

# *E*choes of the Company

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Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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**AUGUST**

**2019**

**No. 4**



**The boldness  
of holiness  
for a new  
missionary  
momentum**

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## Letter of July 15, 2019

Dear Sisters,

*The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ  
be with us forever!*

As we prepare to celebrate the anniversary of the first apparition of the Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine Labouré, it is my joy to reach out to you to share some news. *Spiritual Life*

Like you, I learned about my appointment as a member of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life through the media. I was both surprised and honored by Pope Francis' confidence in me and because this appointment is a recognition of the entire Company - and thus each one of you - for its presence and action throughout the world. Let us thank the Lord and ask Him for the graces that I will need in order to respond in all humility to this totally unexpected call at the service of the Church.

I am taking advantage of this letter to update you about my health. Following the surgery, which went well, I am resting and regaining my strength. I have to wait a little longer to find out if a postoperative round of chemotherapy will be prescribed. Although I am gradually resuming my activities, I have consistently followed the affairs of your Provinces and read the many messages that you have sent me, for which I

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am very grateful. Please continue to hold me in your prayer.

Like Saint Catherine, let us go in a single bound to the Virgin Mary to tell her about our joys and concerns. She will graciously repeat to us, “Come to the foot of this altar. Here graces will be showered on all who ask for them with confidence and fervor.” You can be sure that I will present each of you and all your intentions through the intercession of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the altar this July 18.

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER  
*Daughter of Charity*

## Letter of August 15, 2019

Dear Sisters,

*“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant” (Luke 1:47-48a).*

Yes, the Lord looked down on Mary and ultimately lifted her up into heaven. Through the special grace of her Immaculate Conception, to which she responded with a desire to always act as God’s humble servant and with her ‘yes’ repeated every day of her earthly life, she lives forever, body and soul, with her Master. At every moment – in times of confusion such as the initial message of the angel and Jesus’ staying in the Temple following their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in times of joy like the visitation and Jesus’ birth, and in times of sorrow during the flight into Egypt and the Passion – her confidence in the Lord and His loving plan remained unshaken. Along with my wishes for a *happy feast*, I raise up a prayer for each and every one of you, that we may deepen our identity as authentic servants, rejoice in our call, and embrace our reality, trusting in the support of Jesus and His Blessed Mother.

Your many feast day greetings, promises of prayers, and Masses offered express your closeness, for which I thank you. The abundant evidence that you are striving to live out the values affirmed at the 2015 General Assembly and are beginning to open up to the theme for our upcoming Assemblies has given me reasons to rejoice. Already, the General Council has granted permission to the Province of Vietnam to open a new local community named “Ephata” in an under-evangelized region where the Sisters will work in health care and parish and family ministry. On this oc-

casation and in the name of the persons who are poor served by new local communities, collaborations, and services, I commend you for the serious discernment that has led to them. Moreover, Provinces are clearly studying Assembly materials carefully, making preparations, and offering prayers so that Domestic and Provincial Assemblies will draw strength and inspiration from the Holy Spirit and go smoothly. I also express my appreciation to the General Councillors who are working closely with the Visitatrixes and Provincial Councils to foster Assemblies in which responsible participation unites all Sisters in seeking the will of God together.

You share with me in your letters that you are welcoming pre-Postulants, Postulants, and Seminary Sisters and that young Sisters are making vows for the first time. Their response to the Lord's call makes us echo our Blessed Mother's hymn of praise. Their concrete testimony of deepening their unconditional "yes" to the will of God as His servants in a spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity is a great blessing for the Little Company. The support that each of you offers in your own way to encourage and accompany young people is so valuable. Faithful to our Inter-Assemblies Document, let us continue to take seriously our personal responsibility to be involved in vocation ministry (IAD, p. 24) and follow St. Louise's timeless advice to Sr. Marie Donion: "*As for all the girls you mention... I urge you to be a consolation for them as to help them to discern the will of God*" (SW, L. 607, p. 627-628). While the International Missionary Center reopened this February following work on the building, this month it once again became a local community. It is currently home to three Sisters preparing for mission *ad Gentes*, several Sisters pursuing studies, and two formators. Adding to the many Sisters involved in Interprovincial missions, a Sister, after several months at the Missionary Center, joined a mission in Tanzania. All of them are a sign of the universality of the charity of Christ (cf. IAD, p. 19) and of openness to those who are poor wherever they may be. May the upcoming Extraordinary Missionary Month this October be an opportunity for us to deepen our understanding of the missionary vocation



inherent in our Baptism and renew our intercession for “*those who, through obedience and faith, have left family and country*” (Statute 13d) and those who will welcome this call in the future. During that month, the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region will take place October 6-27. Because of its focus on respect of cultures, encounter, and ecology, I am sure you will follow it closely and accompany it in prayer. I have also been impressed by the listening model used to develop the documents to be studied, a real model for our Assemblies!

Along with these joyful experiences, I also evoke more sorrowful situations, particularly those caused by oppressive government practices, persecution, or the challenges of mass migration. I am thinking especially of the people of Eritrea. In recent weeks, you have surely seen reports in the media on the insecurity, injustice, and suffering of the people there. I continually assure Sister Lettekidan Lucas, her Council, and the Sisters of the Province of Eritrea of my prayer and support as they struggle to remain faithful to our charism in a hostile environment. I count on you to add your voice in interceding with the Lord for their special needs as well as for peaceful long-term solutions that will safeguard the lives and dignity of all.

The doctors are pleased with my healing following my recent surgery. As a precautionary measure, they have now suggested that I continue chemotherapy to prevent the cancer from returning. The dosage of the medication will be less strong than what I received in the past, but the treatments will last several months. My gratitude for your prayers and concern, the patience and assistance of those who work daily with me, and the expertise of the medical personnel in Paris is beyond words.

On this Solemnity of the Assumption, let us recall with admiration that the Blessed Virgin fulfilled the mission that God had entrusted to her throughout her life. May we too strive to fulfill the mission that God has entrusted to us as we seek to *BREAK THROUGH the GATE – GO TOWARDS – ENCOUNTER* – whatever the situation

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that the Lord presents to us. *Mary, our Mother in Heaven and only Mother of the Company, guide us forward!*

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER  
*Daughter of Charity*

## Circular letter of August 12, 2019

To all the members of the Vincentian Family

My dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

In 2017, we celebrated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian Charism. We gave thanks to Jesus for keeping the charism alive, for the many women and men from diverse walks of life who dedicated themselves over these four centuries and for those who continue the unconditional service of Christ in the person of the poor every day with so much commitment, passion, and love.

Because of its divine inspiration, the Vincentian Charism always shows us the path to respond to the needs of the ever-increasing number of people in the world who are abandoned, living on the margins of society, and neglected spiritually, materially, physically, emotionally. As one of the fruits of the Jubilee year, we, members of the different branches of the worldwide Vincentian Family, wished to launch an initiative that would help us deepen our collaboration and effectiveness in responding to the “cry of the poor.”

To this end, we inaugurated the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) during the October 2017 Vincentian Family Symposium in Saint Peter’s Square, in the presence of Pope Francis. The FHA is a worldwide initiative focusing on homelessness in its many forms. It supports Vincentian Family members in addressing one of the

Circular letter of August 12, 2019

most pressing needs of our time so we can ‘welcome the stranger’ in our communities.

Service of the homeless is not something new for the branches of the Vincentian Family. For a long time, they have been involved in successfully responding to these tremendous needs in an effort to end homelessness around the world.

This initiative intends to bring all 150 branches of the Vincentian Family together in the fight against homelessness. The FHA is coordinated by an international board; a commission with international membership accompanies the FHA in all the countries around the world. Specific goals include learning from each other, helping one another, and acting together in direct assistance to the homeless, as well as collaborating in advocacy, thus becoming a stronger and more effective force. To help us achieve the goals, the Commission of the FHA offers many tools for tackling a phenomenon affecting 1.2 billion people worldwide.

When we speak of homeless persons, we have three groups in mind:

- a) people who live on the streets
- b) refugees who are displaced from their homes
- c) people living in substandard housing.

None of them has a real home and is, consequently, homeless.

I am very grateful for the progress made so far. In particular, I would like to mention three initiatives:

- 1) the vibrant and successful Vincentian International Conference on Homelessness (Rome, November 2018);
- 2) the Vincentian Family’s influence in making homelessness the priority theme of a major United Nations meeting (Commission for Social Development, January 2020 session) for the first time; and
- 3) the growing collaborative participation in the FHA’s

## 13 Houses Campaign.

The Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul this year, at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century of the Vincentian Charism, thus becomes a wonderful opportunity to deepen engagement in the FHA and our cooperation across branches, or to start participating and collaborating in this initiative. The goal is to involve all the branches of the Vincentian Family: congregations, lay associations, and societies in all 158 countries where the Vincentian Family is present.

Many branches of the Vincentian Family already are engaged very actively in the FHA. Many are still on the way.

With this letter, in view of preparations to celebrate the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul in all countries where the Vincentian Family is present, I would like to invite the National Councils of the Vincentian Family to unite their members. In countries where one does not yet exist, I encourage one of the leaders to call a meeting of all the representatives of the different branches. In either case, it is for a very concrete goal: engaging together in the FHA project.

Branches of the Vincentian Family might participate in the FHA in various ways:

1. Provide information to the FHA on your homelessness projects. This will allow the FHA to map our collective global impact, proving the strength of the Vincentian Family's homelessness ministry.
2. Offer your expertise to the wider Vincentian Family. The FHA is looking for projects that could welcome a young leader for a short exchange to gain experience. You could also engage in partnerships with other groups involved in the homelessness sector.

3. Engage in research, conversations, and learning opportunities that can help us better grasp the reality of the many devastating refugee crises, too often forgotten.

In addition to the three above-mentioned points, for the upcoming Feast of Saint Vincent, I would like to encourage all countries where the “13 Houses Campaign” has yet to begin to take concrete steps to launch it. The “13 Houses Campaign” is one of FHA’s projects that directly affects the lives of homeless persons.

The name “13 Houses” comes from an initiative of Saint Vincent de Paul in response to the devastating poverty in Paris in his time. Together with the Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Ladies of Charity (AIC), he had built 13 houses for children without one.

The goal of the “13 Houses Campaign” is to engage the branches of the Vincentian Family in a given country to build together homes for those who do not have one. The number of houses or the creative ways to find accommodations for the homeless will differ from country to country. In some countries, the Vincentian Family may build two or ten houses; in others, more than thirteen. In any case, we can all take part in the so-called “13 Houses Campaign.” The Commission of the FHA is ready and eager to help make this a reality thanks to its expert team to help you plan and design your project and, if needed, to help you find funds for it through twinning, partnerships, the Solidarity Fund, or grant writing.

I encourage all the international, national, and local leaders of the different branches of the Vincentian Family, together as a branch on the international level or separately on the national or local area, to get in touch with the coordinating committee member Mrs. Yasmine Cajuste ([pha.info@famvin.org](mailto:pha.info@famvin.org)) to send or receive

information. You also can visit the FHA website: [vhomelessalliance.org](http://vhomelessalliance.org).

Here is a link to a video encouraging participation in the “13 Houses Campaign”: <https://youtu.be/42xwaMfCjO4>.

I hope that, for all members of the Vincentian Family, the annual celebration of the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul will help us to work ever more effectively in the service of the poor. As we engage with persons in need, others help carry our needs. It becomes a holy exchange, a holy ground.

May Saint Vincent de Paul, the “Mystic of Charity,” help us to grow more and more in our relationship with God and the poor, enlightened by the Spirit and with an increased desire to become Mystics of Charity ourselves.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM  
*Superior General*

## Living fidelity in consecrated life in a changing world and a shaken Church

The oral style of the presentation has been preserved.

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### Introduction

Session for  
Sisters  
11-24  
Years  
Vocation

In order to enter into our topic, we will look at how, today, fidelity should deal with our world, surely in a different way depending on the country, culture and situation. However, given that we live in a sort of global village, what influenced the West thirty years ago is now influencing the whole planet, and what happens at one end of the earth ends up happening at the other end of the earth although perhaps with nuances. This affects the life of our communities.

### I – ISSUES FIDELITY MUST CONFRONT TODAY

Fidelity must face certain issues if it wishes to be legitimate and respond to these words from the Book of Deuteronomy: *“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live... on the land which the Lord swore to give”* (cf. Deut 30:19-20).

It is thus essential that fidelity, because it is Christian fidelity, a fidelity to Christ, be a fidelity that gives life. Its function is to support our lives and support a life that is fully alive. In order for this to happen,



it must thus confront contemporary issues.

## 1) THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUSPICION

We owe the first of these tests to what we call the philosophers of suspicion or the thinkers of suspicion (Nietzsche, Marx, Freud). Beyond these figures, an entire era is involved: more than texts, they represent an era and the questions that the thinking of this era raises for us. The question that these philosophers pose to fidelity is the question of authenticity, the relationship between fidelity and authenticity.

Nietzsche insists that the human person is made for metamorphosis, for not remaining in old ways of being. A very contemporary question thus arises: “How can we be faithful and authentic?” This is because authenticity relates to how we change: our psychological changes and our changing ideas. Quite often in our lives, authenticity is successive. We have truths that come one after another, a changing genuineness. If we take the political domain, for example, in our youth, we might have been far left and over time find ourselves extremely conservative. At every moment, we were sincere in our political position. We believe that our actions are internally consistent. However, our opinion may have vastly changed. Many couples ask this question, many young people wonder about their life choice, perhaps about their life as a couple, thinking, “The day that I don’t love him or her anymore, I will leave because I have to be authentic.” Therefore, the day when I feel that I no longer love my companion or spouse, it would be deceitful to remain with him or her. These questions can also arise in our lives.

The test that fidelity must face is what it does with the question of authenticity. Fidelity means something continuous, in other words, over time. Commitment in fidelity is always a long-term commitment. This long-term commitment runs up against possible doubts about my choice.

### Living fidelity in consecrated life

The first test is this question related to sincerity, authenticity. Our modern societies in which we all live, no matter where we live on the planet, are more and more attentive to the importance of personal authenticity. How is a person authentic, or does a person do things out of habit, as if carried along mechanically? Life is not like that. Our fidelities must answer this contemporary question.

What place is there for sincerity and authenticity, knowing that they fluctuate during life? How can we be faithful to the same life commitments while we are changing women and men, changing because we age and meet other people in life? All this changes us – fortunately, because a being that does not change is dead. We could also hope that in changing, we improve a little. This is not a sure thing, but we must believe it can happen.

## **2) FIDELITY HAS SOMETIMES BROUGHT OUT THE WORST IN HUMANITY.**

Fidelity has sometimes led people to death, to murder. If we think of all the men who were faithful to the worst ideologies, in the past Nazism or Soviet ideologies and today's ideology of the establishment of the Islamic State, all these men wanted to be faithful even unto death. Such fidelity is terrible, tragic, and even criminal because it caused the deaths of millions of people: Jews, Gypsies, members of the French resistance and civilians throughout the world. There are fidelities that are dead-ends and cause death. It is a real test for fidelity. This is why the benchmark is "I have set before you life and death that you may live." The fidelity of consecrated life or of the Christian life is not an end in itself; it is a way of living to follow Christ who is our reason for living, but it is not an objective in and of itself. Attachment to fidelity at all costs can cause death and can cause many people to die.

The issue raised is that fidelity is not a value in itself. Fidelity is not a virtue in itself; it is a virtue to the extent that it serves, and only to the extent that it serves. For example, what would be a love that did not desire to be faithful? It would just be a vague

feeling. What would be the intention to do justice without faithfulness? What would a commitment to peace be if it did not intend to be faithful? Fidelity is thus legitimate in relationship to what it serves, when it serves love, justice, kindness, peace... Such causes lose their substance if not supported by fidelity. However, fidelity that sets out to destroy is only an additional destruction; fidelity to foolishness is only additional foolishness; fidelity to lies is an additional lie. Thus, this test imposed on fidelity due to the scale of crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century obliges fidelity to know what it serves. What does our fidelity serve? Together with the women and men with whom we live day in and day out, how is our fidelity at the service of following Christ? How is it at the service of an 'art' of living in this world? How does it bring peace and compassion?

The tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lead us to guard against praising fidelity for itself. Fidelity must serve real values like justice, peace and love, but not works of destruction.

Literature recounts many stories to show that fidelity can be inhumane if it does not serve a life-giving value. We are not made for fidelity in and of itself. Otherwise, fidelity becomes an idol. We are made to be faithful to something - to the love that we want to live, to the quest for God to whom we dedicate our lives-, and fidelity exists to serve that value, our discipleship of Christ, our seeking the truth, our concern for the poorest of the poor. What would concern for the poorest of the poor be if it were not faithful, if it lasted as long as a passing emotion? For concern for the poorest of the poor to be genuine, it must be faithful; otherwise, it is not true that you stand by them. In every age, there are people faithful to the worst forms of violence, dedicated to the worst violence. This challenge to my fidelity today thus offers the great advantage of forcing us to ask ourselves again, "What does my fidelity serve in my life in solidarity with others? What does it serve in my commitment on behalf of the poorest of the poor and those with whom I live day in and day out?"

### 3) REPETITION

The third test for fidelity today is what we could call repetition. In other words, it involves questioning fidelity to see if it is truly alive and embraces the necessary changes of our lives or if this fidelity is only a form of repetition. Repetition would mean that we committed to live in a certain way, with a certain liturgical and Eucharistic rhythm, certain rules of life and certain Constitutions, and then we continue on our way, do not ask any more questions and plow ahead. This latter form of fidelity is half-dead if our experiences and the questions the world presents to us no longer touch it. The third question addressed to fidelity is how my fidelity keeps from falling into repetition of always the same thing just because it would be easy, less tiring and comfortable. We should remember that for the vast majority of people, life is hard, and it is complicated to work, have decent housing and raise children. People cannot admit the possibility of life being a mere repetition because events constantly jostle and jar them. When you suddenly lose your job and with it your salary as well as social recognition, your place in society and in the family, you have to confront the unexpected, which is often so painful, brutal and inhumane. From that point of view, the vast majority of people do not have the luxury we do. How does my fidelity avoid a repetition that is a sort of comfort and sometimes even laziness? We can live that repetition because we have an organizational structure and institutions that are still holding up; we do not have many of the worries that most people have every day. Many worries mean that people cannot live in mere repetition. We have the great fortune of continuity in life. What can we do to avoid repetition? How do we keep fidelity alive?

To summarize this first point, fidelity must serve values that are life-giving. Otherwise, we cannot consider fidelity a virtue. As important events unfold, we should be able to question in our lives as religious how our fidelity is indeed at the service of what gives life to our faith, our way of loving and our concern for the truth and the poorest of the poor. It is not a matter of fidelity to just anything.

**To conclude** this section about fidelity at the service of life, this fidelity has something to do with trustworthiness, the fact of being sufficiently reliable.

A dogmatic declaration of the First Vatican Council proclaimed the infallibility of the pope in certain circumstances, that is, where the Church cannot be wrong. For us, it is not a question of being infallible but of being trustworthy enough, which is not the same thing. Being infallible means never making a mistake, which is not humanly possible. We are human beings who make mistakes; this is part of our human condition. It is not a matter of never being wrong but of being trustworthy enough, steadfast enough in the decisions and the choices we make, in other words, being consistent enough, and this consistency should be at the service of the people around us. This is trustworthiness. Being sufficiently trustworthy means being firm enough for oneself and in relation to others. For example, if we work for social justice, people should be able to rely on us, which does not mean that we are infallible, that we never make mistakes or that we can bear everything but that we are solid enough - but never totally. It would be quite pretentious to say that we are sure to be always totally sound and consistent. Living fidelity thus relates to our consistency of life, which, I repeat, is never an absolute consistency but should be a sufficient consistency; in a way, it stays the course. Someone else can rely on us, in the community, in the Company. Fidelity is not some sort of absolute, first because fidelity is at the service of other values than itself and secondly because perfection is not part of the human condition. What we expect of fidelity is trustworthiness, a capacity for consistency, steadfastness. Our solidity, however, is always relative.

## **II – BIBLICAL TEXTS ABOUT GOD’S FIDELITY AND HIS PEOPLE’S INFIDELITY**

Why read such an old book for the contemporary question of “fidelity today”? This old book is not just a book but words that shed light on our lives, our following of Christ and our desire to

*Living fidelity in consecrated life*

love Him and follow His example.

It is appropriate to read it because I deeply believe that the Bible trains our eyes, teaching us to see, teaching us to read our own lives and the world in which we live. Therefore, reading the Bible does not simply entail turning to a text that we consider the foundation of the Christian faith – and for the first Testament, the foundation of the Jewish religion; it entails understanding that through these countless stories, especially in the Old Testament, something of the human person is revealed. The Bible examines human life through personal experience, and all human situations are present because the text is rooted in history. What characterizes the Biblical text is that it does not speak in general terms; it is not a theory. These texts, rather, are the stories of a small people that describe how this faith community begins and how this people believes that God walks with them and sheds light on the events of their lives.

Reading the text thus means accepting that these stories implicate us and that the Biblical text covers our own contemporary stories. We do not read it because it would offer prepackaged solutions for today's problems but because it sheds light, from one account to the next, on our ways of being men and women and of hoping to be men and women of faith today. We do not read it as a sort of repository of answers; we read it because it tells profoundly human stories, and these profoundly human stories speak of our own human stories. This text is universal and can be read in all times and all cultures because it tells stories of communities, stories of men and women. The texts written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and even 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, that is, more that twenty-five centuries ago, in their own political, social, religious and cultural contexts, are very unlike our situation today.

What relates and what makes the text anthropologically accurate is that they are human stories. These human stories speak of our human stories because we share the same humanity and the same feelings: love, betrayal, lies, reconciliation, forgiveness, violence,

failure and misunderstanding. We live through the same stories as those of these men and women who believed that the One God walks along with them. Once again, it is not a matter of reading them to find formulas to solve our problems, but of allowing the text to carry us along. In other words, the text takes on our modern histories because we share the same humanity. Therefore, we do not turn to these texts because it is expected of us as consecrated people but because they are filled with a human density and the issue of fidelity and infidelity cuts through these accounts.

### **WHAT CHARACTERIZES GOD’S FIDELITY IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT?**

When we look at the concordance of words in Hebrew, we note that God’s fidelity always relates to His tender love. Fidelity and tender love, fidelity and mercy have the same root in Hebrew. Straight off, this tells us that God’s fidelity is a living, loving fidelity; it is indeed a fidelity at the service of His love for humanity. Thus, it is a fidelity linked to His grace, His kindness, an irrevocable tender care (that is, a tenderness that never fails, never goes back on its promise and never goes back on its word), a boundless love. This is God’s fidelity. It is not a sort of absolute fidelity “out there” that would exist out in the heavens but a fidelity at the service of an inexhaustible mercy and goodness that human infidelities, straying and betrayals cannot use up.

When we say that our fidelity only is meaningful if it mirrors God’s fidelity, we are speaking of this kind of fidelity. It is a fidelity with a loving heart, which is the very heart of God.

Moreover, in Hebrew fidelity is also related to faith, and thus again to steadfastness and truth. God is a rock, as the psalmist says. A rock has to do with fidelity or someone who will maintain his love despite the betrayals and failures of the people. God’s fidelity, for its part, remains and will remain because it is solid like a rock. God decided from all eternity to risk this fidelity in human time with creation, salvation, and, of course, the coming of His Son.

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Therefore, God's fidelity, in a way, is His decision to bind Himself to humanity. God is not faithful to His personal being, if I can say it that way, as could be said in other religious traditions. God's fidelity is His decision to bind Himself to humanity through His creative act, by the liberation of Israel and definitively by the Incarnation of His Son. It is not, therefore, a fidelity that would make Him distance Himself to show that He is the greatest, the most inaccessible. No! God's fidelity is having decided to give His love and His tender care to humans forever and to bind Himself to them forever.

So then, how does our own fidelity bind us, commit us to others than ourselves? How does our fidelity serve this commitment for others? in favor of the most vulnerable among us? How does fidelity bind us and bring us closer to the times in which we live and that God loves? Fidelity is thus the opposite of withdrawing; it is made to involve us so that we dare risking ourselves with the world, with people, with and for them because God's fidelity can only be loving. This is why we can say that God made the decision to take the risk of binding Himself to a partner whom He nonetheless knew is far from trustworthy, far from sure, changing and sometimes even fearful. His decision was to bind Himself to humanity despite knowing the human heart well.

### **Such is God's Covenant with humanity.**

God's Covenant with humanity is His irreversible decision to commit in favor of humanity, for it and never go back on His word, even when this humanity, these women and men, betray and turn away from Him. "Return, Israel," is a sort of leitmotif that we hear so often from the prophets, especially in the books of Jeremiah and of Isaiah. This will result in two ways for the people and in a way for God Himself to express this fidelity, two ways to respond to God's fidelity. In this commitment, God expresses His fidelity in two ways as well.

- The first way is what we could call "constancy". This is con-



tinuity, which we find in the prophets: a constancy to hold firm. God is also one who holds firm, who never makes another choice than that of humans. In several texts, we see believers choose the true God and not turn away.

- There is also a way of speaking of fidelity that we could call “return”, in other words, conversion. It means having turned away and returning, straying toward idols, false gods, forgetting God and who is the real God and then returning.

These two images, “constancy” and “returning to the path from which we have strayed”, describe fidelity. We will find these same images in the Gospels. In both cases, whether it is a matter of constancy, a sort of solidity on the path of faith, or of conversion, returning to the path that one has abandoned and from which one has strayed, both are living ways to express fidelity. They indicate that fidelity is not a sort of huge highway bridge where you have the impression that the bridge is unchanging. Fidelity is more like crossing a river and stepping where you can, on one stone or another; at each step, you hesitate to see where you can put your foot next so that it holds you, so that it is firm, so that you do not fall. We must take on the force of the current and assess where we will not slip; we do not have the security of someone crossing a major bridge. No, we make our way depending on the wind and the current and then cross. Constancy and return (the capacity to return to the path from which we have strayed) create a living fidelity, a fidelity not to a past but to a future. We are not faithful to a past; we are faithful to a future, in other words, to a commitment God has made with me to build the future that, in our case, relates to the Kingdom of God. We are not faithful to a sort of nostalgia for the past; we are faithful to the future that God promises, specifically that He will not let us go, He will not give up on us and we will not be abandoned and left alone.

## **THE BOOK OF HOSEA: THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS**

What is it about? These first three chapters are a story within

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the story of the Book of Hosea. They hold together, and we can almost read them separately from the rest of the book. This is why we call it an ‘oracle’.

The text begins by reporting a marriage, a marriage contracted on God’s order. There is nothing nice about this marriage because Hosea is obliged to marry; he receives God’s order to marry an unfaithful woman, whose opinion is not asked. Hosea marries Gomer, a prostitute. In the Biblical text, a prostitute is a woman who goes to other gods; we should not immediately see a sexual image here. (This is the definition of prostitution: going to other gods than the true God.) Hosea, then, marries this woman by force, and to do so, he buys her.

In other words, this relationship between Hosea and this woman begins with a lot of violence and brutality. Hosea does not seem to have the option of saying no to God, and Gomer had no possibility of saying no to this man. In short, the story begins poorly even if driven by divine command.

This is not the loving relationship in marriage for which one would hope.

Hosea buys Gomer, and the relationship will continue in this violence because the children who will be born from their relationship (cf. Hos 1:4-9) have awful names, accursed names. “*She conceived again and bore a daughter. The Lord said to him: Give her the name “Lo-Rouhama”, “Not-Pitied,” for I will no longer feel pity for the house of Israel*” (Hos 1:6). It is awful to bear a name that means, “I will not pity Israel.”

*After she weaned Not-Pitied, she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said: Give him the name Lo-Ammi, “Not-My-People,” for you are not my people, and I am not “I am” for you”* (Hos 1:8-9).

There is nothing benevolent about the descendants born of this relationship. *“You are not my people, and I am not “I am” for you.”* This is harsh.

This relationship begins in violence and remains problematic. For example, Gomer continues her prostitution, continues being unfaithful (this is chapter 2), and Hosea decides to repudiate her in a very violent way, stripping her naked, exposing her to public shame and obliterating her passage on earth. *“Now I will lay bare her shame in full view of her lovers, and no one can deliver her out of my hand.... I will lay waste her vines”* (Hos 2:12, 14). This story thus continues in violence.

And then something happens. *“Therefore, I will allure her now; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak persuasively to her. Then I will give her the vineyards she had, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of her youth”* (Hos 2:16-17). It is a conversion, a reversal.

### **What causes this reversal? What are the consequences for the relationship between this man and this woman?**

The cause of this reversal is the desert: *“I will allure her now; I will lead her into the wilderness [desert].”* The desert is where we lose our bearings; there are no longer any certainties because the references and securities of the past of knowing the path to follow all disappear in the desert. The landscape changes with each storm. There are no more landmarks, and we are stripped of securities and sent back to the essential: how to survive, how not to die of thirst, how not to wander off lost forever?

*“I will lead her into the desert.”* Both of them find themselves in the desert. By the mere fact of being in the desert, the woman Gomer loses her lovers, her idols, the objects of her prostitution, from which she is separated. Hosea, too, loses his securities; he loses recognition as the master of this woman in the eyes of the masses, in any case, of the witnesses at the beginning of the

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book. In the desert, Hosea and Gomer are alone. No one else is around anymore to see what happens. He thus cannot call upon witnesses or on the village to begin a trial as mentioned in chapter 2, verse 4. The desert thus displaces each of them. It is not just the woman who will convert, who will return; he will as well.

If the text that follows is so different from the beginning and tells a story of loving, respectful fidelity, it is because the desert has led both to change. He was sure about his actions before, sure that he was in the right as to what God had asked of him. God had asked him to marry a prostitute woman, and he did so. This woman remained unfaithful, he decided to leave her half dead, and he was convinced that he was in the right in doing this; he was convinced that he was faithful in doing this. However, he was wrong. He is not faithful in doing this because God's fidelity cannot lead to the death of anyone, no matter who she may be. When the text is so violent, this little verse, "*I will lead her into the desert,*" changes everything. He was in a non-loving fidelity, in a fidelity that was destructive of Gomer but also of himself and of his right relationship with the true God who cannot want death, no more of a sinner than of anyone else.

Here is the issue: this man believed he was faithful, except his fidelity did not serve the fidelity of a God of tender love and goodness. It did not serve that God. In a way, it served the image he had of a judging God, a vengeful God. This is why both Gomer and Hosea change in the desert. She changes by leaving her lovers, and he changes, in a way, by leaving his false god.

The fidelity, the connection between them, changes profoundly with "*I will lead her into the wilderness and speak persuasively to her.*" Then, "*I will betroth you to me forever: I will betroth you to me with justice and with judgment, with loyalty and with compassion; I will betroth you to me with fidelity, and you shall know the Lord*" (Hos 2:21-22).

What changes fundamentally in comparison to what we saw in chapter 1 up to verse 15 of chapter 2? What we see from here on is a bond, no longer marriage but betrothal, a favored Biblical expression. In the Catholic tradition, people are betrothed, engaged, before they marry. That is why we find it strange that here betrothal comes after marriage. Nonetheless, we also find this in the unique and beautiful text of the Song of Songs, in which the lover calls the woman, “*My betrothed behind your veil.*”

### **What does this mean for us?**

It is a realization that, from now on, the relationship is reciprocal and no longer domination. In other words, now loving fidelity is at the service of a connective reciprocity that engages both of them, not just the woman. If the husband expects his wife’s fidelity and response of mercy, justice and compassion to his betrothal, this implies that he now commits along with his wife. Thus, today’s fidelity, post-desert fidelity, has nothing in common with pre-desert fidelity. Post-desert fidelity serves to build the relationship, to build the art of loving rightly and in truth, the art of loving such that this love be at the service of life, what gives life and values like compassion, mercy, justice and right judgement. All of these are only authentic if they are faithful.

Fidelity is indeed a fidelity of betrothal, that is, it is no longer a relationship where I take the other person, in the name of what I believe to be fidelity, in order to use the other and make of him or her my object. (Recall that Hosea took this woman by force, buying her.) On the contrary, fidelity is at the service of a respectful and caring relationship. Betrothal means that fidelity now serves this good relationship, a right relationship with the other such that I never make the other person nor God my object. Hosea will not make the woman his object, and Gomer will not make the man her object. The other person is not my object; quite the contrary, he or she is a right-holder, a compassionate subject, a unique person. Fidelity comes to serve this sound relationship.

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This is a transformed fidelity. In a way, through the desert, this fidelity encountered something of the true God by entering into an authentic relationship. In our lives, fidelity must therefore go through these moments of renunciation, these moments when we lose our certainty about what we previously thought about ourselves, the world and God. Fidelity must experience these moments to correspond better to who we are, to the truth of our God, to the truth of relationships. These moments assure that this fidelity is really at the service of a life-giving relationship, of a relationship that gives us life. However, fidelity cannot give us life if it does not give life to others, if it is not at the service of making our relationship with others relationships that help them to live.

As a result, new children will be born from this new relationship; in any case, these children have new names that have very different meanings than at the beginning of the book. Now, Lo-Rouhama means “*You are my people*,” and Lo-Ammi, “*You are my God*” (Hos 2:25). These names bear a promise. This is what makes fidelity possible! The fruitfulness of fidelity has to do with promise, a promise of life, of new life. It does not serve the past, a nostalgia for yesterday’s world or yesterday’s Church; it serves the promise that it is possible for us to live, accompanied by our God who goes before us, in this very unstable world and this troubled Church. This is fidelity: not to return to the past, as if fidelity meant returning to a lost world, but, on the contrary, to believe that, in our modest way, we can be actors in a world laboring to give birth, as Saint Paul says.

## THE DECALOGUE

We can read the Decalogue, those “Ten Words”, in one of the two versions of the text, either in Exodus, chapter 20, or Deuteronomy, chapter 15. The two texts were not written in the same period. I will focus on just three “Words” of these ten commandments.

**THE FIRST WORD OF THE DECALOGUE: “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*” (Ex 20:1-18, Deut 5:1-22).**

This first Word of the Decalogue, which opens the text, “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,*” manifests who God is. Primarily, fundamentally, God is the One who keeps His word of liberation. God’s fidelity is the commitment to liberate, love and save His people. The other Words only have meaning if supported by this first Word. In other words, the following Words are not a sort of *quid pro quo*, like “I brought you out of slavery, so it is in your interest to do what I ask of you.” Not at all! God is not bargaining for our fidelity as a response to His commitment. God gives; He gives freedom; in His Son, he will give salvation once and for all.

The first of the Words of the Decalogue, which underpins all the others and without which they would have no weight, invites us to take the risk of assuming our freedom.

The Words that follow this first foundational Word are also gifts for living in a situation of freedom. As we saw with Hosea and Gomer, it is not enough to have been liberated to remain free. It is not enough to have come out of our slaveries, whatever they may be - the slavery of poverty, of consumerism, of self-image - to be free. The real issue in life is to remain free in the midst of deserts or life circumstances that are so many possibilities for slavery. Fidelity is not like bargaining or bribery. Rather, this principle underlies it: “I freed you because I love you. Not only did I free you, but I show you the way to remain free; I offer you the means to remain free.”

Each Word that follows is a gift offered by God to remain in a situation of freedom and not fall back into other slaveries. We find ourselves in a covenant bond, not a contractual bond: “Because God gave me that, I should give this.” No, God gave and, what’s more, God continues to give what is necessary for liv-

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ing in freedom. It really means, hearing this Word about being brought out of slavery, that our attempts at fidelity even in our human weakness should be a covenant response to the freedom given in history by God.

It is not just the freedom or the liberation of a day, but it is the fact of being able to be free, to be saved in the very course of our personal history, the events faced and the intimate circumstances of our lives that unsettle us. Fidelity serves to help us live. “It is I, your Lord God, who brought you out of slavery.” It serves to make us free, not free for just anything (which is hardly a freedom), but free to be able to love, to the extent possible, as God loves.

Therefore, the first Word that opens the text, “I who brought you out of slavery” is crucial; without it, we would be before an arbitrary God. All the other Words detail the first Word and interpret it. May we live it in our situations, whatever they may be.

**SEVENTH WORD OF THE DECALOGUE: “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Ex 20:14).**

What is it about? Here, it is clearly a question of fidelity. Indeed, adultery is the incapacity or unwillingness to be responsible for oneself. Adultery is the fact of not wanting to answer for one’s life, not wanting to be responsible for relationships, their seriousness and their importance. Adultery is a sort of detachment that supposes that infidelity to my partner would not be so important as long as we are free, consenting adults. Adultery is lack of personal accountability.

In appearance, we could be perfectly faithful while something rings false in us. We do not really take responsibility for ourselves, for our involvement and for the other person. In the Bible, adultery is not just betrayal of relationships, fidelity between a man and a woman. As a result, adultery is the impossibility or unwillingness to commit for the future. We must never forget that in the Bible, there was an obsession, a real concern for descendants, filiation.



We must never forget that Israel is a very small people. Forbidding adultery recalls the importance of committing to the future of the consequences of a relationship, specifically, the possibility of children.

The question raised by this Word is, “How does our fidelity engage the future?” How does fidelity today, with the men and women with whom we interact, first in our religious institutes but also in the charitable work carried out by our communities, in the places where we are sent, how do this charity and this commitment implicate a responsibility for the future? The future of our institute? The future of the women and men with whom we live and work every day in our mission? How does fidelity involve responsibility for tomorrow?

We could reread *Laudato Si'* to see how fidelity also involves the future of creation, the future of generations to come, so that they might be able to live on a still-inhabitable earth. How, then, does fidelity implicate us in the future of the Church, in the future of our institute, in the future of the women and men around us? This is the question posed by the commandment against adultery.

It does not only concern couples nor the present, but, through the present, we implicate the future and commit ourselves for it.

It is thus an issue of being able to answer for ourselves, to answer for our choices, to engage our responsibility and not say, “It’s not me, it’s someone else, even it’s the Superior who asked for it!” Maybe that is the case, but I am the one doing it. Therefore, not committing adultery is an urgent call for the body as well as for the heart. It means always unwrapping the first Word and giving our word. We do this as best we can.

**TENTH WORD OF THE DECALOGUE: “*You shall not covet*” (Ex 20:17).**

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The last Word of the Decalogue is very unusual. It says, “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*”

“You shall not covet.” Covetousness, envy. What is it? When we look at theological and philosophical tradition or anthropological and psychological studies, we see that envy and covetousness always put us in an awkward position and at odds with ourselves, with the result that we are never satisfied. To make us happy, we would have to be like the other person and have his intelligence, his learning, his money or his education. In short, I would always have to live a different life, a dream life and take from the other person what I think he has and I do not. In our local communities, all of this leads us to compare ourselves and be rivals, which inevitably destroys us. As long as we are busy competing and thinking that life is better for the other person, we do not change anything about our own life or do anything for our personal growth.

The command against covetousness, which is an ancient Biblical illness found in the story of Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 3), exists to help us love ourselves. It helps us believe that we can live with what we are, that it is not necessary to take what we think others have from them and that we can in fact grow, change, improve and transform ourselves with what we are. We thus recognize an invitation to the primary fidelity, which is fidelity to ourselves. This fidelity to ourselves, however, must be based on the first Word, without which we cannot understand that we do not need to covet since God has freed us. It is not a moral lesson preached to us; it is an invitation because God loves us, and if we are loved, we do not need to wait to be someone else in order to respond to God.

We do indeed need to be faithful to ourselves, but this fidelity to ourselves or to being able to live with ourselves comes from always being in God’s loving care. We should not be faithful to ourselves in order to remain where we are, not change and be

satisfied with what we are; we should be faithful to ourselves because we only transform what we love. We do not transform what we hate; we only change what we love. If we do not manage to have sufficient self-esteem, we cannot change because we only convert what we love. This applies to the world as well. We can only hope to participate in its conversion and in greater justice and peace in the world if we love it, never if we hate it.

The same is true for our lives. This Word intends to teach us to love reality so that we can then build our lives, transform them and convert them.

The fidelity to which this Word invites us is fidelity in response to this promise made by God: “You can live with what you are, and you can grow with what you have because I love you.”

Do not forget that this final Word, different from the preceding Words, is a Word addressed to the heart. The Word of God, “you will not covet,” speaks directly to the heart. In other words, because the text goes from the first to the tenth Word and unites them in pairs, there is an echo between, “*I am the Lord who brought you out of slavery*” and “*you will not covet.*” It speaks of this work of adjustment, of profound fidelity in the depths of ourselves and not just in external behaviors that could be simply correct, out of fear, conformity, to avoid accusations, but that would not reflect what is in the heart.

This tenth Word thus speaks to the heart, not just behaviors. What a beautiful promise that liberation or salvation makes it possible to adjust and correct ourselves and thus enter into this fidelity in the depths of our hearts.

### **III – APPROACHES TO GIVE HOPE FOR THE POSSIBILITY TO LIVE OUR RESPONSE OF FIDELITY AND INTEGRATE IT INTO GOD’S LOVING FIDELITY**

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**1<sup>ST</sup> APPROACH: THE FIDELITY THAT INTERESTS US IS NECESSARILY PART OF THE FINITENESS OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.**

Our fidelity is first a sort of hospitality extended to ourselves and to our own reality with its complexity, ambiguities, limitations, faults and weaknesses. No fidelity is possible if it does not take into account the reality of our weaknesses.

Everyone needs to have enough self-knowledge in order to be faithful to the core of who she is. Fidelity is thus not a static state; rather, it must embrace our lives with their weaknesses and strengths, embrace our vulnerability and the inevitable changes in our lives. Fidelity is what allows us to integrate what we become, contributing to unifying our changing lives.

**2<sup>ND</sup> APPROACH: FIDELITY CANNOT BE ESTABLISHED ONCE AND FOR ALL.**

While we promise fidelity by our vows and try our best to live it every day, by its very nature, it is never established once and for all. It must be taken up again, reinterpreted based on what happens to us and especially what happens to us that we did not anticipate and that upsets life: sudden losses, serious illnesses, painful failures... All this challenges us and calls into question what we thought and believed up to that time. We know well that these moments of trial have a “before” and an “after”, for example, a “before” when everything we did succeeded and an “after” when everything we do fails!

Fidelity must take this into account in order to be authentic and loving and serve the life of God within us. This is why we commit ourselves as a life promise to what we place before ourselves while we also commit in such a way that we have to live into it with the various circumstances of our lives. In other words, we must come to terms with new faults, our new weaknesses, with the unknown in ourselves that we do not know until we have gone through a particular trial. It is only at that moment that we know how we react.

### 3<sup>RD</sup> APPROACH: PROMISE

To think about our personal and communal fidelity in the life that we have chosen, the issue of promise is that of commitment. Commitment produces something that bears a lot of hope, an anthropological hope. Why? When we promise, it means that we take with us what we have already lived, we take the “package” of our lives, including what I would have wished did not exist (a childhood tragedy, for example). When I promise to live in fidelity, I take with me all my memories, the happy things that have built me up but also much more painful things. I take everything; I do not select because we cannot choose, carrying everything with us, never leaving behind anything of our history. We carry it all the time; it is always there, whether we want it or not. I take all this history and project it before me; I commit myself in fidelity though I know nothing about what will happen to me tomorrow.

In our day, we are obsessed with the principle of precaution, which dictates that we should know the consequences of the choices that we make. We see this in the areas of health, nuclear power, ecology, food, public health... except life is not like that. We cannot say, “I accept committing myself and being faithful on the condition that my life goes this way or that way... on the condition that I am sure to do this or that.” No one can promise me that things will happen according to my desire. No one can guarantee that it is risk-free. No one can guarantee that there will not be any unpleasant surprises, sufferings, misfortunes or doubts. No one can guarantee that everything will be calm in my life and that if I try to be faithful, everything will go well. No, no one can assure me of that. We can hope for it, but we can never guarantee it. Nonetheless, we promise, we have the desire and do it: we commit our lives in fidelity to what we do not know about the future. This is an incredible force of the Christian life. It is not limited to the Christian life, but in the Christian life, it is very particular and even more so in consecrated life because we make this commitment with others. In congregations, we make it following others (the Sisters who have gone before us) and always

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in the company of God who goes before us and accompanies us. This creates unity of life.

Being able to take our history with us, projecting or throwing it before us and committing it for the future without knowing what will happen to us, such fidelity brings us inner unity because we always live this relationship between our history and our future in the present. As a result, we weave together the three human times: present, past and future. In our world that is so fragmented, so unsettled, where changes and transformations are so rapid and chaos is so pronounced, it is very important that consecrated women like us live in unity even in our personal histories thanks to this capacity to commit all that we are. This is the issue of the promise.

While it is difficult, even impossible, to promise a feeling's permanence when nothing is a done deal, on the other hand, it is quite possible to commit to promising, in the depths of the present, to do everything possible to keep our relationships alive and life-giving. Here is where mercy comes in as well, in the depths of our limited, finite condition, subject to the accidents of life and to the very weaknesses and failures that are inherent to our humanity. Offering our trust, having confidence, does not mean we can expect everything of others but it does involve building with them a place of sharing. It is also accepting the possibility of changes, of reversals and maybe even betrayal. This, in any case, is how our God trusts people.

## SEVERAL QUESTIONS

**HOW CAN WE SAY THAT FIDELITY EXISTS TO GIVE US LIFE AT THE SAME TIME THAT WE CONFESS A CHRIST WHO WAS CRUCIFIED AND DIED?**

We must look at the nature of Jesus' fidelity. Jesus' fidelity is never a fidelity that causes death. Christ's fidelity is to His Father and to His coming to show people that God is close to them. Through Christ's life, words and actions, we realize that the God who was

thought to be distant and behind the veil in the Temple, is in reality and in truth a God who is close to each person, a God who does not need an intermediary. This is Jesus' fidelity: showing that God makes Himself close to those who thought they were far off: sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, women, children, the sick, those possessed by demons, that is, all those whom society set aside or whose testimony society at that time rejected, as was the case for women.

Jesus' fidelity is at the service of proclaiming this God, a God who has drawn near, who made Himself the neighbor of all and who no longer needs those who believe in Him to observe some 600 or 900 commandments to be able to pray to Him or love Him. Fidelity to this God will lead crowds to follow Jesus; in the context of Jesus' age, it will attract unlikely candidates, excluded people. Jesus thus raised hope, but not just the hope of the liberation of Israel, as we see in the accounts of the Passion or the summary offered by the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The hope that Jesus has stirred up is a movement that we could call "popular". It is not a movement of the rich, the conventional thinkers and the learned of the time; on the contrary, this movement provokes fear among the "establishment", those who have a place in society, specifically the high priests, Pharisees and even the Romans. This conflict between the hope raised among those who were far off or felt far off - the most humble - and the leaders' fear that this movement will disturb their position is what will gradually lead to the Passion. In the end, they are afraid that Jesus' proclamation of a close and fatherly God will unseat them from their privileged place.

The Passion is the tension of this conflict in which the leaders, be they religious or political, will manage to join together in order to exclude Jesus in one way or another and thus maintain their privileges, positions and personal comfort. What led Jesus to death is not a desire to die; He is not faithful to a deadly God, a God who would want His death. What led Jesus to death is fidelity to a living God who wants the most humble to live and know that God

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loves them. However, since this is not acceptable to the powerful of the time, they decide to put Him to death. Christ's fidelity is to God's art of loving. It is never a morbid, deadly fidelity. The Father does not lead His Son to death; the leaders of the priests and, in a way, the Roman military, do. Christ's fidelity comes at this price: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (Jn 15:13) since it is indeed a case of "*laying down one's life for one's friends*" so that they live.

It is striking that Jesus does not take anyone with Him in His death; there is no glorification of death. Jesus never brings His closest friends to death. When the guards come to arrest Jesus, the disciples flee, judging that it is wiser to get out of the way of danger, and Jesus does not hold them back. When Mary and John are at the foot of the Cross, Jesus says to them, "*Son, behold your mother,*" and "*Woman, behold your son.*" He wants to restore a future to this man, John, and to this woman, Mary. By saying to His beloved disciple, "*Behold your mother,*" He gives him a new commitment, turning him again toward the future by turning him toward a new relationship. Saying to Mary, "*Behold your son,*" has the same effect. Jesus redirects both of them toward life.

Often parents who have lost a child tell us that they would have preferred to die with their deceased child; given how hard this is, they do not want to outlive them. It is unbearable and intolerable to remain alive when those who should live die from illness or a crime. Jesus' words to Mary, "*Behold your son,*" indicate to her that John is her son and that she has a filial connection, not just a friendly or neighborly relationship. Before seeing the image of the nascent Church in this, we should see the power of a life connection given as He dies. This prevents those who love Jesus most, Mary and the beloved disciple, from becoming caught up in Jesus' death or so fascinated by it that they would have no other desire than to die with Him.

These signs indicate that fidelity is for living, but not for living our own little life, which is hardly interesting, but for living in



favor of others, for living with and for others. We can say that Christ's fidelity is so we can live and not so that we die because God is the God of the living and not of the dead. Furthermore, the Son of Man accepted death on the Cross not to praise death but to praise life, in the sense that there is no greater love, not than giving one's life, but than giving one's life for one's friends. He does not give up His life but gives it for others.

### **WHAT IS THE DESERT?**

In the Biblical tradition, the desert is the place for listening to the will of God. This is true for Jesus when He withdraws to the desert; there, He confronts the devil to recall the authentic word of God. At the same time, the desert is an ambiguous, ambivalent place. It is thus both a place of silence that helps you hear the always-discrete word of God and a place that legitimately causes fear because it disorients whereas human beings need certainties, security and known paths. It is never so simple to cross through and live in the deserts of our lives because we feel lost there. However, when we begin to get lost is often when we start to find the right path, the path of God, but the very moment is legitimately worrisome. The human person is not made for living in the desert because it is a hostile place as well as the place of all temptations. Therefore, crossing the desert requires remaining rooted in the Word of God. Surely, this is why it is more reassuring and less worrying to go off to the desert as a group.

We have Christ but also our Sisters and people with whom we are in solidarity who remain beside us. They cannot make the journey for us, but they support us in knowing that if we cross through the desert, it is to reach a habitable land because we are not made to live in the desert. All of Biblical and liturgical symbolism, such as the Lenten Season, reminds us that this time is not intended to last. Sometimes we might take self-satisfied pleasure in thinking that all this is very virtuous and courageous, but that is not the point. The real issue is that crossing a desert should strip us of false certainties and false images of ourselves as well as of God.

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**CAN WE SPEAK OF FIDELITY IN A DIVIDED CHURCH? EVERYONE THINKS THAT HE OR SHE IS FAITHFUL AND THAT THE OTHER IS UN-FAITHFUL.**

Tradition, the Word of God and Christ's example offer us reference points. For example, if fidelity to God consists in believing that we can deride the humble in the name of this fidelity, fidelity is in fact a lie. If we believe that our fidelity to God gives us privileges over the life of the world and those who struggle, then we are living a lie, wherever we are in the Church: at the top, the middle, the bottom, it doesn't matter!

If we think of a very tragic contemporary problem, the real scandal is not speaking badly of the Church because this house is holy; the real scandal is violating and harming the life of the least among us, children and the vulnerable. The only scandal, in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, is not damaging the Temple, but damaging the temple of living bodies: children, the weak, widows, foreigners, immigrants. The scandal is not to attack the institution, its image or its structure, which is above all and quite naturally human like any human structure. Today, this is a serious issue for fidelity.

**DOESN'T REPETITION RUN THE RISK OF MAKING US FALL INTO THE DANGER OF ROUTINE?**

There is a relationship between fidelity and repetition. We should recall that repetition offers relief for the will because repetition offers relief to desire. This is the purpose of repetition, and this is good because we could not consume our will and desire every day without quickly becoming exhausted. The repetition of a daily schedule and liturgy is thus very important. The repetition year to year and thanks to the organization of a religious institution, with its meetings and Domestic, Provincial and General Assemblies, is also important. If we had to decide that it would be a good idea to meet every time, I suspect that we would not meet often. All of this is important for structuring life. The whole difficulty is

making sure that this repetition continues to hold meaning. To avoid falling into routine, it is important that we continue to be present to this repetition such that it is alive. Routine is doing something but no longer being present to what we do. We do it because it is a habit and we do not want trouble, but our heart and soul are no longer really in what we do. If this happens occasionally, it is not serious; inevitably, we are not always totally present to what we are doing. It would be very tiring if all the time we were absolutely present to what we do. However, there is a significant margin between absolutely always and almost never. In our religious life, we should regularly ask ourselves about how our living fidelity – a fidelity above all to the life of Christ – fills the repetition of what our consecrated life proposes. We do not have to ask this question every day or even every week, but we should be able to ask ourselves it, perhaps when a particular event occurs or when our local community, situation or mission changes. We are always walking a fine line. All this has to do with the heart since in appearance we could be perfect and present all the places we should be, without really putting our soul, spirit, intelligence and faith in what we do. However, we are very fortunate to have a spiritual tradition that supports our desire.

#### **WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT THE SITUATION OF ABUSED WOMEN AND THOSE RESIGNED TO THEIR SITUATION?**

No one is in the shoes of another person; no one is in another person's skin. The question that might arise is, "In serious circumstances, to what should we be faithful?" Is it right to want to be faithful to someone who has decided to eliminate you slowly but surely through lies, violence, rape or exhaustion? Is fidelity to what causes death legitimate? We do not have to respond to this question, but we should face it directly. I remember a woman whose husband beat her for more than thirty-five years. When I asked her how it was possible that she still be there with him, she told me that she had done it for her children so that they would have a father. Then, the children grew up and moved out, but she remained because she did not know where to go or how she would

*Living fidelity in consecrated life*

have survived humanly and financially. What's more, when her husband was not completely drunk, he would ask her forgiveness even if that very evening he would hit her again. However, one day, this woman almost died. She found herself half-dead at the hospital because of his blows. Then, that woman told me, "*It's over; I will not return any more because I do not want to die.*"

What counts is to do everything to help people live, but it is not so easy. I think that we are the last ones to judge all these situations; however, I repeat, fidelity never exists for itself but only to serve values of love, but a love that causes death is not real love. If possible, you should listen gently to their complaints, listen to their mixed feelings and assure these women that whatever they decide, you will not abandon them as long as it is within your power. It is up to them to decide, and no one else. The first among us to throw a stone would do well to look at herself and at what she might do in similar circumstances.

**By way of conclusion: "FIDELITY AND OBEDIENCE"**

Christian obedience is always the obedience of sons and daughters. In other words, obedience only exists in a context of freedom; otherwise, it is what we call slavery. A slave is in a situation of submission. If he wants to remain alive and eat, he has no other choice than to submit to the arbitrary will of his master. Only sons and daughters, that is, only those who have the dignity of freedom, can obey. Therefore, there is no obedience without freedom. In religious life, obedience, which is the ability to listen, to adopt a listening attitude, is cultivated and should be cultivated in the same way that the reality of freedom should be cultivated. In the Christian life, one cannot go without the other because its obedience is that of free children. Fidelity is thus promised and not imposed.

Véronique Margron  
*Dominican Sister of Charity of the Presentation  
of the Blessed Virgin*

## The Vincentian style of vocational accompaniment

### INTRODUCTION

*“Some time ago, a friend asked me what I see in a young person. My response was that ‘I see someone who is searching for his or her own path, who wants to fly on their two feet, who faces the world and looks at the horizon with eyes full of the future, full of hope as well as illusions. A young person stands on two feet as adults do, but unlike adults, whose feet are parallel, he always has one foot forward, ready to set out, to spring ahead. Always racing onward,’”*<sup>1</sup> the Pope declared to young people.

After listening to the testimony from Sister Alessandra Smerilli, expert and participant in the Synod on Young People (cf. *Echoes of the Company* May-June 2019), we are going to focus more particularly on the Vincentian style of accompaniment. I do not claim to exhaust such a vast subject; it would require more time, but I would like to offer some lines for reflection, the fruit of years of service shared with other Sisters alongside young people. Because you come from many countries, cultures and life styles, I will limit myself to some shared ‘universal’ traits that should speak to each one of us.

When we speak about vocation, the first attitude that arises is wonder and awe. Pope Benedict XVI wrote, *“Vocations are not the result of a human project or a skillful organizational strategy. At their deepest level they are a gift of God, a mysterious and ineffable initiative of the Lord which enters a person’s life, attracting*

1. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, 139

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*him with the beauty of his love and awakening as a result a total and definitive gift of self to this divine love.*"<sup>2</sup>

Vocation is thus a call to life marked by gift and mystery, which you cannot consider on a theoretical level. However, we can encourage it, especially by living our vocation in an authentic way, responding boldly to the challenges of our times and offering young people our time, our spaces and opportunities to encounter God in those who are poor.

*"Each vocation is a radical experience of beauty, a **wonderful encounter**. Those who have experienced this beauty continue to desire it throughout their lives. It is an encounter that occurs only once, but it is so strong and radical that it forever changes us. At that moment, the person has the most sublime human experience, understanding **who he or she truly is**: something very beautiful and great. We see a sort of infinite tabernacle, very small but immense."*<sup>3</sup>

Many people are convinced that we are living through a change of era. Pope Francis constantly encourages us to board this "ship" directed toward the future, not abandoning it even our numbers are decreasing in many countries. Let the words of the prophet Isaiah touch us. *"Strengthen hands that are feeble, make firm knees that are weak. Say to the fearful of heart: 'Be strong, do not fear!'"*<sup>4</sup>

Here are three aspects that, by their very nature, are part of our DNA and can help us determine the primary elements of the Vincentian style of accompaniment.

### 1. THE VALUE OF LISTENING

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2. Message of Benedict XVI on the occasion of the second Latin-American Continental Congress for Vocations, January 21, 2011

3. L. Bruni, *Elogio dell' autosoversione. La fioritura umana nelle organizzazioni a movente ideale*, Roma, Città nuova, 2017, p. 55

4. Is 35:3-4

This attitude is at the foundation of our faith, the faith of the People of Israel and our charism. The Daughters of Charity have always been attentive to this dimension, which is part of a person's very being and not limited by age. Many older Sisters are a real reference points for young people. This is not by chance; it is a gift.

A Daughter of Charity's listening focuses mainly on four domains:

- the Word of God
- the signs of the times
- the cries of the poor
- young people

We will focus on the final point because one of the greatest poverty today is not being loved, not feeling accepted, understood nor heard.

However, it is not always easy for a young person to open up to someone else, even someone who demonstrates a readiness to listen to him. There are preconditions for listening that determine its effectiveness, such as trust, empathy, acceptance and the absence of judgement toward those who make themselves known and "bare their souls". It is hard for us to create open, authentic and joyful connections, to communicate what we have experienced calmly and freely in order to know each other better in truth, without masks or polite screens. The great task for our day is relearning to *express ourselves naturally*, to *tell our stories* as we are. We are no longer used to nor raised to recount *our inner experience*, especially *our emotional experience*, truthfully to others.

Young people who begin to discern their vocation often present a clear "*expressive inhibition and emotional instability*,"<sup>5</sup> which inevitably has an impact on healthy vocation discernment. In the past, we supposed that we could accompany this new generation of instable and wounded young people with a path of growth

5. Crea G., *Tonache ferite. Forme del disagio nella vita religiosa e sacerdotale*, Bologna, EDB, 2015, pp. 31-34

### The Vincentian style of vocational accompaniment

dealing primarily with the spiritual dimension. We thought that it would only be in discovering an attraction for the transcendent that they would gradually overcome certain relational shortcomings. Today, it is no longer possible to think in this way. In our day, it is necessary to pay special attention to people's emotional history and their capacity to express their feelings and situations of suffering in their family life that have a significant impact on their reading of the personal call and an authentic inner listening to God.

By speaking about themselves, young people become aware of what they experience and perceive. Over time, this exercise gives birth to inner freedom, real acceptance of their own history and the capacity to face fears and inconsistencies.

The virtue of simplicity, a way of being in truth, helps us in the art of listening; Saint Vincent called it his gospel. *“Simplicity is concerned with seeing that actions and words are straightforward and sincere. [...] when we think of simplicity as a particular virtue, properly so-called, it includes not only purity and truth, but also its characteristic of keeping from our words and actions all deceit, craftiness, and duplicity.”*<sup>6</sup>

Simplicity is the capacity to say things as they are, directly. Along the same lines, impartial, welcoming and non-judgmental listening fosters the practice of this virtue, even in young people.

## 2. A UNIFIED LIFE

As a result of the challenges of post-modern society, which Baumann defines as a ‘liquid society’, with its conviction that *change is the only thing that is permanent and uncertainty is the only certainty*, people experience fragmentation, inner division and the inability to make decisions. *“Some young people [...] want to continue being children or indefinitely prolong their adolescence and put off having to make decisions. “Fear of the definitive thus generates a kind of paralysis of decision-making. Yet youth*

6. CCD XII, 143



*cannot remain on hold. It is the age of choices and herein lies its fascination and its greatest responsibility” (CV, 140).*

A unified life is the antidote to dispersion and states of anxiety that lead to fear of living, avoidance of reality and the incapacity to make long-term decisions. All this has implications for vocations: multiple experiences do not always lead to a real choice but to waiting that tends toward infinity. Service and prayer, if they are closely connected, also prepare young people to discover their true identity for a greater unity of life.

### **Service and prayer**

In fidelity to our charism, it is fundamental to connect the dimensions of prayer and service in order to prevent a faith life of comfort, an “armchair” faith life, as Pope Francis has called it. This means making an appearance Sundays without any specific effects on people’s everyday life.

Taken together, Martha and Mary, the two protagonists of the famous Gospel passage in which Jesus scolds Martha for being too busy with her service rather than remaining at His feet like her sister Mary and listening to the Teacher, can represent well the Christian ideal of contemplation in action.

Vincenzian spirituality leads us to find Christ through service, just as it happened for Saint Vincent. *“Christ entered his life not through a window from heaven but through the streets of men; he saw those who were poor.”*<sup>7</sup>

In service, we experience God and others. We become aware of the demands of love, maintaining a more truthful vision of reality and life. Those who serve will pray for those whom they meet, feeling that they receive much more than they give while developing values that ultimately find their place in day-to-day life.

The Holy Spirit is the protagonist who sheds light on choices and

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7. L. Mezzadri, *Servizio in Dizionario storico spirituale vincenziano*, 387

### *The Vincentian style of vocational accompaniment*

enflames hearts to serve with God's charity. Today in the western world, young people urgently need education and meaning. They are often tempted by the easy life, excessively sheltered and too comfortable. Encountering poverty becomes an opportunity to lay bare their own weaknesses, call them by their names, integrate them into their lives and set forth from that reality.

As for Saint Louise, it is through the needs of our poorest brothers and sisters that we recover our will to live, to ask ourselves the deepest questions about the meaning of life and consequently to give of ourselves. When we learn to savor the values of life, we can turn away from empty and meaningless things. *“Social engagement and direct contact with the poor remain fundamental ways of finding or deepening one's faith and the discernment of one's vocation.”*<sup>8</sup>

For “digital natives” who have a relationship with the sometimes superficial reality of the virtual world, service is an opportunity to enter into contact with reality. A face-to-face relationship with those who are poor becomes a privileged means for regaining our humanity and a more appropriate relationship with the world around us.

The Inter-Assemblies Documents have already expressed this concern.

*“Welcome others into our local communities to experience prayer and service of persons living in poverty.”*<sup>9</sup>

Again,

*“To this end, **let us dare** generously:*

- *to strengthen a vocation culture through our attractive and evangelizing witness;*

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8. Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, 170

9. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009-2015, p. 26

- *to open up our local communities to young people in order to offer opportunities for sharing, for prayer and for concrete service of persons who are poor, to accompany them and to reflect with them on their experiences of faith and service.”<sup>10</sup>*

## **The gift of community**

*“When religious communities and new foundations live their fraternity authentically, they become schools of communion, centers of prayer and contemplation, places of witness of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and arenas for evangelization and charity.”<sup>11</sup>*

A fundamental element of the Daughters of Charity’s style of accompaniment is community, as our Constitutions remind us: *“The Founders considered community life one of the essential supports of the vocation of the Daughters of Charity.”<sup>12</sup>*

Those who have already chosen to be Daughters of Charity are not the only ones who should consider this dimension. We should also extend its sense to young people who live a time of discernment because community life contributes to the growth of the person as a gift and as a trial.

Life in common is a constituent part of discernment itself. It is a space to live in together, not as a refuge to “hide ourselves” from the dangers of life, but as a sure place to stay and reveal who we really are.

*“Friendship and discussion, often within more or less structured groups, offer the opportunity to strengthen social and relational skills in a context in which one is neither analyzed nor judged. Group experience is also a great resource for sharing the faith*

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10. Inter-Assemblies Document 2015-2021, p. 24

11. Final Document of the Synod of Bishops, *Young people, faith and vocational discernment*, 88

12. C. 9

*The Vincentian style of vocational accompaniment*

*and for mutual help in bearing witness. The young are able to guide other young people and to exercise a genuine apostolate among their friends.*"<sup>13</sup>

Vocation ministry centered on the community dimension is the best calling card for young people who approach and gradually discover the beauty of feeling a member of a family. Here, I would like to say a word about the importance of collaboration with the Vincentians in vocation ministry. In speaking of fraternity, their presence enlarges even more the idea of a family and enriches what we can offer in terms of content and experiences on a spiritual and apostolic level. Moreover, in all educational areas today, we emphasize the importance of collegiality and therefore diverse figures that can become a reference for young people.

Offering experiences of service or gatherings with the presence of Daughters of Charity and Vincentian priests increases the possibility that young people open up and look seriously at their lives from a perspective of discernment.

Similarly, the presence of Sisters of every age can also be a source of enrichment and fruitful discussions, revealing the value of a charism passed on from generation to generation.

Working as a team also makes sharing opinions easier and allows for a more detailed evaluation of the paths traveled. This way of working translates into a greater good for young people in their journey and for the Sisters involved.

### **3. THE PROFILE OF THE ACCOMPANIER**

Spiritual accompaniers, in its highest sense, are life teachers who act not only through words but also by their personal presence that communicates spiritual energy; they are models. Saint Vincent de Paul drew inspiration from this form of spiritual direction, which continues to be a reference for our day.

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13. Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, 219

As Daughters of Charity, we are called to courageously live our lives given to God and to persons who are poor. The strength and effectiveness of our accompaniment lie primarily in our way of living as Sisters and sharing with young people. Here are some characteristics of Vincentian accompaniment.

### **Understand the value of time and going step by step**

Time and the practice of going step by step (which implies progress, climbing upward) are essential elements for the transformation of a person's human and spiritual life. The Holy Spirit acts in a person whose body and soul have limitations and potential; the Spirit respects their structures and processes.

Significant changes require time and patience. It is important to look to Christ's teaching method with His disciples.<sup>14</sup> His extreme sensitivity in his actions goes hand in hand with firmness regarding the demands of a Gospel-based life. The light and truth of Christ make their way without violence, and the same should be true in spiritual accompaniment, where we "*sow and reap*."<sup>15</sup>

### **Strength and gentleness, tools for support along the way**

If there is an especially delicate aspect of accompaniment, it is the relationship between the person accompanied and her accompanier. It can be very difficult to know when to use strong words or more gentleness with the person accompanied.

The capacity of accompaniers to use strong words when necessary is part of the practice of affective and effective love. The risk in any relationship is stopping at the first form of love, affective love, which is more sentimental and less likely to confront the inevitable storms of life.

On the other hand, effective love is the guarantee that I do not base my relationship only on a feeling but on what is truly in

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14. C.A. Bernard, *L'aiuto spirituale personale*, p. 47

15. Jn 4:37

### The Vincentian style of vocational accompaniment

the other's best interest. In this relationship between Sisters and young people, it is important to be able to have a degree of freedom that accepts the possibility of disagreement. A call to order does not then become a reason to abandon the path.

One of the most widespread emotional weaknesses today appears precisely in the incapacity to accept and deal with conflict, developing behaviors likely to distort the relationship. These include indulgence, ambiguity and pity although we know that *“the path of spiritual maturation of a person takes place through overcoming adversity and obstacles that come from limitations of situations of created beings and the maturation the person has already achieved.”*<sup>16</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Passion for young people is born from passion for life and for the promise that God has prepared for each one of us. Today, we are reflecting on the Vincentian style of vocation ministry, but we know that there are no magic formulas or simple techniques.

We recalled some characteristics specific to us that we have inherited from our Founders, such as listening, service, prayer and community, in which we can recognize the signs that bring us back above all to our personal vocation.

We are aware that the sum of what we have received is what we can give others. Even in vocational accompaniment, we become and generate life if we manage to offer ourselves and offer what impels us each day to be Daughters of Charity.

In recent years in Italy, the vocation crisis has become especially pronounced. We realized that we had to do more. Therefore, starting from nothing or almost nothing, we began to offer young women a series of special gatherings on vocation discernment: three weekends spaced out over the year and a longer period in the

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16. R. Frattallone, *Direzione spirituale: un cammino verso la pienezza della vita in Cristo*, Roma, LAS, 2006, 234

summer for two years. This offering is open to all young women who are asking themselves questions about their life and their call. The only thing we ask of them is fidelity to the two-year process. At the end of it, the young women are called to make a choice, to take a step, in one direction or another.

Even when their ways part with ours, young women tell us that this type of program is a rich resource for them and helps them make decisions.

Sister Raffaella SPIEZIO  
*Daughter of Charity*

## Designation of Visitatrixes and Appointment of Provincial Directors

### DESIGNATION OF VISITATRIXES

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*News  
from the  
Provinces*

PROVINCE OF BELO HORIZONTE: Sister Caetana Luiza Heleno GOMES was re-designated Visitatrix on January 2, 2019

PROVINCE OF ESPANA-SUR: Sister Maria del Carmen POLO BRAZO was designated Visitatrix on February 6, 2019.

PROVINCE DEL CARIBE: Sister Ediltrudis ACEVEDO MADERA was designated Visitatrix on April 3, 2019.

PROVINCE OF IRELAND: Sister Goretti BUTTLER was re-designated Visitatrix on April 3, 2019.

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AFRICA: Sister Raymonde NAHIMANA was designated Visitatrix on April 17, 2019.

PROVINCE OF LA MILAGROSA BOGOTA-VENEZUELA: Sister Blanca Cecilia TRIANA GONZALES was designated Visitatrix on May 1, 2019.

PROVINCE OF NUESTRA SENORA DE LA MISION-AMERICA SUR: Sister Maria Elisa ORTIZ



BENITEZ was designated Visitatrix on May 1, 2019.

PROVINCE OF MADRID-SAN VICENTE: Sister Maria Eugenia GONZALEZ MARTINEZ was re-designated Visitatrix on May 1, 2019.

PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Sister Theresa EKE was designated Visitatrix on May 15, 2019.

### **APPOINTMENT OF PROVINCIAL DIRECTORS**

PROVINCE OF MEXICO: Father Silviano CALDERON was re-appointed Provincial Director for a six-year term on December 18, 2018.

PROVINCE OF ESPANA-SUR: Father Juan de la ROSA MENDOZA was appointed Provincial Director on December 18, 2018.

PROVINCE OF RECIFE: Father José POREIRA RIBEIRO was re-appointed Provincial Director for a three-year term on January 16, 2019.

PROVINCE OF GREAT BRITAIN: Father Paul ROCHE was re-appointed Provincial Director for a three-year term on April 11, 2019.

PROVINCE OF ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC-ASIA: Father Amado CABALLERO was re-appointed Provincial Director for a three-year term on May 8, 2019.

PROVINCE OF LA MILAGROSA BOGOTA-VENEZUELA: Father Alvaro Mauricio FERNANDEZ MONSALVE was appointed Provincial Director on May 14, 2019.

PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Father Damian NWANKWO was re-appointed Provincial Director for a six-year term on July 24, 2019.

Synod for the Amazon,  
a challenge for the entire Church  
*“Evangelization and Ecology”*

Motherhouse, May 22, 2019

Notes taken during the presentation

On May 22, 2019, Monsignor Roque Paloschi, Archbishop of Porto Velho, Rondônia (Brazil), accompanied by Monsignor Rafael Cob Garcia, Apostolic Vicar of Puyo (Ecuador), Sister Maria Irene Lopes Dos Santos, delegate of the Confederation of Religious Men and Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, and Sister Rita Lopez, DC, explained to the Sisters of the Motherhouse what is at stake in the upcoming Synod for the Amazon planned for October 2019 and the theme chosen by Pope Francis, *“The Amazon: New paths for the Church and for integral ecology”*.

The Synod comes at a critical moment in human history. It falls within the context of the climatic and ecological crisis of the planet. We find ourselves in this particular historical moment. This is why the Spirit of God will lead us to find new paths to save not only the Amazon and its peoples, but also the planet, for the challenges of the Amazon concern the entire Church and the whole world.

Archbishop Roque made us more aware of the universal significance of this special synod and indicated the three major issues:

- the inculturation of the Gospel,
- the question of indigenous peoples and harmonious co-existence among different populations,
- an integral ecology that respects peoples and each individual, the land and rivers.

These three points show how a regional synod can be open to the universal, concerning ecclesial, pastoral and social questions as well as ecological ones.

**A seminar took place February 25 - 27 at the Vatican** in preparation for this special Synod for the Amazon. Approximately eighty people participated, including the seven presidents of Episcopal Conferences in the Amazonian Region (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana, Peru and Venezuela). The theme of the seminar was “*Towards the Special Synod for the Amazon: Regional and Universal Dimension*”. This title emphasizes the universal dimension of this regional synod.

**The first phase of the Synodal process included the consultation in the Amazon of all the dioceses and many individuals, indigenous people and cities** because developing an integral ecology requires listening to, recognizing and respecting individuals and local populations as valuable interlocutors and fostering the broadest participation possible from all socio-ecclesial categories. Three priorities came out of this seminar: the issue of native peoples, effective shared responsibility of lay people and valuing the specific role of women and consecrated life in this territory.

**A meeting of the Pre-Synodal Council** then gathered all the suggestions that emerged from the consultation of dioceses and of the Pan-Amazon region. The *Instrumentum laboris* will be written based on a summary of the collected data. This document will then return to the grassroots for study by all.

The theme of “new paths” is fundamental. The Church really needs to find new paths to fulfill its mission in the Amazon in this moment in history. We need to speak about new things and new perspectives and not be afraid of what is new.

Monsignor Roque PALOSCHI  
*Archbishop of Porto Velho  
and president of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI)*

### Province of Graz-Central Europe

### Caritas in Budapest

After the Second World War, the communist government banned the Hungarian Caritas [Catholic Charities], the Catholic charitable organization. Caritas resumed its activity in 1990, and Christians actively support Caritas' goals. The headquarters of the Hungarian Caritas located in Budapest has approximately 1,000 volunteers who work on social initiatives.

I have the good fortune of working with Caritas in a parish in Budapest. Other volunteers and I together strive to help people in need and support social and health programs. I am more directly involved in services for people who are homeless, and we distribute meals and clothing and try to offer them psychological support. Each person is welcomed as an equal, and we believe it is important that everyone feel at home here. They must fight against not only the cold and hunger, but above all against isolation and rejection.

Some people who live on the streets show an interest in the Catholic religion; they come to listen to the Word of God with our group. Sometimes even after they have found work, they return to participate.

During these gatherings centered on the Bible, we listen to a Biblical text and an explanation, and then we have a very free discussion. The people from the streets ask all the questions that they want, and the discussion quickly turns to their problems, especially lack of security in the streets and worry about the

future. They also speak about their friends living in the streets, and information is shared.

Each year, several homeless people agree to help prepare the Way of the Cross. At each station, one of them courageously carries the cross, and we pray together. This year, at the end of the Way of the Cross, one of them, a non-believer, said that while carrying the cross, he was deeply touched by the love of Jesus. Another man, who had done time in prison, approached the priest to make his confession and receive God's forgiveness.

One day a young Tzigane (Gypsy), who was rejected by his parents and had grown up in a Home, asked to prepare for Baptism. One year later, he was baptized and made his First Communion. This was an occasion to have a big celebration with all the poor and homeless people. Since then, he has become a real witness to the Gospel for his suffering brothers and sisters.

It is always complicated to accompany people in very difficult situations. Together, however, we try to take responsibility and help each other to be attentive to each other, even in the little details of everyday life. As for me, living with those who are poor evangelizes me. They teach me to discover the beauty of the Gospel each day and place friendship at the heart of my life.

Sister Cherubina SZÁNTÓ  
*Daughter of Charity*

Sister Anna Cantalupo  
Daughter of Charity (1888-1983)  
Servant of God

“Angel of Charity, Mother of the Poor”

H

History  
of the  
Company

The day that Sister Anna Cantalupo died, various daily newspapers in Sicily presented her as “*the most popular and beloved Sister of Catania*,” “*the mother of the poor*” and an “*angel of charity*”.

**WHY DID THIS HUMBLE DAUGHTER OF CHARITY DRAW SO MUCH ATTENTION?**

Sister Anna possessed a contagious joy and a compassionate charity that derived not only from her relationship with God but also from an exuberant, delightfully Neapolitan character, which she kept until the end of her life. As a child, she was called Pia and described as a real “*scugnizzo*” [imp], who enjoyed turning somersaults. She liked to dance, dressed elegantly and took great care with her hair. She was rather vain! With her beautiful voice, she enjoyed singing many Neapolitan classics and could delight her relatives and friends, especially during celebrations.

The Cantalupo family was well known in Naples. People considered her paternal grandfather a “saint” in his practice as a lawyer; they also called his son Egidio, Pia’s father, “the lawyer of the poor” because

he received the rich and the poor with the same kindness in his office and defended them with his verbal prowess but asked no fee of the poorest clients. He and his wife, Baroness Francesca Caffarelli di Guzman, would have six daughters; Pia was the fourth child. Unlike the other girls, Pia was highly spirited and like a whirlwind. With her many pranks, she often threw the house into turmoil, which worried her mother. One day, meeting Father Mariani at her father-in-law's house, she asked him to bless Pia, who was giving her much cause for concern. "*I have the impression that she has the devil in her,*" she said. This priest, placing his hand on the girl's head, reassured her with a smile. "*Do not fear; she is preparing to become a saint!*" Was this a prediction? In any case, this holiness was not yet evident to her mother's eyes.

#### **DISCOVERING HER VOCATION AND THE CHARISM**

After her First Communion, Pia began to calm down somewhat. She was intelligent and started helping in her father's office. As an initial form of evangelization, she asked her father's clients if they said their prayers, went to Mass on Sundays and fulfilled their Easter obligation.

December 16, 1901, was a graced moment. While tidying up the room of her sister Adeline, she found the "act of consecration to Jesus" that her sister had written. Troubled, she asked herself, "Can a young woman become the spouse of Jesus, of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity?" Even as it seemed impossible to her, she found the idea beautiful. That very evening, she asked her sister to take her to see her confessor, Father Antonio Di Coste, the following morning. This confession brought her great light; in her autobiography, Pia wrote that she recognized within her a clear call from Jesus to become His spouse.

*"I did not yet know that this was the time of grace when Jesus looked upon my soul. At the end of May 1902, I consecrated*

### Sister Anna Cantalupo

*myself to Him for the first time; at the age of 14, I gave Him my heart with the vow of virginity.”*

Attracted by the white cornette of the Daughters of Charity at Trinity Hospital, whom she could see from her window, Pia waited for the right moment to meet one and ask how she could be like them. In her response, the Sister beat around the bush and exaggerated the obstacles and difficulties. Pia then answered with her impetuous spirit, “*Sister, if your community is a hell, I want to come live in this hell as well!*” She then knew the address.

After obtaining permission from her father, on the condition that the Visitatrix of Naples keep her in Naples for his lifetime, Pia presented her request, which was accepted. Pia began her Postulancy at Mont Calvary Institute.

### DAUGHTER OF CHARITY

On December 23, 1908, she entered the Seminary. During this period of formation, she had the opportunity to assimilate the Founders’ thinking on the mystery of the Incarnation. Saint Vincent was not just a contemplative but also a real model of the active life, uniting contemplation and action, practicing the charity that Christ incarnated. “*Let us love God with the sweat of our brows and the strength of our arms.*”

The vocation does not consist only in loving God, but also in inspiring those who are poor to love Him. “*It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love Him.*” This thought captivated the young Seminary Sister and would become a deep conviction that would drive her until the end of her life. On August 19, 1909, she was sent to the Motherhouse in Paris to complete her Seminary.

After habit-taking, Sister Cantalupo returned to Naples and was sent on mission to a primary school. There, she had some difficulty disciplining the students. She herself had been lively and



boisterous and thought that rapping the desk would be enough to impose her authority over the children. But no! The class quickly became a little infernal mess,<sup>1</sup> and the Sister who taught in the classroom next door had to intervene to restore a few minutes of peace and quiet.

At the end of the school year in 1910, she was sent to the Royal Hospital for the Poor, Charles III Square in Naples, to serve a group of poor elderly patients. When the Sister Servant, Sister Pintaldi, brought her to her service, going down a long, dark hallway, she pointed out to her what was written on the wall at the end, “God sees me,” and indicated that in this service she would have no responsibility and would just work under God’s watchful eyes.

Full of enthusiasm, Sister Cantalupo, who had just received the name of Caterina, joyfully set to work, and the elderly quickly recognized the big heart of this young Daughter of Charity.

To prepare for vows, she worked seriously to grow in virtue, to the point that her health suffered. She contended with an asthmatic bronchitis, which obliged her to have long periods of medical care during which she would experience her companions’ sisterly affection.

On Christmas Eve in 1913, she pronounced the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and service of the poor. She kept until her death the letter from her parents offering their blessing on this occasion.

## THE SERVICE OF FIELD HOSPITALS

World War I broke out in Italy in 1915. The Visitatrix, Sister Emilie Maurice, established thirteen field hospitals in Naples to care for wounded soldiers. She asked Sister Caterina Cantalupo to leave the elderly temporarily in order to go to Hessler Hotel, where those disabled by the war were hospitalized.

1. Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift* (June 17, 2008), p. 18-23.

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This new work corresponded to her big heart meant to love those suffering and lead them to God. She gave them funny nicknames to console them in their amputations. For example, she would call a young man who had lost both his arms and legs “Pechinello”. On August 20, 1918, Sister Caterina lost her father and offered this suffering for the soldiers in her care.

That year, the Superiors decided to send her to Catania in response to the insistent demands of Baroness Anna Zappalà, who had become the president of the Work for Assistance to the Sick Poor in their Homes. It was a work of Pius IX College established by Cardinal G. Benedetto Dusmet, who had asked for the Daughters of Charity’s help in the education of poor girls.

### THE TURNING POINT IN HER LIFE: FROM NAPLES TO CATANIA

On December 3, 1918, Sister Cantalupo arrived in Catania. She was presented to the Sister Servant of Pius IX Institute, Sister Irene Vadon, a Jewish convert to Catholicism. She came from Turkey, was over 90 years old and still oversaw the school for the orphaned girls.

Sister Irene Vadon’s first question was, “*Do you have a teaching certificate?*”

“*No,*” answered Sister Cantalupo, “*I was sent for the service of the poor of Baroness Zappalà.*”

Visibly upset, Sister Irene exclaimed, “*What a trouble this Baroness is! She has two Sisters; that is enough for her! You are dismissed!*”

Sister Cantalupo withdrew, very sad. Soon afterwards, Sister Margherita came to encourage her. “*Do not pay any attention to the Sister Servant’s brusque manners! You will see that she means no harm and will submit to the Baroness’ wishes.*”

When the Baroness met Sister Cantalupo, she welcomed her with great joy and indicated her desire that she bear her same first name, that is, Sister Anna. From that moment on, the history of the National Work for the Sick Poor would interweave with the life of Sister Anna, who would care for hundreds of war orphans and widows. The service consisted in weekly medical care, distribution of medicine and clothes, the possibility of academic studies and classes in dressmaking, embroidery, typing, etc.

The government had provided sewing machines and typewriters, and war widows were chosen as teachers. Sister Anna took responsibility for the organization of summer camps at the seashore for orphans, catechism classes for the children, youth and women, as well as retreats. Twelve young war orphans would enter the seminary; after their priestly ordination, they returned to Sister Anna to celebrate their first Mass. Among the girls, there were also many religious vocations; others became wives and mothers who, after their marriage, would continue to come to the house and attend catechism classes. In the courtyard of the Institute on Sundays, a swarm of children and youth participated in the different activities offered.

The Sister Servant, Sister Irene Vadon, felt totally overwhelmed at all the bustling activity that perturbed the orphanage's program, but she realized the impossibility of getting in the way of such an expansion. Baroness Zappalà offered to establish a small house on her grounds (St. Peter Street) for the four Sisters involved in the service of war orphans and the sick poor.

On April 11, 1923, Sister Anna Cantalupo, Sister Celestina Brandy, Sister Luisa Scardigno and Sister Margherita Corriero, appointed Sister Servant, left Pius IX Institute and moved to the new house named the House of Charity at 49 St. Peter Street.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift*, p. 54.

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Mother Inchelin,<sup>3</sup> Superioress General, visited the headquarters of the work in October and congratulated the Sisters for all their hard work. From then on, Catania would find there the ideal place to heal all suffering and a fiery Sister who captivated people's hearts.

The first fruits began to appear. A mother cured of a serious illness found the faith and received Baptism. An unmarried couple, aged 79 and 77, made their relationship official and married; they would set off a long series of legal marriages that would so astonish the employee in the Public Records Office that he would ask if Sister Anna had opened a marriage agency.<sup>4</sup>

## RETREATS

In April 1920, in the church of the Minoritelli<sup>5</sup> adjacent to the Pius IX Institute, Sister Anna began the first three-day retreat to prepare for Easter. She would gradually involve people whom she approached in various city offices: employees of city hall, the post office and banks, but also firefighters, police officers, street sweepers, taxi drivers and railroad workers. To encourage them to join the activity, she spoke with their bosses: bank directors, railroad engineers, etc. In her simple but passionate way, she convinced them to grant a few hours leave to their employees so she could gather them to listen to the Word of God. It was touching to see managers arrive first and encourage their employees with a joke, "*You cannot say 'no' to Sister Anna!*"<sup>6</sup> Sister Anna, who had great devotion to the Sacred Heart, even managed to have a painting of the Sacred Heart placed in all these offices and for the employees to make their act of consecration.

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3. Visit of the Superioress General, Sister Inchelin. Cf. Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift*, p. 59.

4. Marriage Bureau - In Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift*, p. 59.

5. The Church of Mary Immaculate of the Minoritelli on Gesualdo Clementi Street (now Four Cantons Street) in Catania is called "of the Minoritelli" because it had belonged to the monks who resided in the attached convent.

6. Chronology of the life and activity of Sister Anna Cantalupo (1994), p. 29.

February 11, 1925, was a special date for Sister Anna. For the first time, she made “*the vow to offer herself out of love to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the sanctification of priests*” in the Association of Auxiliaries of Priestly Reparation, the headquarters of which was in Paris.<sup>7</sup> Sister Vincenza Gioia<sup>8</sup> stressed, “*This consecration was the springboard for all the powers of her soul in seeking the glory of God and salvation for sinners.*”<sup>9</sup>

One day, Sister Anna met a poor man who was deaf and mute. She asked him if he had met his Easter obligation, but the man communicated that no one could understand him. Pained, she found a priest who knew sign language and set out to find all the deaf and mute people in the area, most of whom worked as shoeshines. She invited them to the House of Charity to help them prepare for communion on Easter Sunday.

Her name quickly became a symbol of charity. All those who were in need turned to her, and she managed to find a solution for each one. In person or in writing, she would address anyone who could possibly help them. She spoke with the same simplicity to the prefect, the mayor, judges and doctors; her words drew them in and led them to share their money. All willingly committed because they knew that Sister Anna only asked for assistance for persons who are poor.

#### **A NEW MISSION FOR SISTER ANNA: THE COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS ASSISTANCE TO SOLDIERS**

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7 Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift*, op. cit. p. 62.

8 Sister Vincenza Gioia, in S.T. [*Summarium testimonium*] - n. Texts XVI § 228, 3-35. “*I met Sister Anna Cantalupo in March 1949. I had recently completed my formation at the seminary of the Motherhouse in Paris. My first mission was the House of Charity in Catania where Sister Anna Cantalupo was the interim Sister Servant. I remember that she immediately spoke to me about the work of assisting the sick poor in their homes. She was enthusiastic about serving in this work founded by Cardinal Dusmet. I understood that this enthusiasm also sprang from an attitude of sincere and trusting collaboration with the president, Baroness Anna Zappalà. She had real devotion to the Superiors and the Bishop of that time.*”

9 LVI, op. cit., p. 62.

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On September 1, 1939, Germany's occupation of Poland led World War II to break out. On June 10, 1940, Italy entered the war.<sup>10</sup> The announcement came during a meeting of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart. Sister Anna immediately invited the Ladies to engage in a new service: accompany the hundreds and thousands of soldiers who would pass through Catania on their way to the battlefields. Are they all in a state of grace? Have they made their first Communion?

*“The Lord wants us to go out to meet our soldiers in the barracks to give them the Miraculous Medal and explain to them the Virgin Mary’s promise. In the barracks, He wants us to encourage general confessions and participation in Holy Mass. We will do everything so that they leave Catania in a state of grace.”*<sup>11</sup>

As all the Ladies of the Sacred Heart agreed, they immediately began to plan. They ordered 10,000 medals from Rome, bought thread to braid a three-colored cord for them and asked the printer to run off leaflets explaining the apparition. Thus was born in Catania the Committee for religious assistance to soldiers who were passing through the city on their way to battle.

Sister Anna communicated this initiative to Archbishop Carmelo Patanè,<sup>12</sup> who gave his blessing and assigned two chaplains to it, Father F. Ricceri and Father G. Serrano. Other priests spontaneously offered their services, including two Priests of the Mission, Fathers Capurso and Messina.<sup>13</sup> After obtaining authorization from the General Commander, Sister Anna, along with one other

10. Doc. 25 - War Diary of Sister Anna Cantalupo, the record of the spiritual and material works that took place in Catania from June 10, 1940, to August 30, 1941. The original was typed by Miss Grazietta Cima, taking dictation from Sister Anna (Archives of the Cause for Saints, Archiepiscopal Curia of Catania)

11. Doc. 25 – War Diary, p. 58.

12. Doc. 25 – War Diary, p. 65 (July 26, 1940, the first 20 lines). “Our work is now firmly established. July 26, the work will have an official name, the Committee for religious assistance to soldiers, and Father Ricceri, delegate of His Excellency the Archbishop, will be its leader.” Cf. S.T. n° IV Texts: Fr. Santo Leonardi, Ad 29 §76, p. 51.

13. Cf. Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift*, p. 81, 84-85.

Sister and a few Ladies, began their tour of the barracks to plan the schedule for gathering the soldiers. They soon learned that one thousand young volunteers from the militia were about to leave for the northern front.<sup>14</sup> Sister Anna decided to meet them to give them an affectionate greeting and exhort them to accept a Miraculous Medal with devotion and wear it with confidence.<sup>15</sup>

Thus began a real awareness-raising project. One by one, the soldiers approached by train and the Marines and Navy from the port. The 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, made up of more than 30,000 soldiers, joined them in Belpasso.<sup>16</sup> The soldiers readily welcomed their visit and confided their concerns about an elderly mother, a crippled father, their wives and young children, etc. Sister Anna noted all these intentions on little pieces of paper. She forgot no name and left no request without a response.

She then worked with the Public Records Office to request various documents. It granted her everything, even allowing her to have access to the offices to help in research, thus providing genuine assistance and the warmth of fraternal support for all those setting off for war with heavy hearts.<sup>17</sup>

The most solemn moment was the Eucharistic celebration in the shadow of cannons or by flashlight on the train platform at four o'clock in the morning, sometimes even at three o'clock.<sup>18</sup> News of all these moving moments spread through the city. Women from Catholic Action asked to collaborate and would provide priceless assistance.<sup>19</sup> In August 1941,<sup>20</sup> fierce aerial bombing hit Catania. It destroyed many houses, and the families made

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14. Doc. 25 – War Diary, June 23, 1940, p. 58.

15. Doc. 25 – War Diary, June 25, 1940, p. 58-59.

16. Doc. 25 – War Diary, June 25, p. 61.

17. Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift* (1994), p. 89

18. Doc. 25 – War Diary, p. 76

19. Doc. 25 – War Diary, p. 60-61. Angelina Gaglio, Lady of Charity and diocesan vice-president of the Catholic Women, and Mary Nicotra, diocesan president of the Feminine Youth of Catholic Action, asked Sister Anna to allow them to join in the wonderful work.

20. Doc. 25 - War Diary, August 1941, p. 87

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homeless were housed in the seminary buildings. The rector called upon Sister Anna to organize assistance to those who lacked basic necessities.

A bomb fell on the House of Charity, cutting through it from the roof down to the ground floor without detonating or causing any damage. The Blessed Virgin's protection was evident. When the German bomb disposal experts came to remove this nearly one-meter long bomb, they said, "*Sisters, you were lucky. Had this bomb exploded, it would have destroyed the house!*" The Sisters had no doubt about this as they wholeheartedly thanked their heavenly protector.<sup>21</sup>

One day, Interior Minister Mario Scelba<sup>22</sup> came to the House of Charity to congratulate Sister Anna for the good she had done for the soldiers. Emboldened by so much kindness, she asked him for three things:

- 1 – Free postage (but she would not be given this)
- 2 – A vehicle to facilitate visits to those who are poor (this request was immediately granted)
- 3 – Financial assistance to demolish the wooden sheds eaten by termites and to rebuild them with bricks (he promised and followed through).

### **A BOLT FROM OUT OF THE BLUE...**

On March 1, 1947,<sup>23</sup> Sister Anna was appointed Sister Servant of the House of Charity, replacing Sister Corriero. Sister Anna had difficulty accepting this service, not only out of humility, but also because she thought that such an office would take away

21. Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift* (2008), p. 92

22. Mario Scelba was an Italian politician, Prime Minister from February 10, 1954 – July 6, 1955, and President of the European Parliament from 1969 - 1971.

23. Doc. 14 – Naples, May 1, 1947 (Installation of Sister Servants of the Province of Naples, Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity. Taken from the Council Minutes of the Central House of Naples (April 1944-September 1949) vol. XVIII, 288.



her freedom to care for those who are poor. She accepted when she understood that it only meant adding attention for the Sisters to her work. Nonetheless, a certain uneasiness remained in her heart because when she was outside to serve the poor, she felt that she was neglecting the house, and when she was at home, she thought about the needs of the poor. She gradually managed to strike a balance.

Simple in her ways, transparent and incapable of scheming, she had no artifice or pretense in her speech or action. However, because of her many commitments, she did not have a lot of time to listen to the younger Sisters; nonetheless, her conversations with them burned with love of God and for those who are poor. Always ready to sacrifice for the good of souls, she was able to point out errors and always seek the Sister's spiritual good.

When she realized that she was no longer able to keep up with accompanying the groups of the Children of Mary, she entrusted them to a young Sister, asking her to love the children and youth and especially to lead them to Mary, sparing nothing for their spiritual benefit. She continued to give her time to those who were poor, care for them and write letters of recommendation and requests for assistance, for work and even for housing.

During the years after the war, adolescent girls scarcely 14 years old who left orphanages without any family to take them in asked to stay in the House of Charity until they could find work. When they did leave the house, Sister Anna would prepare a good trousseau for them and round out their meager savings to help avoid the risks of situations of poverty and crowded quarters.

Every morning after preparing the work for the Sisters and volunteers who helped her to send documents, Sister Anna would set off on foot, rosary in hand, to visit people whose addresses she had carefully noted. She would recall the words of Saint Vincent, "*A Daughter of Charity will go ten times a day to visit the poor,*"

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*and ten times a day she will find God.*” With the eagerness of a mother, Sister Anna went from one house to another, often crying with the poor and always seeking solutions to their problems.

### HONORS

Focused on her many charitable activities, Sister Anna did not realize that the poor, city leaders and its residents felt the positive influence of her apostolic zeal as she gained great popularity and a reputation for holiness. As a result, on June 2, 1953, she received the honor of “Knight of the Republic”. This news came as a great surprise for her. It would take the effort of Father Grimaldi,<sup>24</sup> her spiritual director, to reconcile her to it. He wrote, “*Suffering is so often borne in triumph; sometimes good needs to be born triumph.*” Sister Anna, who loved Catania like her hometown,<sup>25</sup> received the award, “*Honorary citizen of Catania*”.

In 1958, for her Golden Jubilee, the Archbishop, the prefect, the mayor and the entire city of Catania demonstrated their affection although she wanted to spend the day in prayer, humbling herself for not having lived up to the many graces that the Lord had granted her.

### THE INFLUENCE OF A NAME

The name of Sister Anna continued to exercise its influence. When a Sister sought in vain to convince a student’s father to make his confession and receive Communion for Easter, he answered that he would have made his confession with Sister Anna because she really represented God!<sup>26</sup>

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24. Fifth Session - Letter from Father Grimaldi to Sister Anna.

25. Cf. S. T. n. Text XII Giovanna Iacono Cosentino - A 101 ad 104 § 180, p. 88.

26. Sister Vincenza Gioia, *When a life becomes a gift*, p. 100.

For special occasions, the House of Charity had the custom of inviting those who are poor for a meal. For the inauguration of a large hotel in the city, the director wanted to invite 200 poor persons and asked Sister Anna to prepare the dining room. At the end of the meal, an elderly woman turned toward Sister Anna and said to her, *“I had asked the Lord that I might eat a dish of pasta with sauce before I died. Today, I am consoled! God bless you, Sister Anna!”*

#### A NEW WAY OF SERVING

More than 90 years old, Sister Anna sat at her desk and began a new way of serving. Since her sight and hearing were failing, she continued to write letters and requests with the help of a magnifying glass. She even strove to maintain communication thanks to the telephone, thus continuing her ministry.

At the end of each day, she accepted help to get to the Chapel before the tabernacle; there, she entered into intense prayer, recommending to God the problems of all those who had come to see her during the course of the day. When someone asked her to summarize her life of charity for a newspaper article, she responded simply, *“It does not seem necessary for a Sister to be mentioned in a newspaper. What have I done that is exceptional? I simply worked, met so many good people and loved everyone. What would be the sense of such publicity for the work that I did thanks to the Lord’s grace alone?”* She humbly added, *“Do you know who I am? A little donkey with two pouches, one on one side and one on the other side. Whatever is placed in them, I carry. This has always been my work.”*<sup>27</sup>

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27. In 1973, for the 50th anniversary of the opening of the House of Charity, Luigina Grasso, a journalist for the daily newspaper “La Sicilia”, presented himself for an interview. Sister Anna could not refuse him because she owed a debt of gratitude to this newspaper that had always supported the work.

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Her last writing dates from February 17, 1983, a letter addressed to Father Natuzzi, CM, her spiritual director. In her shaky handwriting, she exaggerated her faults and limitations because of her ardent desire for perfection, but she still shone like a ray of light around her and communicated a sense of confidence and hope that brought souls closer to God.

At the end of February 1983, another journalist, the great-grandnephew of Cardinal Francica Nava, came to interview her. Sister Anna welcomed him joyfully even if she did not like the idea. When the journalist told her, “*The people of Catania will always love you,*” Sister Anna stated that she was happy to be their “fellow citizen”.

In the days that followed, the flu kept her in bed; pulmonary complications set in a few days later. Always energetic and brave, Sister Anna insisted on going down to the chapel, despite unusual fatigue, because it was First Friday, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, a devotion dear to her. The doctor caring for her advised the community to accept Sister Anna’s desire to bring her spiritual director to her bedside.

Father Natuzzi arrived immediately from Naples and celebrated the Eucharist in her room. At Communion, the priest said, “*The Body of Christ,*” and Sister Anna responded in a strong, clear voice, “*Amen.*” This was her last word, which took on beautiful meaning for the local community as a synopsis of her life totally given to God for the service of the poor! This *Amen*, extended into eternity, becomes the Alleluia of praise of Christ in the celestial liturgy.

It was dawn on March 17, 1983.

Sister Cecilia DI GIUSEPPE  
*Daughter of Charity*

**EXCERPTS FROM POPE FRANCIS'  
LETTER TO PRIESTS**

**I like to spend time looking at  
the Blessed Mother and letting her look at me.  
I pray for a childlike trust, the trust of the poor  
and simple  
who know that their mother is there,  
and that they have a place in her heart...**

**To contemplate Mary  
is “to believe once again in the revolutionary  
nature of love and tenderness.  
In her, we see that humility and tenderness  
are not virtues of the weak  
but of the strong, who need not  
treat others poorly in order to feel  
important themselves.”**

**... Perhaps at times... regrets, complaints, criticism  
and sarcasm gain the upper hand...  
let us look to Mary so that she can free our gaze  
of all the “clutter” that prevents us  
from being attentive... and thus capable of seeing...  
Christ alive in the midst of his people.**

**Pope Francis, August 4, 2019**

