

to bring fuller life to others



*Congregation of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother
Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Assisi*

July 2015 #8



The fraternal dimension of the Church Communion

Dear Readers,

The topic for reflection in our Newsletter number 8 is: **The fraternal dimension of the Church Communion**. This is a challenging issue from a theological perspective but especially in the practice of everyday life. Yet this dimension is the ultimate prophecy and testimony in the Church and the world today. The angle chosen presents this theme as the challenge presented to consecrated religious to **live the present with passion**. That is why I would like to share with all readers the joy contained in the words of Pope Francis in the Apostolic Letter on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life. He writes:

Men and women religious, like all other consecrated persons, have been called, as I mentioned, “experts in communion”. So I am hoping that the “spirituality of communion”, so emphasized by Saint John Paul II, will become a reality and that you will be in the forefront of responding to “the great challenge facing us” in this new millennium: “to make the Church the home and the school of communion.”[5] I am sure that in this Year you will make every effort to make the ideal of fraternity pursued by your founders and foundresses expand everywhere, like concentric circles.

He goes on to say that communion is especially exercised within our communities. Pope Francis invites us to refer to all the comments made during the meetings with religious men and women when he exhorted us evangelically, calling us to rediscover *the “mystique of living together” which makes our life “a sacred pilgrimage”*.

He raises questions related to our communities becoming increasingly international and prompts us to rethink relationships among people from different cultures, how we allow them to express themselves, how we welcome specific gifts and how we each must become fully co-responsible. Pope Francis expects us to go with greater courage beyond the borders of our Institutes and invites us to design projects for formation, evangelization and social intervention that offer a real prophetic testimony. Furthermore, he says that in order to be spared from the disease of self-reference, we must pursue true synergy among all vocations within the Church since no one can build the future in isolation or with one’s own strengths.

The testimonies included in this issue express the challenges and joys of the call to be witnesses of communion in the Church and world today. Let us be challenged by these questions so they may help us awaken the passion for Christ, for humanity and the community where we are called to express bonds of communion.

*Sr. M. Teresina Marra, SSM
General Superior*

Prophetic Testimony of Consecrated Life

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COMMUNION AND COMMUNITY

Each relationship of communion is the result of human commitment and the gift of God.

CHASTITY

Chastity means transparency, loving honesty, commitment to living relationships in a way that does not manipulate the other.

WITNESSES

Pope Francis’ call to “live the present with passion” invites us to reflect on what we do and on the reasons why we do it.



COMMUNION AND COMMUNITY

Communion: gift of God and human commitment



Living together in a community is one of the characteristics of religious life. In fact, not all forms of consecrated life provide for common life. Sometimes people living in the same community find an agreement based on shared interests, similar traits (or complementary ones) in character or personality. Often times, members in a religious community are very different from each other because of their personality, history, cultural background, training and experience. We may find the same colorful mosaic in the

group of apostles who were so different from each other, yet Jesus summoned them to join Him. *“He appointed twelve that they might be with him and he might send them forth”* (Mc 3, 14-15): this is also the deep mystery of the religious community; we may be united by few or many aspects, but the fundamental trait of unity and communion is provided by the Lord Jesus. We share baptism, religious vocation, a single charism and a common mission.

Living together in a religious community or a family requires developing human capabilities, as a stable identity capable of integrating shadows and light, positive aspects and limitations, both of oneself and others. It requires the capacity to give but also necessarily to receive affection, respect, compassion, help, closeness, support. Those unable to receive become self-sufficient and proud (the narcissist who needs nothing... if we think we do not need others, sooner or later we will believe we don't need God either!). Those unable to give, risk turning themselves into the center of the world and incapable of getting out of themselves (withdrawing into a world of selfishness). Another important quality which must be developed is the capacity to accept and manage in a soundmanner the inevitable conflicts we experience when we live together or collaborate in a group.

These characteristics are very important for a healthy sharing of life and effective cooperation. However, in



order to establish relations of communion and fraternity in a religious community, in a family or any other type of group or sharing, human effort must be transformed by the gift of God. Communion is the result of *“the love of God... poured out into our hearts”* (Rom 5,5); it is the fruit of forgiveness that allows reconciliation with ourselves, with one another, in our relationships.

“May they always love and respect each other” (Legend from Perugia FF 1564): this is one of the exhortations that Saint

Francis leaves as an inheritance to his brothers. Throughout his life, Saint Francis develops the certainty that this aspect constitute a central core in vocation and mission. It stems from a deep experience of God that Francis had during his process of conversion, and it is renewed throughout his life until his death. It is an experience of God as Father and Mother. This experience is the foundation of the evangelizing mission: we are called to communion, to universal fraternity with humanity and all creatures. All that exists was entrusted to us; therefore we must take possession of nothing and everything must be returned to the only Lord and Father of all.



Sr. Samuela Maria Rigon, SSM

May they always love and respect each other

St. Francis



CHASTITY

Lifestyle in View of Celibacy / Virginity / Chastity

Lifestyle is always a determined response to questions that beset our lives. With regard to the *Evangelical Counsel* of celibacy, a counsel that springs from the Gospel, these questions can be: How do I shape my sexuality and physical existence? How do I shape my future, my relationships?

Under sexuality we understand a fundamental aspect of life, and it includes gender as well as genealogy in a narrow sense and the strings of experience and social communicative aspects related to it. Sexuality is not only a biological, but also a psychological-spiritual and socially determined dimension of men and women. Encounter, communication and love are always the intrinsic central values of sexuality – and those can only be achieved in a lifelong process.

Today, people rarely speak of the word *chaste*. Yet, this concept entails attitudes that cannot be given up. Chastity means transparency, loving honesty, and living relationships that cannot be monopolized. St. Francis of Assisi talks in his *Canticle of the Sun* of water as a sister that is useful, humble, precious and chaste. The following saying of St. Giles of Assisi, a close trusted friend of St. Francis of Assisi, is handed down: *For me chastity means to keep all one's senses for God's grace.*

Mother Frances considers the vows as a weapon against inner fickleness and a help for constancy in the good (ref. letter 25 of Mother Frances to Fa. Jordan). "*Holy chastity will permit you to follow the lamb wherever He goes*" (ref. letter 22 of Mother Frances to Fa. Jordan). It is clear that the vows always elicit a response and are therefore a path toward a destination.

It is this basic openness for God's work that makes people freely choose the way of celibacy. This doesn't mean that it is a better way, but that it serves me in my humanness. It is one's own lifestyle/culture, one's own kind of freedom for living love. One's own lifestyle is then accompanied by thankful joy, but is also a constant challenge that does not diminish our zeal for the presence of God in



us and through us. Celibacy is not first and foremost a renunciation, but a way to shape the relationship with people, world, God, and myself. Celibacy is the vow of a loving commitment. In perceiving and accepting of my own neediness, I choose to serve others in their hardships and needs. Through words and deeds and by relativizing all the relationships that are not God, I put myself at the service of others. In my daily life, I gradually learn that “God alone suffices” (Teresa of Avila), because God is the origin of the human person, the deepest and most intense way to encounter others and live with them.



Virginity relates most profoundly to others. Community becomes a place of receiving and giving closeness, attention, trust, and safety. It becomes a place for developing, a place to learn dedication to life and to others. Any exclusivity of love is broken open in view of the Kingdom of God.

At the same time, it is also a form of shaping the reality of love. Marriage and celibacy are related to one another. Often they can become a critical corrective for each other. In their own way, both are living signs of love. Thus, both become ways of shaping a relationship that must challenge our times. They need to keep in the forefront the question of where people come from and where they go, and in this way give meaning and depth to life.

Sr. Gudrun Maria Schellner, SSM

Our relationships with others are a vital support to celibate living

OWL #14





WITNESSES

To live the present with passion

In this article we will focus on ways to “live the present with passion” which is one of the objectives of Pope Francis regarding the year dedicated to consecrated life.

To live the present with passion is about reflecting on what we’re doing and why we are doing it. It requires us to step fully into the moment; it is about living in the present, not just going through the motions, coasting through life or running on autopilot. Your attention, your full awareness is focused on what you are doing in



this moment. Doing this can help us be more aware of our thoughts and actions, and how they affect us and how they affect others. This kind of conscious living can help us learn to know when to support and when not to support; when to be involved and when not to interfere. It can also help us to learn about what really matters, not allowing ourselves to be controlled by the cares of this world, not remaining on the surface of life, not looking for instant results, not avoiding painful struggles. It is about being aware, which means we are conscious of what is going on inside of us as it happens, and it helps us to make more conscious choices rather than acting on impulse.

Living with passion is also living in accordance with our deepest values which give us meaning, the type that allows us to look back without regrets because we have seized the present moment and we have enthusiasm for the future. It is about taking the time and making space to be still so we can hear the voice of God.

The human heart was made for passion, for a strong desire to reach for something beyond ourselves. To live a life of passion calls for frequent self-reflection, taking an inward look at oneself. It is about contemplative living—a reflective life that involves the stepping aside daily from activity to reflect on how the activity supports/enhances our call to love God and others. In other words what are we doing for others? Are we promoting love of God and neighbor?

Sr. Catherine Marie Hanegan, SSM

Describe what it means for you
“to live your religious life in the present with passion.”

From Goiânia - Brazil

I have been the parish priest of Nossa Senhora das Dores, in the village of Vila Pedroso in Goiânia, since March 2014. Besides the main church, there are six chapels with a total of sixty thousand people in the area. This is one of the 120 parishes of the archdiocese of the capital city of Goiânia, currently with a population of 2 million people. There are not many priests in the archdiocese, so in the parish there are no priests or deacons that can help me in my ministry—the only help I get is from some lay people and the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.

The presence of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother in the parish is a great gift from God. In addition to the excellent social work they do with hundreds of children and teenagers, on weekends the sisters collaborate in the mission of the parish in the group of altar servers, catechists, vocation encouragement personnel, formation of extraordinary ministers for the Eucharistic Communion, parish events and other formation areas.

I usually celebrate Holy Mass in the Convent of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother from Monday to Friday at 6:00 a.m. Once a week, I teach a class to the novices and function as the spiritual director.

I can say that I live in full ecclesial communion with the people and the sisters. The collaboration, sharing and daily prayer enable me to carry on my ministry, so I can carry it on in a lighter and less arduous way.

Fr. Rafael Oliveira da Silva



From Trinidad - Caribbean

During the Rwandan genocide, I prayed constantly "Lord, please may I live, for the sake of my younger brothers, if they too are to live..." (This does not mean that all those who died did not pray or did not have confidence in God.) My life was spared by God's divine will and wisdom which is known by Him alone. Through the years it has become clear that my life is not only for my siblings. I believe my primary call, is to belong to Him first and foremost within the vocation to religious life, and then all else including my ministerial life is only a fruit of that relationship.

Recently, I made a visit to St. Francis Basilica with the intention of making my confession. The confessor, in his efforts to speak English, repeatedly said to me; "Sister, what the world needs today is a sincere and concrete life of witness." For me this is what it means to live the present with passion. My passion is born out of the experience of being able to love and accepting being loved, which is the promise I made when I made my vows. Daily nourishing this relationship with Our Lord is what will keep me attuned to His voice. Then in the silence of my heart when He whispers I will be able to listen and passionately do what He may be asking. I think this was the secret of St. Francis and St. Clare and all the other Saints. They listened to what God was asking of them and acted upon it.

Sr. Katherine Marie Mujawamariya, SSM



From Assisi - Italy

“Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (Jn 15, 13) For me, this quote from the Gospel of John is a life program that I strive to understand and live every day, although I am aware that this mystery of love has to do with everyday life and my fragility. Every day, I experience God’s love Who continuously gives us Jesus, his Son, Whom I chose to follow for a lifetime. Every day, I have the grace to share the beauty and the reality of a committed life for the Kingdom of God, the way to holiness. So I am able to approach my brothers and sisters through



eyes, not of suspicion or judgement, but through the eyes of the mercy, through the same eyes with which also I am always watched. And through these eyes, I experience that God reconciles all things to Himself and that He makes everything beautiful. When I meet people, especially young people searching for their vocation or starting a journey in the religious life, and families, I try to transmit the passion that fills my heart so that they also can experience the joy of the total self-giving to God and our brothers/sisters.

Sr. Tatiana Maria Murador, SSM

*“Lord, I desire nothing but You,
but You I desire to possess entirely.”*

M. Frances Streitel

