

INFO SS.CC. SISTERS N°36 – JUNE 20TH 2016

## **"The Community: Challenge and Mission"**



Step by step, we are walking towards this new Face of the Congregation which the “General Chapter 2012 asked of us. This does not just mean a “geographical re-organization”, it demands much more from us. As Paul says to the Ephesians: “*May Christ live in our Hearts...*” ( Ep 3, 17). Let us allow Christ to live in our hearts, because, it is there where the greatest “re-configuration” of the Congregation will take place, the true New Face. And if Christ lives in the heart of each one, then he also lives in the Community.

Just a few weeks ago we celebrated the feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit upon each one of us, as members of the Church of Christ. A Spirit which makes our hearts capable of being transformed so as to receive the gift of God in our lives. A Spirit who reveals the true Face of God, and therefore, the true Face of the Congregation. Let us not forget that our Constitutions tell us: “*In Jesus we find everything: his birth, his life and his death. This is our Rule*” (Const. 3).

The community is a fundamental part of the reconfiguration. Therefore, it has seemed important to me, to offer you this reflection on “community: as challenge and mission”; it is based on a talk by Sr. Simona Brambilla, mc. I think that it is a profound reflection which is appropriate for the moment that we are living. I invite you, not only to read it, but to also reflect on it, in and with the community.

Sr. *Simona Brambilla*, a psychologist and superior general of the Consolata Missionaries, presented the theme “**Community: challenge and mission**” based on the text of the Samaritan woman. In a very expressive way, she helps us to see elements present in the construction of a well-community: thirst, earth, the different stones, the work of excavation, gushing water and the care of the same well. The whole process stimulates the desire for Living Water which brings us to a renewed encounter with Christ, who at the same time, overflows into so many human hearts thirsting for love.

## JACOB'S WELL

We know the story well. *“So Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar..., Jacob’s well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well... A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink” (Jn 4, 5-7).*

A woman with her empty pitcher, a woman emptied by life, by relationships that seemed perhaps to fill her momentarily, but leaving her thirstier than before, heart parched, sight extinguished, hope now worn out. That pitcher, under the midday sun, is her life: forever in search of water and accustomed to obtaining it through a variety of means: a bucket, a rope, and the strength to draw it up. One pays for one’s water supply. The well has its price. No-one gives you something for nothing.

It all started – or rather, re-started – for her around a well, under the midday sun. An empty pitcher, at the well, encounters a Jewish man who is tired on account of his journey: two fatigues thus compared. The fatigue of a pitcher parched by the vicissitudes of life, and the fatigue of a God freely emptied of Himself. The well represents for both a source of refreshment: for the thirsty Jewish man, who asks for a drink, and for the dry pitcher, which asks to be refilled, for the umpteenth time, after having been emptied for the umpteenth time.

The well is there, silent, acting as testimony to the dialogue between Jesus and the woman, simply as a place, an occasion, an opportunity for the development and expression of a desire, of a thirst which will gradually reveal its object. Nothing more and nothing less. The well does not seem to have so bad a lot. It has achieved its mission: indicating to the woman the true Source, and satisfying God’s desire for self-communication.

It is up to us today, to multiply the wells where thirsting men and women are invited to encounter Jesus, to offer oases in the deserts of life. How can we **multiply the wells**? Are our communities, in reality, such wells at which the Journeying Christ finds rest and humanity encounters the living Water? Do our communities intend to offer themselves as humble places of encounter between the Lord and the individual? And if our communities are not such wells, what are they? How can we set about building communities that are Jacob’s wells?

### **1. Building wells**

A well cannot be improvised. It is first and foremost the result of a gift – **water** that runs in the depths of the earth. To find it requires a patient process of seeking, and the demanding enterprise of digging. Let us consider some of the elements present in the construction of a well-community:

**Thirst:** Thirst pushes us to look for water; it becomes the energy which pushes us, motivating, digging, removing rocks, knowing how to find ways to reach life. One cannot build community without this Life-tension. Life which gurgles in the other, life which gurgles between us. I need my senses to be refined if they are to perceive this life: to hear it, see it, touch it, taste it, breathe in its perfume. How are my senses? What am I doing with them? What do I listen to? What do I see? What do I taste? What do I touch? A passionate desire for life, a burning thirst for Life: this is the beginning of the construction of a well-community.

**Soil:** Our human soil, that with which the Lord has moulded us, this human soil within which the breath of life flows (cf. Genesis 2,7) Our soil, having been worked over, becomes a path for life. The condition of a well is determined by the solidity of its walls. Care for relationships, the evangelical transformation of the ties that bind us, the art of letting God’s will model our human

soil to the point of rendering it a channel of living water: these constitute the ascetic path of fraternity.

**Rocks:** They are hard, they obstruct the channel of life. One must stop, in order to determine the dimensions, the consistency, the position of the rock. Perhaps the rock has been there for millennia developing particular geological formations which must be investigated. Then comes intervention. One digs around the rock, extracts it. Do not discard such rocks; only be sure that they do not become impediments. And beware: there is always the risk that the walls of the well will collapse. Do not wait on such rocks. Do not imagine that they can be eliminated! Work on them, use them! But first identify them, and do not fall into the trap of identifying with any of them!

In the construction of a well-community there are some rocks which may cause one to trip:

- I. *The rock of self-sufficiency says:* “I don’t need anyone else, I can handle myself. I won’t reduce myself to asking others”.
- II. *The rock of self-adoration says:* “Unto me be glory, honor, and admiration, for ever and ever, Amen”. This one needs a pedestal so that all might perceive her good Works.
- III. *The rock of depreciation says:* “I’ll do it, I’ll do it... because if someone else does it I’m not convinced they’ll do it up to my standard”. Then she complains that she ends up doing everything, while others do nothing. She speaks incessantly of the importance of trust.
- IV. *The rock of victimhood says:* “Poor little me, the worst always befalls me... she preaches humility, and seems to accept her own limits...”.
- V. *The twinned rock says:* “Only you can understand me!” She has a strong tendency toward a special relationship with someone within or outside the community, an exclusive friendship.
- VI. *The omnipotent rock says:* “Stick with me and I’ll protect you!”. Frequently she battles with authority, possesses a great deal of influence in the community, and can be openly aggressive or subtly manipulative.
- VII. *The rock of gossip says:* “Come to me and I will reveal to you the secrets of the congregation!”. In community meetings she keeps quiet, but later in the corridor and in the room... she turns into an extremely effective social network for the transmission of first-hand news.
- VIII. *The rock island says:* “Let nothing disturb or frighten you, for I suffice”: for her the community is shallow, immature, childish. As a result, she decides to live in her own world, trying to find her own way to grow, improve, become a saint.
- IX. *The rock of compliance says:* “It’s always been done that way”. She feels the need for authority’s approval, and she fights and strives to achieve it.
- X. *The rock of false gold says:* “Look unto me and you shall be radiant”. She becomes the superior’s favorite: she is brilliant, intelligent, does many things well, and seems always to have a perfect relationship with those in authority. She is trustworthy, obedient... and so it goes that she becomes the superior’s councilor, the superior’s messenger, the superior’s friend... the superior’s superior. She avoids all possibility of failure: she cannot deal with it. Failure in short terrifies her.

**Digging:** By this is meant that passage through human soil to the depths which contain the water of life. It means a descent towards the darkness, to a death experience itself! The descent is difficult. Accept your mud and that of others: if you go digging it’s inevitable that you’ll end up moving it and sully your image – that image which you constructed with so much effort. That mud is nothing new: it’s always been down there, but before you weren’t aware of it. In the mud, you learn solidarity, you learn that you are poor, you learn that you are no better than the others. It’s the logic of the grain of wheat. The logic of Easter. The construction of a well-community is a Paschal event.

**Gushing water:** Unexpectedly, life gushes out and rises. Behold how life was below, beyond the mud. Behold how the earth gives birth to that life which was hidden in its womb.

The well is the fruit of a gift – water – and of a labour, digging. It is the fruit of a patient and persistent search for the element of life. It is the fruit of hands that dig deep, guided by the water’s gurgle. It is a journey through human soil certain of the life that gurgles within. It means dealing with the rocks which may block the process. It means, in the end, letting the Gospel penetrate and transform the deepest layers of our hearts and transfiguring the ties that bind us together. The well-community is the fruit of a gift and of a patient and tenacious process of labour intended to bring the gift to life and make possible that it be offered to others. The well becomes a place where the downward motion of excavation meets the upward movement of water, to the patient emptying (kenosis) of the channel there comes a response of that gushing water which can regenerate the human heart.

A well-community, then, is a community of people who have been evangelized and are available to an ongoing process of evangelization, who furthermore:

- Are thirsty.
- Are attuned to the flow of the Water/Spirit.
- Dig patiently and persistently downwards in order to reach the water.
- Identify and work on the rocks they encounter.
- Know how to get their hands –and those of others – dirty.
- Come together around a sacred space, empty of themselves and filled with the flow of regenerative water (a process of decentering from themselves and committing to an evangelical transformation of relations).

Thus does the community become an opening which can bring the water to light, a place of regeneration, an oasis in the desert of life, a well at which Christ loves to seat Himself so as to give living water to the human heart that thirsts.

## **2. Looking after the well**

A well must be looked after, kept in clean and in good condition, so as to continue to be the channel of contact between water and the light. Otherwise a well can become sick. There are many diseases which can afflict the well-community. A degenerative illness, that which amounts to a reduction of desire, of pathological thirst. This occurs when desire, thirst for the living Water becomes sick, and so the community – instead of seeking the living water where it flows – seeks it where it does not flow, seeking it in polluted underground waters. Jeremiah warned Israel: *“They have forsaken me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water”* (Jer 2, 13).

It may happen that the community, even without realizing it fully, begins to follow as a criterion of its living together not the Gospel of Jesus but the convenience of the group, which may come from as-yet-unevangelized dynamics. The relationships, as a consequence, become functional and serve the various thirsts of those who make up the community, or at least have a greater influence in it, rather than possessing any evangelical quality. Relationships are places and spaces for life: our freedom affords us the opportunity to take this gift and make it fruitful, or else we can reduce the desire, the search, into a quest for alternatives which will fail to quench our thirst and turn our communities into cracked cisterns.

Let us allow the Samaritan woman to stimulate anew in all of us who are consecrated, and in our communities, a desire for the Living Water which translates itself into movement, journey, dialogue, in a renewed encounter with Christ who awaits us always, at the well of today, in order to set out anew, poor in ourselves and rich in Him, towards the human heart that still thirsts for His Love!