday: when like Naomi and Ruth we feel that not only has reality changed, but that we too have changed. It is then that we realize that God is at work in us. Transformation takes place when we allow God to speak to our hearts and allow him to work in each one of us making our own the words of St Paul “I am sure that God will bring the good work which he has begun in you to a happy end” (Phil. 1,6).

Plenitude. Life is born again in the story of Naomi and Ruth. It is the story of humanity and of the presence of God in its midst. As we contemplate the story of these two women we must also contemplate our lives and ask ourselves: what is God saying to us at this time in our personal, community and Congregational story? What plenitude is God talking about to us?

The process which we are living as a Congregation asks us to walk in communion and fidelity, giving the best of ourselves so as to make our ss.cc life and mission bear fruit. Let us receive as a gift: the life of the older sisters who like Naomi are women of faith; decisive, faithful women full of experience and wisdom, the fruit of a life rooted in Jesus and in his Word; and that of the younger sisters who like Ruth are women who are free, loyal, detached from everything... Let us walk together as consecrated women who welcome love and pain, who interiorize it and who extend it outwards in newness and hope.

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Fidelity in our vocational life is not a goal, it is a daily consequence of living a commitment freely gained through love. It is the existential option for a person, “Jesus” and for a cause “the Kingdom”. This type of fidelity demands that our lives be consistent; it is easy to be consistent for a day, but very difficult for a whole lifetime; it is easy to be consistent in the moments of joy but difficult in the moments of trial.

Since our vocation and grace are gifts that we carry in earthen vessels, fidelity therefore needs to be looked after (2 Cor. 4,7). Our fidelity cannot be sustained by our own efforts alone, but with the fidelity of the one who called us and who continues to call us, because “he remains faithful because he cannot deny his ownself” (2 Tim. 2,10) and we continue forward because we know the one in whom we have placed our trust. (2 Tim. 2,12). God who called us 5, 10, 25, 50 years or more ago, continues to call us with the same love with which he called us the first day. Herein lies the whole secret of our fidelity.

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In this present context in which we are living as a Congregation, we are invited to open ourselves to the Spirit so as to perceive how to be faithful to the Lord and to our charism today. Discernment in the light of the Word must be the key which helps us to follow the right path, to look ahead, to keep our eyes fixed on the future, so as to look towards tomorrow with hope inspite of our reality: we are growing older, we have a lack of vocations, a lot of fragility... hope makes us glimpse the hand of God. The light of his Spirit which guides use even in moments of darkness.

May this reflection on fidelity in the light of the life of Naomi and Ruth inspire us to live our own life in a more convinced and joyful way. With this real experience of being loved by God and of

responding to him in faithful love, we will be able to confront the diverse realities which this Congregational journey presents us with. We will be able to go forward not through our own strength but because in our human and fragile reality, God continues being the firm support who sustains us with his faithful love. We will be able to open our eyes and discover the witness of many of our sisters, who simply live their fidelity to the Sacred Hearts in their daily lives and who are an example for each one of us. Sisters who through their joyful lives recreate the charism where they are, and who continue making their own the founder's conviction "*We are a need for the heart of God*".

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