

# MONTHLY RECOLLECTION

JULY 2020

## “THE GREATEST IN GOD’S SIGHT ARE THOSE WHO HUMBLY SERVE”

Dear sisters,

We read in the Gospel of St. Luke that among the Apostles of Jesus a discussion emerged about “*which of them was the greatest*” (Lk 9:46). Jesus told them: “*the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves*” (Lk 22:26). Time and again, the twelve had gotten into this sort of silly debate. They had argued about the same matter while they walked at some distance from Jesus, thinking that He couldn’t hear what they were discussing (cfr. Mk 9:33-37). But he knew what they were discussing and used the occasion to teach them about childlike humility.

On another occasion, the mother of James and John had come to Jesus to ask that her sons could sit on his right and left in the kingdom. The other disciples were indignant (cfr. Mt 20:20-28). Jesus taught them that the greatest should become the servant and the one who wished to be first should be the slave of all, adding, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many*”. Jesus finally takes this teaching on service to its climax when he wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a large bowl and washed the feet of his disciples saying, “*If I, then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you*” (Jn. 13:14-15). These few citations from the Gospels show us what Jesus expects from us as we live in communities. In the light of this teaching of being at the service of others, I would like to draw your attention to the challenges we encounter while living fraternal life in common.

Community is not a crowd of people but a gathering of persons around Jesus Christ the leader, animated by the Holy Spirit to live in unity. Unity is the key to any successful community life. Even the very word ‘community’ becomes incomplete if we remove ‘unity’ from it, so it goes with community living. If there is lack of unity the community falls apart. Our Mother comments on this aspect with very strong words as she reminds us of the proverbs that: “*Union makes strength; and Union makes the small big, but division makes the big small. We are small, but our strength is in unity and through this unity we can accomplish great things for God ... If we become disunited, our fall is certain. Woe to her who causes splitting; woe above all to whoever in front of a person of the world blames her predecessor, who makes it known that she is not in agreement with her Superior and with the Sisters.*” (Conference to the community at Rome, 03 March 1905).

In the Gospel of St. John Jesus prayed that all his disciples may be one as He and the Father are one, setting before us the Holy Trinity as the model of unity. The greatest difficulty posed to the life of unity is the lack of genuine relationship with the members in the community. What is challenged most in a community is our capacity to love as described by St. Paul (1 Cor 13:1-13). The moment we fail to serve others in charity, community life gets disordered and the members are divided. Regarding this aspect, our Mother Foundress rightly exhorts us saying that “*The members must consider each other as spouses of Christ, chosen instruments of grace and living temples of the Holy Spirit, and as such esteem and love each other. One must absolutely not regard the noble positions of the world, or that which one has brought to the Sodality. All must help each other as Sisters even at the cost of sacrifice; they must share the joys and sorrows, and prefer always the common good to their own*” (Conference to the community at Rome, 03 March 1905).

All the same, we are aware that all of us are saints in the making, striving for holiness and perfection. When a group of members live together it is but natural that there will be individual differences, misunderstanding, differences of opinions, conflicts and relational problems just as we have seen in the above citations from the Gospels. We should always remember that when Jesus called His disciples to follow him, he called them to be the servants of all and advised them to enter through the narrow door. He never promised them an easy life, rather he told them to take up their daily cross and follow Him. Service entails taking up our daily cross and following Jesus radically as presented in the Gospels. Given our human weaknesses sometimes our community life becomes a cross for us; might be because of our own making or because of the lack of charity on the part of other members in the community.

Our Mother Foundress indicated to the sisters ‘the cross of Christ’ as the royal road and invited everyone to gather all their spiritual life around Christ in the mystery of the cross. She was convinced that one can become his disciple only by taking up his cross and following him. It involves imitating Jesus' example. She not only endured difficulties and sufferings but accepted them with fidelity and serenity. She wants that we carry the cross with the same attitude as pointed out in her letter to Sr. Melania: *“This morning my Holy Communion was for you, my dear daughter, who for ten years has carried the cross so faithfully and joyfully with me”* (MTL, Letter to Melania von Ernst, 06 September 1904). The cross, for our Mother Foundress was the daily place where one encounters Jesus and accepts every trial, every difficulty, every hostility to become one with Christ. To follow Jesus means to fulfil God’s will each day (cfr. Conference, 28 February 1897). We all have to be bearers of the cross and we must know how to stand under the cross, despised, unknown, derided, because it is only through taking up our cross willingly that we can be true followers of Jesus. Sometimes we need to thank God for the people who make our life difficult in the community because they help us on our way to sanctity.

We make our profession of Evangelical Councils with great zeal and enthusiasm, accepting the service model of Christ and expressing our willingness to take up our daily cross, but somewhere on the way we lose its vigour specially when it comes to relating to our community members. We might be great animators and eloquent speakers having a great relationship with the people being actively engaged in our apostolic work, but all this will fall short if we are not community-oriented persons. We should always remember that one of the marks of our Religious life is fraternal life in common. Speaking about this aspect our Mother Foundress says that *“the salvation of one’s own soul does not exclude those of others, so the thought of the salvation of others requires that we do not neglect those of our sisters. Rather, as, before all, we must provide for our souls and then for those of others, so also, before all, we must show our love towards the sisters. They have the greatest claim to our charity, to our help and to our prayers; not our natural family to whom we are tied by the chains of flesh and blood, but our spiritual family”* (Conference to the community at Rome, 03 March 1905).

To overcome relational problems, we need to cultivate in us patience and understanding towards others, because we never know what another person is going through. Many times, the problem we see in another person is an issue in our very own life and we need to work on it. St James poses the following questions before us for our introspection, *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?”* (James 4:1). Relationship in a community is nourished by love, forgiveness and acceptance, while it is destroyed by pretence, duplicity, gossips and jealousy. The difficulties that we encounter in our community should not be looked at as unresolvable problems but challenges to be encountered and overcome together. If we look at the Biblical figures right from Adam to the apostles of Jesus Christ, we find that their life was marked with difficulties and challenges. They did not allow the difficulties to overpower them rather overpowered their difficulties with their profound faith in God. This is very satisfying and consoling Biblical evidence that before we encounter any difficulty God always charges us with His grace to encounter that difficulty. Sometimes our difficulties might look very big but we should not forget that we believe in a God who is much bigger than the difficulties we encounter in our communities.

Prejudice and preconception built-up over the hearsay about a sister can lead to disruption of a relationship even before an encounter. It is always wise to have a first hand experience with a sister and then make personal observations rather than approaching that sister with a prejudiced mindset. Sometimes when we are transferred our primary concern is how will I be able to deal with a particular community member? To these our Mother Foundress gives a very good advice as recounted by Sr. Augusta: *“When I confided to her my fear about the difficulties, she replied: One must not imagine the difficulties ahead of time”* (Sister Augusta Sander). **My dear sisters, the sure means to overcome the difficulties in our communities is to have regular community prayers where all the members of the community participate without any exception; frank discussion about the individual differences; sharing of faith experiences; fraternal corrections done in charity; getting rid of prejudiced ideas and avoiding gossips. In our communities there should be no room for the question, who is the greatest of all? Rather, we should be guided by the question, how best can I serve my community?**

Hans Urs von Balthasar a Swiss theologian speaks about two types of dramas. The first one is ‘EGO-DRAMA’, in which ‘I’ am at the center. I write the drama, I choose the characters, I decide the plots, I direct the drama and I play the main role in the drama. All the attention is focused on me. While the second type of drama is ‘THEO-DRAMA’, in which ‘God’ is at the centre. He writes the drama, He chooses the characters, He decides the plots, He directs the drama and I am only one of the characters in His drama. Given our human orientation we are always drawn towards playing the ‘Ego- drama’. Community living is a call to live in unity accompanying each other through fraternal love and concern. It is a call to participate fully in the ‘Theo-drama’, where I allow myself to be guided by the will of God and work in perfect harmony with others to realize the plan of God. Participating in the Theo-drama would mean to be the servant of all and to take up our daily cross and follow Jesus.

This Month as we are going to celebrate the Feast of our Mother Foundress on 06 July, let us specially draw inspiration from her to overcome the difficulties, especially those regarding our relationship with the community members. The many sayings of our Mother Foundress cited above can help us to imbibe her spirit and to live by it in our communities.

### **Questions for your personal reflection:**

- *How do I live the mandate of Jesus Christ to be the servant of all and carry my daily cross?*
- *What difficulties do I encounter in relating to my community members? Is there a particular sister in my community who has become my preoccupation?*
- *What measures do I take to overcome the individual differences in my community?*
- *Do I judge a sister, influenced by prejudiced ideas and what I hear from others?*
- *Do I make enough effort in my life to imbibe the spirit of our Mother Foundress and to live by it?*
- *What is the drama I am engaged in, is it Ego-drama or Theo-drama?*