

4. Reshaping Desires: Fourth Stage

*"Six days before the Jewish holiday of Passover,
Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived,
whom he had raised from the dead.
They offered a dinner there in honor of Jesus.
Martha served the table and Lazarus was one of the guests.
Mary showed up with a very expensive perfume bottle,
almost half a liter of pure tuberose..." Jn 12:1-3.*

What Mary lived between the passage of the resurrection of Lazarus and the anointing at Bethany, remained in the gloom. We know that, reconciled inwardly, she approached the mystery of death and pain. With the experience of the resurrection of her brother Lazarus, she knew in a new and experiential way that the love of Christ Jesus gave life to the dead, and that He was the Resurrection and the Life.

We don't know how many days passed after that fact, but the narrative says that, a short time later, Jesus was back in Bethany. In this scene Martha and Mary find themselves in a situation contrary to the previous scene. Martha is at home serving. Mary, on the other hand, is attentive to Jesus, possesses herself, is a subject of herself, and after what she has lived her heart overflows. She wishes to give herself, to give thanks for she has received, and she presents herself at dinner "with a bottle of very expensive perfume, almost half a liter of pure tuberose".

This jar can symbolize the life of Mary, a life that she now holds in her hands, because she has known herself and possesses herself. A life that she considers of great value, precious in the eyes of God and her own. Mary has become involved, she is no longer divided internally, she is qualitatively diverse in her deepest self on an affective and cognitive level. From her inner center she wants only one thing: to give her whole life to Jesus and seeks the opportunity to do so.²⁴

4.1 The affections and the body




Mary, with all freedom, shows up at dinner with the perfume bottle. If before she sought consolations, now detached from them and from everything that others could say (detached from prejudices and desires to look good), she openly manifests with bodily gestures her surrender of love for Christ. Acting with this freedom, in which self-possession is perceived on the one hand, and on the other, decentralization of oneself, speaks of a "*reorientation*" of desires and liberation from one's own egoisms.

The person who is at this stage,²⁵ manifests with clear gestures, that her life is all of the Lord and that she wants to give herself. She frees herself from excessive self-care, from her own health, risking herself for the Kingdom in ordinary life. They are gestures of great freedom in apostolic service, for example, going to places of mission despite the physical and health risks that this may imply, or manifesting with concrete gestures of presence their adherence to the poor and marginalized despite the social or political pressures that this may entail, or giving themselves in love and charity to the

²⁴ It is more cohesive internally and is able to re-orient all areas of your life in one direction. Cf. Teresa of Jesus Book of Dwellings. M. 4.2.1, M.5.1.2.

²⁵ Before, she was held back by the fear of bodily suffering and losing her health: «The penances that these souls do are as concerted as their lives; *love her very much* to serve our Lord with her [...] Do not be afraid that they will kill themselves because their reason is very much in itself, there is not yet love to get out of reason», cf. Teresa of Jesus. Book of Dwellings M.3.2.7. Now it is free from these fears and nothing stops its surrender.

community and to daily services. In the field of prayer and apostolic giving, she will not deal so much with herself, but with how to please the Lord²⁶. In our cultures, women have been inculcated more than men in submission to customs and good social behavior²⁷. For a woman, the fear of looking bad, of losing social approval, can be an impediment to the free manifestation of prophetic gestures that announce the Kingdom. Only love gives freedom to express in concrete actions the passion for God and for humanity.

-  Do I know or have I ever known any sisters who give themselves freely and lovingly to Christ to the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven? (Can I identify some of their characteristics... such as What are their affections? What are their body gestures?)
-  Have I experienced at any point in my life this freedom and this affection of love in surrender? I remember the moment
-  How dependent am I on the theft of others? am I able to free myself from this? if I don't receive social approval that I feel? What's wrong with me?

4.2 Relationships

At this stage, *desires*, motivations, small decisions, relationships are reshaped, and the whole being and acting are oriented towards a cause: Jesus and the Kingdom. She is moved by the relationship of love with Jesus in which *all her affections are involved*. Women have a greater capacity than men to live intensely the emotions and manifest them. If a woman from the depths of herself, opens her affections in the relationship with Christ, or with another person, she will tend to live with greater integration between her thoughts, affections, desires, and attitudes.

The difficulties appear because one must go from having oneself as a reference to putting one's center in Christ in *a habitual way*. This point is of paramount importance within the female dynamic since it is about discerning when the relationship seeks a personal and selfish interest, or when there is a "love without interest".²⁸ A dialectic between the apparent good and the real good may be at play due to the presence of unconscious motivations²⁹. For example, one *can give to receive something in return*, and so one's self-giving is only in appearance. This stage calls for a total following of Jesus, where the disciple or disciple *learns from the Master to "love gratuitously."*

²⁶ "Maybe we don't know what it is to love, and I won't be very frightened; for it is not in the greatest taste, but in the greatest determination to desire to please God in everything", M.4.1.7.




²⁷ In CAIN K.M., «Development of Individual Differences in Helplessness: Relations to Gender and Psychodynamic Theory», 41 appears as girls tend to be more controlled by parents giving them rules of behavior and social adaptation: "Parents appear more likely to give critical and controlling feedback to girls than to boys".

²⁸ When St. Teresa refers to a mature love, detached, in a way that makes the person come out of himself, putting more interest in the good of the other than in himself. Speaks of a love without interest St. Teresa. Book of Dwellings. M 4.2.9

²⁹ Following St. Ignatius, Rulla L. proposes that in the dialectic that occurs between the apparent good and the real good, conscious and unconscious dynamics appear and the person can seek an apparent good unconsciously motivated by secondary gratifications, so that his freedom and responsibility are restricted insofar as he is not aware of the motivation that leads him to act in that way, nor free to decide. Therefore, in this dimension there is the non-guilty error. The decision for the real good implies losses in which the psychodynamics of the person is interwoven, so sharing with others and / or others their process can help clarify their motivations. Cf. RULLA L.M., *Anthropology* 180.




The tendency of every woman to live in connection with others can become a weak point, if she allows herself to be carried away by the desire of "possession" or "retention for herself". Some symptoms of these pretensions can be, seduction, manipulation of affection in relationships. At this stage the person is free to manage her impulses, as well as being able to give generously and receive detachedly. Paradoxically, in order to have necessary to lose oneself, and "love without interest" occurs when egoistic desires, she decenters herself in a *habitual way*: that proceeding has been configured as part of her personal structural remodeling of desires, so that the person out of love can give herself totally like that bottle of perfume that is poured out at the feet of Jesus.



-  What are my strongest desires? Those who help me discover the meaning of my life.
-  Have I ever experienced the desire to "own" others in a relationship? to own my workplace? To possess a place and a role in front of others?
-  Do I live more focused on myself than on the desire and call to give myself to others? What are the signs?

4.3 Women and the socio-cultural and ecclesial context

The experience of totality is leading women to a liberation from socio-cultural and socio-ecclesial conditioning. It can be said that the prophetism³⁰ of women appears when in the lifestyle there are countercultural elements that face conflict, resistance to change, and follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. In the same way today there are cultural preconceptions that can condition the apostolic and prophetic mission of women. These preconceptions can be subjective, that is, the person has them and they trap her, or objectives, insofar as they are external rules or customs that do not allow her to realize what God wants from her. Mary of Bethany breaks with the socio-cultural schemes of women, and the gesture she makes is unusual. It transcends the traditional concepts of what a woman could or could not do, it is a prophetic gesture that is outside the socio-cultural context of the time.³¹

-  What is my concept of a consecrated woman in the Church? What do I think is their role? What are the possibilities and what are the limits?
-  What do I feel about the role of women in the Church?
-  What do I think God calls women in the Church today?

³⁰ Teresa of Jesus, in the sixteenth century, makes these desires for liberation evident precisely in the fourth dwellings. The force of love and inner fire burned her soul and propelled her to free herself from the cultural gender ties that prevented her from going out to found, write, and teach mental prayer to her nuns.

³¹ The anointing of the dead was normally performed by women, but never the anointing of the living. This was a task reserved for God's priests or elect to anoint. Cf. RIGATO M.L., "Mary di Betania nella redazione Giovannea », 211- 212.

