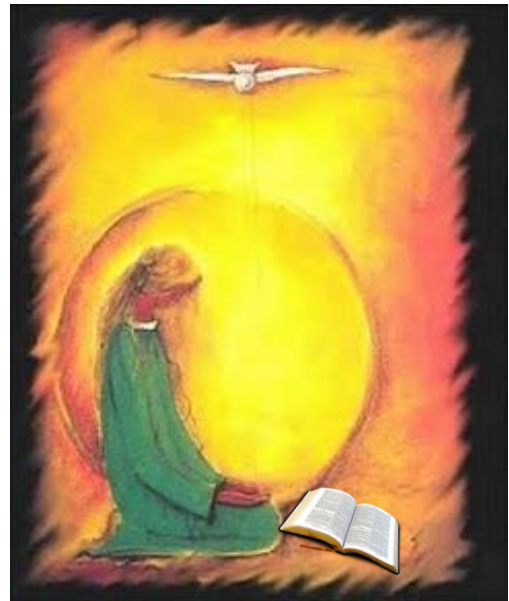


DISCERNMENT AS AN ATTITUDE OF LIFE

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In the letter of the previous Info I invited you to experience Christmas as a celebration that is different, unique and which could recreate life and mission. I imagine that everyone in their personal, community and pastoral reality was able to experience this, welcoming in your heart the closeness, tenderness and love of the Incarnate God.

Little by little we have returned to our normal daily rhythm, revived by the experience of meeting Jesus and willing to let the seed sown this Christmas put down roots so that it can bear fruit. Today, it is no longer the shepherds, the Magi, Mary or Joseph who collaborate with the plan of God. Today each one of us is called to witness the love and tenderness of God in the everydayness of our lives. That is where we have to discover and embrace Jesus being born every day, being born in me, being born in my community, being born in each specific aspect of our ministry.

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But to welcome God and to do this in the everydayness of our lives is not an easy experience, we need his grace, we need his Spirit. This Spirit who teaches us to walk in the truth of Jesus and his Plan of Love; He will teach us to announce the joy of the gospel, not our way, but in the way of Jesus; He will teach us to discover the surprises and the calls of God. Only he “*makes all things new*”. If we ignore the creative and transforming action of the Spirit, our effort to live according to the Plan of Jesus, will be vain and empty.

Speaking of “*discernment as an attitude of life*” is not a new topic for us, it is rather a common theme, usually worked and reflected on by the sisters and communities at some point of their journey; but in the concrete reality of our daily lives, we do not always experience this attitude, indeed, perhaps many times the Holy Spirit is “*the great unknown*”.

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If we look again at the decisions of the 35th General Chapter, we can see that the word “discernment” does not appear in many places, but at times when it does appear it is crucial. Speaking of the reconfiguration process we are told: “*This organization must be reached through a gradual, discerned process...*”. Speaking of the elements essential for all levels of leadership we are asked “*to exercise the service of leadership from, in and for communion and discernment ...*”.

The capitular decision is challenging, risky, as are also the calls the Church makes today: “*wake up the world*”, “*Shine with your prophetic witness*”, “*go against the tide*”, “*leave your nests*”, “*live with joy*”, “*show everyone how to follow Christ and put into practice his Gospel, fill your heart with joy*”. Pope Francis told us in the opening message of the Year for Consecrated Life.

The process of “revitalization” that we are experiencing together as with the process of “*restructuring Apostolic Ministries and community presences both at internal, and Congregational level*”, need to be experienced in an attitude of personal, community and congregational discernment.

All personal and communal discernment is always a call to conversion of heart. St. Paul reminds us that we must be transformed to discern God's will “*Do not follow the ways of the world in which we live, but be transformed from within. In this way you will know how to distinguish what is the will of God, what is good, what pleases him, what is perfect*”. It is an invitation to put on the armor of light, of freedom and the power of the Gospel.

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In this journey that the Congregation is making we need to constantly ask for the grace of “*docility to the Holy Spirit*”. Discernment is and will be the star that guides us along the path that the Lord wants to take us. For this we need more assiduously to return our gaze to the Lord and let His Word continue to guide our steps, allow his Spirit lead us and bring us along fresh, renewed, daring and mystic ways; ways that are more human, more coherent and evangelical.

Our Founders were docile to the action of the Spirit, and from Him and with Him were light in the midst of darkness, in the particular time in which they lived. Passion for the love of God, was at the center of their heart and life. They had the ability to perceive the most urgent calls, to respond with creativity and boldness from the love that dwelt within. They lived centered, focused and penetrated by the Gospel. This is the heritage and the testimony they left us, now it is up to us to recreate this experience, from an attitude of listening and openness to the Spirit, from a return to the Word and allow ourselves to be confirmed by it.

The rhythm of our daily life, often leads us to live outside. Everything pushes us to move in a hurry, barely stopping for anything and anyone, with the risk of living mostly in the crust of life, forgetting what it is like to feel life from within. In a rhythm such as this, living in an attitude of discernment is not easy, we need to strengthen an essential dimension of our life “interiority”. Welcoming the Spirit requires that we learn to listen inside the heart and to be led by its bold and creative action, to feel the need to live guided, supported and strengthened by Him.

What the world, the Church, our congregation, our community, each one of us is experiencing, is asking of us unprecedented fidelity to the Spirit of Jesus. The question would be, in the concrete reality of our personal and community life, how are welcoming the Spirit and His work in us? What new paths does he want us to take? We need to work and recreate

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ourselves by the Spirit of Jesus. Only the Spirit can give a “*new face*” to our personal, community and Congregational life.

Here I share with you some quotes that can help us in this journey of discernment as an attitude of life:

Our experience of faith. Firmly believe that God has a dream for us, for our Congregation, that in the road we have taken, God goes before, he wants something new for us, for our Congregation. This attitude of faith is essential to discern, it is to allow the Spirit to be the protagonist of this whole process.

Allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit. With respect to this Pope Francis says: “*There is no greater freedom than letting ourselves be carried away by the Spirit, relinquish calculating and controlling everything, and allow Him to enlighten us, guide us, direct us, encourage us to go wherever He wants. He knows what he does in every age and in every moment. This is called being mysteriously fruitful!*”

Discerning from communion. In discernment there is no personal or group interests. We must listen to what the Spirit is saying to each sister, to each community, to the Congregation, and to embark on a joint search of God's will. And this, not just for the big decisions, but for the day to day ones.

To be open to the God of surprises. God's surprises are sometimes difficult to understand and even harder to accept and take on, so we need to let the Spirit recreate our lives to listen and welcome his calls, with an attitude of openness, docility and availability.

Availability. The rules of “*discernment*” speak of holy indifference, of coming to recognize that at the center of our life is one absolute thing which is God, the rest is relative. Our life is in his hands. To personally take this on at certain times is not that hard, to live it day to day costs us more, but it is even harder when it is the community body that has to live availability to the will of God.

The suffering reality of our world. The message that the Church is sending in recent times is of “going out”. The Pope Francis says “*Let's go, let's go to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ I prefer a turbulent, wounded and stained Church to go out into the streets, to a Church sick because of enclosure and the comfort of clinging to one's own securities*”.

The sense of belonging to the SS.CC. Family. In the process that the Congregation is experiencing it is essential that we feel we are one body, living affective and effective belonging to the Congregation; experiencing that everything that lives in it affects me, I rejoice with its joys and its suffering hurts, I feel I am within it, I am not on the sidelines passively watching from outside. The SS.CC. charism is alive in me, I tremble with the ability to share it, spread it, I still feel “necessary for the Heart of God” in communion with all my sisters.

Having all this in mind in our life, will mark our way of discerning and living each day. Searching the will of God for every sister, every community and for the Congregation, is ultimately “to choose life”.