

A SPIRITUALITY FOR LEADERSHIP

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SPIRITUALITY IN THE SERVICE OF LEADERSHIP



As I said in my letter to all the sisters in the month of January, some of the info letters of this year will be an invitation to reflect at personal and community levels on certain areas that encourage us and help us to give answers to what is being asked of us in the process we are experiencing as a Congregation.

The new road we are traveling along, involves some very important elements that cannot be overlooked throughout the entire process. One of them, and perhaps the most important is “*leadership*”. The General Chapter clearly states that “*All the sisters must understand and experience this leadership within the framework of authority-obedience proper to religious life itself*” (Cap. Dec.). Among other characteristics of this leadership it states that “*it should be a service exercised in and for communion and discernment, seeking forms of co-responsibility, dialogue, participation and delegation, being attentive to different understandings, incorporating different ways of thinking and encouraging reconciliation and acceptance of what is other*” (Cap. Dec.).

Reminding ourselves of this capitular call and the importance of “*leadership*” within the process of reconfiguration, we invite you to reflect on this subject during these first months of the year. We know that many sisters and communities have deepened or are delving deeper into the theme of “*leadership*”, and we are very glad, because this is proving that the Chapter Decisions are being taken up responsibly and with a great sense of belonging. We also know that the content that is being proposed for reflection, may be well known to many or to most sisters.

Why do it then? **Because** from our experience of the service of leadership as a general government, we feel and realize that there is always something to learn about this subject and to fully accept it. We are always learning, and given the importance of leadership throughout the process we are going through as a Congregation, we believe it is important and a sign of communion, to reflect together on some topics of this great theme.

This month the invitation is to reflect on “**spirituality in the service of Leadership**”. When we talk about spirituality, we understand that it is to lead a life guided by the Spirit of God, “*to live according to the Spirit*”, “*to be led by the Spirit*”, “*to walk in the way of the Spirit*” (Gal 5.25; Rom 8, 4), are rich Pauline expressions that links spirituality and points a way forward. They also express the gratuitous initiative of the Lord and our desire to respond in fidelity. Christ as the centre of spiritual life, a life always in process, moving forward...

So I am suggesting a reflection, more a meditation, based on a conference that Fr. Gonzalo Fernández Sanz, CMF gave to the Superiors General in Rome. I have taken from this conference all that can inspire and recreate this mission that has been entrusted to us, considering that leadership at any level, has to embody a spirituality that supports, inspires and encourages.

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Let us focus on the person of Mary, as she appears in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. We have here two images (that of the Annunciation and that of the Visitation) that can help throw light on the spirituality of those who, because of the mission received, experience annunciations and visitations.

Here is a simple “*Marian Decalogue*”, formed with some meaningful words for prayerful reflection. This is not with the intention of proposing Mary as the “model” of who we are called to be in the service of animation, but rather to invite us to discover that what she experienced in relationship with God and with human beings, that will help us to understand and exercise our service in a better way.

1. “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1: 28)

It is impossible to experience “spiritually” the service of leadership and turn it into a source of personal growth, but rather to welcome it and accept it as a grace. It is true that for most of us this service is not something desirable in itself but *an assignment we accept humbly*, welcoming with faith the way in which we receive it.

We must discover that the mission given is in reality a new grace that alters our lives, that is, God's gift that shows his love and gives us His Spirit to carry out this mission. It allows us to give our lives so that our sisters may live faithfully the vocation received. So like Mary, we too should feel “*full of grace*”. Let us remind ourselves that this is not something we seek but a mission that we receive. So we can trust that the Lord will be with us, that He is our shepherd, even though we walk through the dark valley we fear nothing, because He goes with us (Ps. 22).

2. “She was troubled at these words” (Lk 1: 29)

In “spirituality” we must not be afraid of moments of discomfort. Ours is not a spirituality of “feeling good”, of turning off stress, but of discovering God in the web of life such as it is, with its lights and shadows. In the service of leadership we often experience a lot of discomfort caused by different situations. But perhaps the most profound discomforts that unsettles us most are those that come from the Word of God.

For Mary there was distress at the words of the angel. For us it has to do with the inadequacy we often see in ourselves, between our assigned mission and our personal poverty. One “*fears*” not living up to the Word of God, the God we are called to serve, not being consistent. This fear can paralyze us, it is true, but it can also help us to mature spiritually, because it allows us to become aware of who we really are, and moreover opens us to God's action in “*us*” and “*through*” us. When both dimensions are part of our experience, we are better able to accompany our sisters in religious life.

3. “Fear not” (Luke 1. 30)

Amid the discomfort, the Lord's message is unequivocal: “*Fear not*”. Fear is a feeling that paralyzes us, that blocks all the resources God has given us to accomplish this task. Only faith enables us to discover there is no reality, dull as it may seem that cannot be penetrated by the Light of God. Actually we have to recognize that our fears become an issue of faith. That is why in our spirituality it is so important to be nourished by the Word of God. History, yours and the worlds, is in God 's hands. Therefore there is no reason to fear.

One of the best services we can offer is to invite our sisters not to fear, to be believers who grow in faith and hope in regular contact with the Word of God.

4. “How can this be?” (Lk 1: 34)

Important parts of our spirituality are the questions. Mary is usually presented as the “*Woman who said Yes*”, that is, as the woman with a response, but Mary is also the woman with questions.

In the exercise of our service we do not always know what to do. We are also perplexed when dealing with personal situations, financial problems, restructuring processes... and many questions arise. But the questions, when well formulated, are part of the answer, they give us clarity. Things are not repeated by habit or laziness. What are the questions we ask today? What are the questions that arise today in our service leadership?

5. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Lk 1: 35)

The difference between “*spirituality*” and “*spiritualism*” is in the role we assign to the Holy Spirit : a supplementary role or a dynamic role?

We are called to always remember that “*no one can say Jesus is Lord if they are not moved by the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor 12:3). This same Spirit will remind us throughout life what Jesus said (Jn 14:26) and will guide us to the whole truth (Jn 16:13).

What does it mean for us that the Holy Spirit will come upon us? I think we might respond by saying that we will receive the gifts and fruits of the Spirit to carry out our mission. It is important that we become aware of this “*spiritual endowment*” and that we are thankful for it. It will help us a lot to cope with our service from a deeper perspective, as women of faith. The service of leadership with the gifts of the Spirit will certainly produce the fruits of the Spirit in the people with whom we share life and mission.

6. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1: 38)

When we say “*yes*” to this service, we say “*Yes*” to God and to His Word. We believe that the same God who has called us will complete his Work in us.

The “*yes*” also implies a spirituality of accepting the consequences. Nobody is given a cross heavier than they can bear... with the grace of God.

7. “Mary set off in haste” (Lk 1: 39)

This “*setting off*” implies a spirituality of openness and to put into play a series of attitudes: patience, humility, the ability to surprise, the ability to listen...

When Mary set off, she did so “*in haste*”; for us it would be without unnecessary delays, putting our heart into what has been entrusted to us. Moreover, Mary, in her visit to Elizabeth, carried the gift of “*peace*”, because she carried in her womb the “*Prince of Peace*”, “*Christ our peace*”. She is the one who carries God. Do we not find here new inspiration for our spiritual journey? We are called to bring the gift of peace to our sisters.

8. “Blessed is she who believed” (Lk 1: 45)

What we need to feel more deeply in this service is the experience of faith in a God who has already come, who acts in people, who sustains life and energizes it through his Spirit. If only we could say of ourselves what Elizabeth said to Mary: "*Blessed are you who believed... because everything the Lord has promised, he has done*". To what extent is this service helping us to believe more deeply and to give of ourselves? We may have reinforced our conviction that religious life is on the line. This calls for a deep life of faith and when this is missing or very weak it is very difficult to meet the challenges ahead.

9. "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1: 46)

Mary's response to the "compliment" given by her cousin Elizabeth is a song of praise to God - the Magnificat - that reveals valuable elements of their way of experiencing faith in God and our Marian spirituality.

An experience of God: a source of joy and fulfilment, an experience of salvation or a "basic experience" that allows us to move from a life centred on ourselves to a life centred on God and others.

An image of a God who reveals his "*loyalty*" over the vicissitudes of history and gives us complete confidence in his love.

When we examine our spiritual experience, do we recognize these traits in our experience of God? An exercise that can do us much good would be to write our own "*Magnificat*", to realize the works that God has been doing in us, in our sisters, in the Church and in the world and of which we are happy witnesses. A greater abundance of gifts, an increased expression of gratitude and praise.

10. "She returned home" (Lk 1: 56)

To know how to return home is important. The service leadership entrusted to us is temporary, it has a beginning and an end. Therefore there is a "*returning home*", a need to know how to conclude with dignity, serenity and responsibility, the mission entrusted to us.

It would be of help not to confuse the *role* we represent with the *person* we are, be aware that the service is entrusted temporarily. It is also very helpful to cultivate all that facilitates this returning home, that is, to be open to being sent where the Lord wants, to be willing to share with humility the experience gained in the service of gifted leadership, and as a result of this experience, to show a great openness to the mission; to continue giving life for Jesus and his Kingdom.