

consecrated life: a hope that transforms¹

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PROVINCE OF OUR LADY OF THE PILLAR

"The Lord wants to open a path in our hearts through which to enter our lives and make his journey ²".

We are going through a century deeply wounded by wars, polarities, and the demonization of others who are different from me, and yet, at the same time, paradoxically blessed and full of potential because it is the time in which *God is coming*. How can we continue to speak of hope in a world that seems to become increasingly inhospitable, where millions of human beings suffer violence, go hungry, are forced to abandon their lands, see their most basic rights ignored, and are devastated by indifference?

As women called by Jesus, it is precisely in the fractures of our world where we most need to *inhabit the cause of hope*. A hope that resides in the heart, in the place of our deepest desires, in contact with who we are and who we live. Connecting with the hope that transforms requires going deep inside, and from there, it speaks of us and of all that we dare not say out loud but that beats within us ³.

It's exciting to discover that in Hebrew, the two words for hope (*miqwah* and *tipwah*) come from the word "rope" (*qaw*), which as a verb also has the meaning of "to wait." Hope is a rope that Someone extends to us and to which we cling.

Let us experience hope through four ropes plus one more, like those with which the paralytic's friends lowered him to Jesus, opening a hole in the roof (Mark 2:3-12). We will try to allow these four ropes, which we receive and offer, to intertwine us as a *community of care* and therefore also as a *community of hope*. We will need to cling blindly to the fifth rope, again and again, in every circumstance, like little girls who allow themselves to be led lightly along the new and surprising paths of the world.

¹ Presentation at the UISG Plenary Assembly. 2025. *We have reproduced the text almost in its entirety, with minor cuts for space reasons.*

² Origen, Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 21:5-7.

³ MC de la Fuente, "Spaces of co-hope that forge meaning," in *Sowing hope by accompanying the present*, Narcea 2024, 85.

THE FIRST ROPE: THE ONE STRETCHED BETWEEN NAOMI AND RUTH.

Responding for One Another | Companions of Hope in Times of Loss

How can we help ourselves maintain our spirits and rekindle hope in times of loss?

When Naomi felt like a failure because she was left without a husband and without children, and when she felt empty inside, without meaning, without spirit - call me "bitter" she had said (Ruth 1:20) - she did not imagine how far the rope that Ruth extended to her from her resilient heart would go.

Two women, at different stages of their lives, who, amidst an uncertain present and future, set out together, with no more baggage than the ability to count on each other. They are also us. Ruth, belonging to a hostile people and a different culture, hears a caress that soothes her uncertainty and fears from Naomi: *"Daughter, I want to find a place for you to live happily"* (Ruth 3:2). Naomi gives her a bond: she calls her "daughter," she embraces her and her inner longing, and Ruth, in turn, offers her companionship and the possibility of unprecedented fertility.

God puts in Naomi's mouth what He Himself desires for each of His creatures: to be able to find a place for them to unfold their lives, where they can live with dignity and meaning. It is by inhabiting their own moment, their own season, that Naomi and Ruth can accompany each other in a way that is healthy for both of them; and they offer each other a mutual fidelity through the best and the worst, which knows no turning back. Together they will trust in the One who is for them *the One who treats them with kindness and the One who provides*.

We long to express to each sister, and especially to the younger generations, the desire Naomi offered Ruth: to seek together a place where a new life can be born, where we can continue to spread love toward others; a place where we can bless and be blessed in our differences. The neighbors will say to Naomi as she cradles Ruth's son in her arms: *"Blessed be the Lord, who has given you one who will vouch for you, who loves you so much!"* (Ruth 4:14). How can we vouch for one another in our congregations?

Our conversations, our ways of proceeding, are not neutral; either we become discouraged or we become hopeful. What ropes do we need to lay for ourselves so that along the journey we murmur less and bless more? Ropes that show we can live together, amidst our great differences and daily friction. Ropes that make our lives good for others.

Hope not only has the dimension of the future but also of recovering the past. Remembering how God has led us (Deut 8) is a guarantee that he will continue to do so in his own way and that *he goes before us* every step of the way (Ex 13:21-22). There is no hope without *the memory of the heart*, and today we are invited to give thanks for the lives of the women who have preceded us in our congregations, who trusted and risked together in very difficult times, and whose memory teaches us that we can become *companions of hope* as we embrace times of loss.

THE SECOND ROPE: THE ONE JESUS EXTENDS TO A WOMAN WITH FEVER

Shaking a hand | The hope of small gestures

Experts say the key to healthy aging is *relationships, relationships, and relationships*. How do we reach this difficult stage of life with secure bonds?

I had the experience of living with a sister, where we saw little by little how the disease took hold of her, her memory, her will, her direction... It stripped her of almost everything, but it

couldn't take away her smile. In his book ** Pure Presence**, French writer Christian Bobin recounts his experience with his father, who was ill with Alzheimer's, and how he discovered with him another way of perceiving and another language: "These people love to touch the hands we extend to them, to hold them for long periods of time, and to squeeze them. This language is impeccable."

Jesus, too, had long held the hand of a woman to rescue her from a fever that had kept her withdrawn (Mk 1:29-39), and he held the hand of a teenager who had lost all will to live, like so many of our young people, discouraged and bereft of meaning (cf. Mk 5:41). We hardly suspect the suffering behind the other person. Jesus always approached with a gentle touch. He couldn't reach her hand, but he did gently touch the back of that woman who had been bent over for years, without her speaking, without anyone intervening on her behalf. It was he who, being present, *saw her and was moved, and* wanted to give her the possibility that there could be a different life for her (Lk 13:10-17).

What are we carrying, what keeps us hunched over, what keeps us focused on ourselves, what do we need to be free from? There are sisters who no longer know how, and perhaps cannot even ask for help. Let us reach out, continue offering lines of acceptance and affection. No matter how many years people have been blocked, never stop trying. God is hidden in the details. Let us inhabit *the hope of small gestures*.

If we were to lose the Gospel and only these words remained, the gift of your service is engraved in them: that closeness, that proximity, there where the other is, in the midst of those fevers that make us lose heart, meaning, hope, esteem, validation. Simply being, drawing close, sometimes for a long time until there can be even the slightest contact. Holding each other's hands so we can rise, and be ready to serve and offer our gifts. Not from obligation, not from the duty of a numb consecrated life, but from deep gratitude, from the overflow that comes from knowing we are healed and lifted up each time. We hold a hand simply by being there, without judgment, welcoming the *God-who-comes-and-is*, in what we do not yet understand. He enters through the weakest and most precarious side of life and knows nothing but to accompany. Only discovering that we are not alone, that there is someone there, opens cracks of hope.

THE THIRD ROPE: THE ONE THROWN BY A FOREIGNER TO JESUS

Holding the gaze and the sense | Faces that give hope to our lives

We need to know there's someone there, but we also need that someone there *to see us*. The internet colonizes our interiority and our intimacy, and diminishes the quality of our daily relationships. The virtual world, which has brought us so much good, also sometimes leaves us scattered, with unhealthy rhythms, with few opportunities for silence, disconnected from ourselves. We urgently need *to regain presence* in our communities, because when I'm truly present, I make the other person feel valued. I say to them without words: "I'm here for you, you matter to me. I'm not looking to waste time with you, I'm looking to celebrate your presence in my life."

In the Gospel, we contemplate that it is in this space of concrete presence, face to face, where hope takes root: a foreign woman presents herself to Jesus to ease the suffering of her sick daughter (Mk 7:24-30), but he seems *not to see her*. In his healing context, she seems to be of no consequence; he doesn't see her in her entirety; he sees her in her labels. It seems to him that he has nothing to do with her, that he isn't ready to take the rope the woman offers him, even though he had previously taken the rope of Jairus, a prestigious Jew, when he begged him for his also sick daughter (Mk 5:23-24). With his refusal, Jesus seems to want to avert his gaze, *but she* does everything she can to allow him to hold it and allow herself to be touched by his affliction.

And here it is the woman who throws the rope to what in Jesus was still lost and could not yet be completed, certain areas of his heart that had not yet been evangelized. This woman cured him of his conditioned Jewish perspective and widened unimaginable spaces within him, helping him dissolve his own inner borders and discover that *everyone, everyone, everyone*, had access to that bread that was freely given to him too. When he looks at her, he sees her in her dignity, and this demands respect for her pain ⁴. In the closest translation to Greek, Jesus says to her: *“You have evangelized me...”* (Mk 7:29) or, to put it another way: *You have made me more human. To whom do we give meaning, who gives it to us? Who throws us ropes that broaden our horizons and make us more human?*

There are two autobiographical books ⁵that have left their mark on me, and that have led me to gaze upon faces that I don't have access to in my daily life: both have made me cry, and in these times threatened by the inhospitality and brutalization of certain political practices, they become even more significant. Their lives are marked by the pain and poverty of being rejected, of being disregarded... But God does hear their cries wherever they are (Gen 21:17) and calls us to go out to those places of exclusion, to remain there, bowed, kneeling, because that bowing is the beginning of every process of hope: a face that becomes a friend and someone to care for.

Who are these faces that bring hope to our lives today? Like fragile and trusting women, like Canaanites crying out for broken lives, will a few crumbs of hope suffice for us, like that woman? (Mark 7:28)

THE FOURTH ROPE: THE ONE BRAIDED BY MARTHA, MARY, AND LAZARUS

Loving ourselves is letting ourselves be | Where there is care there is hope

Throughout this Holy Year, we are constantly asking ourselves how to make hope concrete in our contexts and in our daily lives, how to give it substance; how to care for it and weave it together. This community of care that is Bethany offers us the framework for navigating these vital lessons and reversing the "crisis of living together" that is manifesting itself in our societies and in our own spaces.

How can we improve community ties? How does the way we communicate influence our lives? How can we express our discomfort without hurting others? How much hostility can we endure before we become ill? There are ways of living that heal us, and ways of living that degrade us.

Relationships are what gives us the most joy and also what causes us the most pain, and most of the time we hurt ourselves through sheer clumsiness, through wounds that haven't had a chance to heal. In a world of fractured relationships, healthy relationships between us are our greatest challenge today. If we don't work on them, we won't have viable communities to offer to the young women who come to us.

We are all needier than we let on—we harbor secret pains—and we are all more loving than we let on. How can we unleash the love within each of us? How can we help unleash it in others? If there is a place where Jesus went to receive and allow himself to be cared for, to draw out the capacity for affection and tenderness that was within him, it is Bethany. It does us good to contemplate him receiving, to see how he takes his time to let himself be loved and to allow himself to be loved by his friends.

Loving your sisters doesn't mean giving yourself away without limits or renouncing your own

⁴A. Odriozola, “Caring for Hope in Situations of Adversity,” Justice and Mission Conference. CONFER 2024.

⁵J. Zamora, Sólito, Periscope Editions, 2024. S. Alana, The Bad Habit, Seix Barral, 2023.

needs. You can love, and love very strongly, from a healthier and less painful place, where there's also room to take care of yourselves and where you can care for, respect, and love each other without feeling guilty or selfish about it.

Jesus had done all he could for Lazarus, and now he is the one who needs care in the face of the atrocity that is about to befall him (Jn 11:53). Martha nourishes his life; we imagine her focused and grateful on this occasion, and Mary caresses and anoints his feet with an excessive amount of perfume. In the scene, they do not speak. There are moments when words fail and gestures deepen into silence. They weep together; they do not hide their vulnerability. They express their needs and limitations; they both help each other to trust in Jesus beyond what they can see, and they surrender themselves to the healing and life-giving power of God (Jn 11:1-45).

Loving each other means *letting each other be*, like Martha and Mary let each other be, each in her own way, each from her own very distinct mental and emotional perspective. They had gone through times of comparing and competing with each other, and where complaints easily surfaced. Now they've learned the value of collaboration; they let each other be; they know that when they add up, they can offer much more; that by intertwining their threads, they multiply.

We need to make concrete in our communities those gestures that humanize life. We need to be able to offer, together with others, our bread and our perfumes. We need to give thanks together, *to celebrate the Eucharist* in a world wounded and hungry for love and beauty.

How can we weave this care among ourselves, and with others, to generate communities of hope, communities that yearn for a horizon of good life for all? Where do we feel urged by God to weave our cords together with other congregations today?

THE FIFTH STRING: WITH WHICH JESUS DRAWS EACH OF US TODAY

Making Home from the Wound | Fragilely Happy Women

Companions of the night and of doubts, companions of vigil and of tears. Ready to share all things. How meaningful it is that in the same Jubilee Year of *The Hope That Never Disappoints*, Pope Francis invites us to journey deeper into the land of the Heart of Jesus, to never cease exploring it (*Dilexit nos*). Only in that space of the Heart is it possible to lower barriers, unlearn fears, know the only love that cauterizes the deepest wounds, and discover ourselves connected in our essential fragility.

From the cross, Jesus connects Mary and John, offering them the possibility of making a home in the very place where they have felt wounded by their loss (Jn 19:25-27). He also unites us, offering us bonds: he gives us sons and daughters, makes us mothers and sisters. From now on, Mary will be there wherever we are, the first pilgrim of hope, so that no one, ever again, will have to grieve alone.

Mary teaches us that hope is nourished by that resistance and resilience that allows us to endure pain without breaking. Mary knows that hope is born in the present, and sometimes in difficult circumstances. It is *to persevere and hope*, when others in the same circumstances would not. And she will be filled with joy to discover that the Ruah, the Spirit, vibrates in the fragile, the tender, the weak, the vulnerable... and that from there, it transforms us. God looks upon smallness; Jesus gives thanks with joy because he has chosen to reveal himself to those who need others (Luke 10:21-24).

To have a vulnerable heart, like Jesus's, is to know that everyone has *the right to enter our lives*

and to feel drawn to all that is wounded and in need in this world. For an inhospitable place, a place of pain, to become a home, a *place of encounter*, a love that welcomes the other with all that they bring. The wound can become a hostile space, when it is the object of indifference or exclusion, or a blessed space.

And it is there, paradoxically, in those secret crevices within ourselves, where his grace undeservedly visits us, and that is what fills us with hope, a hope that no one can take away from us, because we know that what is definitive does not depend on us: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter my house, but I receive you with such joy."

Our hope is knowing that Jesus will continue to entrust us with his talents, time and again, to alleviate suffering, to help increase the amount of love in this world, to encourage us to live.

LET US BE HELD BY THE STRINGS OF LOVE

May the fears, which we have, and the uncertainty that greets us at every step, not prevent us from weaving our cords, from weaving networks and alliances that care for, repair, nourish, and beautify lives; and from being able to talk to one another along the way about how we live, what our dreams are, and who keeps us grateful until the end.

To be transformed is to allow ourselves to be drawn, to grasp his cords of affection and justice, and to have a unique security in our lives: whatever happens, he will never let us go, because he will not allow a single one of his smallest creatures to be lost, not a single sparrow (Mt 10:29-31), nor the faint light of a single firefly.

May we help each other to be humble pilgrims in this land of a Love that surpasses us, accomplices and companions on the journey, alongside all those who seek refuge today. Pilgrims who *choose to love completely* in every circumstance. Women wrapped in weakness (Heb 5:2) and therefore ready to share in all things. Women fragiley happy, fragiley hopeful.

PRAYER

*Let's see if it's true that we love him,
let's look inside ourselves a little.*

*There are things hanging that hurt him
Let's scrub the floor and open the doors!*

*Let's remove the names from the blacklist,
let's put the enemies on the dresser,
let's invite them to soup.*

*Let's play the flutes of fools,
of the simple ones.*

May God be pleased if he comes down.

Gloria Fuertes

♫ I'll keep calling you – RUAH [\[Click here\]](#)

