

INFO SS.CC. SISTERS N°28 – JULY 20TH 2015

## "Missionary Zeal"



“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). Paul experienced the mission of proclaiming the Gospel as an urgent need and commitment, and on behalf of this mission he became the servant of all. He had the profound conviction that the Gospel places a value on the commitment of devoting one's life to the service of love. His passion to proclaim the gospel springs from a deep desire to share with those near and far, the gift of an encounter with Christ, the gift that he has received. God touched his heart, he opened his eyes and his life was transformed; he could not and would not do anything else, to bear witness to what God had done for him, to his encounter with Jesus Christ; and he would not cease to say to everyone who had been entrusted to him, the treasure he had found in Jesus.

“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!”

As you can see in the letters of the most recent “infos” that I am touching on issues that are very connected with each other: evangelical communities that are life-giving, re-energized with our SS.CC. vocation, mission and missionary zeal; yet each one has its own identify and importance, and all are integrated and complement each other. Our life as consecrated women only makes sense if it is in the service of the mission, at the service of the Gospel. Each of us is called to raise our voice as Paul did and to make our own his words “woe to me if I do not preach the gospel”, feeling “this proclamation” as a duty that belongs to me and which I cannot delegate.

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(Const. 57).

In the decisions of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, we have strong calls in line with the mission. We are reminded that “we are bearers of a charism that has much to contribute today to a world with situations of division and rupture in need of an image of God that reminds it of mercy and communion; a world with areas of poverty and suffering that need reparation and compassion; a world often separated from Christ that needs the witness of the closeness and love of our Good God. It speaks to us of the need to “prioritize new emergencies and cries of today's world”.

These calls connect us directly with the need to revitalize “missionary zeal” at personal and community level. “By vocation we are committed to participate in the mission of Jesus, proclaiming the Good News of love which alone restores, liberates and reconciles fully” (Const. 57). To reawaken this evangelical zeal we need to rely on those disciples and missionaries of Jesus who embraced and assumed the mission to proclaim the Gospel as a wonderful and sublime task to which they gave their lives to end. “I feel I am the happiest missionary in the world” (Damien). “I want to be consumed like a candle” (GM).

Authentic proclamation is lived out by witnesses, testimony becomes the key force to evangelize. Jesus entrusts his mission to witnesses “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and then you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1.8). A witness is forged by the experience of an encounter with the Lord. It is in this encounter where the disciple experiences his love and mercy, and become witnesses to an encounter that invites us to another encounter; the disciple has had an experience and wants others to have the same experience. “I received from the Lord what in turn I have handed on to you” (1 Cor 11:23). Paul does not invent anything, he is true to what he has received, the proclamation of the Gospel is a matter of fidelity.

Christ's message cannot be invented or made to everyone's liking. The testimony of the risen Christ requires a chain of witnesses, we cannot testify in isolation. We are witnesses, because there are other witnesses who have gone before us, other witnesses who are with us and other witnesses who will follow us. “The zeal that animated the primitive community encourages us to work with the people of God, to promote communion in the Church and in the world, especially where love is lacking” (Const 58). We are heirs of a mission, of good news, that has to become a blessing for all those in need of love, and whose lives are constantly threatened. We are responsible for ensuring that the love, mercy and blessings of God are embodied in those to whom we are sent.

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If we have our eyes and heart open to the needs of the world, we will realize that these are greater and more numerous each time; more men and women who need and seek the testimony of closeness and the love of our Good God. At the same time we can experience that we do not respond to all these needs as we would like, which sometimes can lead to frustration and discouragement. At times like these, it can help a lot to remember this saying of André Frossard: “God only knows how to count to one”. God loves humanity in the abstract and together, but his love comes to men and women in their personal concrete reality. I think our way of proclaiming the Gospel, must be from the closeness to each person, from the small, the simple, what reaches the heart, from personal encounter. We are invited to proclaim the Good News from the spirituality of encounter, from the encounter with the other in his/her concrete reality.

To proclaim the Good News of love, we need to recover the value of interpersonal encounter, the time lost in the one to one. A proclamation which takes place with and from the gospel; a dialogue that leads to listening to the real needs of our brothers and sisters, sharing with them, searching together what is meaningful, their expectations and hopes. A Good News that becomes a gesture, a word, an attitude and a commitment. Human beings of today, the recipients of our mission, are in need “of an encounter, of dialogue, of listening, of quality relationships, of spirituality, of tenderness ... We need to be rich in relationships, feelings, affections, in spirit ...” (Mariola Lopez). In such a context, the words of the Good Mother fit very well “we are a need for the Heart of God”. Necessary to approach each person with concrete

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gestures and attitudes that speak to them of the love and mercy of God for each one. Necessary to touch the human heart in the manner of Jesus.

*“I know that nothing makes sense, if we do not touch the hearts of people.*

*For this reason it is enough to be:*

*a lap that welcomes, an arm that enfolds,*

*a word that comforts, a silence that respects,*

*a joy that is contagious, tears that flow,*

*a look that caresses, a love that motivates” (Cora Caralina).*

May the Lord incorporate us into his plan of love, a project that fills our whole being and doing. May the Gospel values define our lives, making us signs of the love of God by word, gesture and concrete action. May the service of the Gospel be our main concern and occupation, no matter what our age, number, human strengths...; the important thing is to give joyfully and with determination our *“five loaves and two fish”*, and the Lord will do the rest; it is a question of love. This is the way to make visible the public commitment that each one made on the day of our religious profession *“in whose service I wish to live and die!”*

Let us ask the Lord to send the power of the Spirit on us again and again, so that we may become women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel following the example of Mary, disciple and missionary of Peace.