

6. Incomprehension, suffering, passion: sixth stage

*Why hasn't this perfume been sold for three hundred denarii?
and has it been given to the poor?
But he didn't say this because he cared about the poor,
but because he was a thief, and since he had the bag,
he took what they threw into it.
Jesus said to him, "Leave her, let me keep it for the day of my burial.
For poor you will always have with you;
but you will not always have me" Jn 12:6-8.*

In the biblical text Mary's overflowing gestures provoke Judas. The evangelist himself makes it clear that the words of this apostle do not correspond to his true interests.

Judas harshly criticizes Mary's gestures, and in front of all the guests devalues her action and humiliates her. At the same time, he criticizes Jesus for accepting such a manifestation. Mary's gestures and attitudes cause persecution because they question the deep root of human actions and bring to light the motivations of service among the apostles. It seems that Judas did not sincerely love Jesus, it seems that he was with him because he was moved by personal interests.

Mary's loving gesture reflects great strength and generosity, however, by exposing herself in this way, she is extremely vulnerable to all the guests. The harsh criticism of one of the apostles surely made a great dent in her heart. *Mary was risking everything*. She knew that the Jews, among whom would be some of her friends, wanted to kill Jesus. With her gesture, she leaves no room for doubt. *She, in solitude and stripped of herself, manifests herself openly and totally on behalf of Jesus*. After Judas' intervention, the atmosphere in the room would have become rarefied. Some would question Mary's gesture and perhaps the very acceptance of this waste on the part of Jesus. Finally, He Himself intervenes and defends her with force "Leave her!" Let her be, let her act. Don't stop her. "Leave her!" This clear manifestation confirms that Jesus is in the same key of loving gift as Mary, and that he accepts the prophetic meaning of her gesture.

³⁵*At the same time He frees her from cultural concepts that could prevent her from manifesting her love and generosity. After Mary anoints his feet, He Himself repeats the gesture by washing the feet of the disciples and invites us to do the same as a sign of love (Jn 13:14). This gesture of Jesus gives strength to his confrontation to Judas: it is not a question of giving money to the poor, but of loving them by giving one's life for them in loving service of sisters and brothers, sharing goods, creating justice. One can glimpse the deep sense of solidarity that comes from the relationship with Christ.*

The person who reaches this stage joins more closely the experience of Christ's passion and death, suffering persecutions himself for his sake. On this dark night, she is purified of personal tendencies that may lead her away from greater union with Christ. The experience of intimacy with the Saint is transforming, sanctifying, and freeing her from her own tendencies. At this stage *a person not only does good, but does so by overcoming evil* (Rom. 2:21).

³⁵ Cf. McKENNA M. «Let» 21-42.

6.1 Affections and the body

How do affections and bodily appearance come in at this stage? The desire to be with Jesus in friendship and love becomes a *passion of love* that overcomes the fear of physical and moral suffering. In the text there appears a continuity and progressive coherence in what Mary does to manifest her total donation. Her life was endangered by the association with Jesus who's life is threatened; however, she risks everything, she expresses care for Him, solidarity at the moment of death, intimacy, delicacy, sweetness, totality. Faced with Judas' claim, there is no alteration in her gestures, she remains faithful in what she does. Mary has definitely changed. Before she did not leave home because she was comforted by her friends, now she is publicly criticized by one of the apostles, and she risks her life without seeking protections or excuses. She has freed herself from his initial pursuits and dependencies, and with all her being remains faithful with Jesus in trial (Rom 8:31-38).

The person who is located in this relational stage, lives at risk and accepts the fatigue of daily life, difficult situations, illness, persecutions and properly dangerous situations. Many martyrs in our century have borne witness by exclaiming with their surrender: "Your love is worth more than life! (Ps 62:4). It is time to manifest fidelity in the hour of trial and to suffer with Christ joining his passion and death.

- How do I live the small misunderstandings and sufferings of everyday life?
- How do I live in solitude? Do I join Jesus in solitude or do I seek compensation? Which?
- Am I offering my daily fatigues, illnesses, limitations or rather seek through them to receive affection and be the center? (this does not mean that we should not take care of our health, I mean the feelings and affections that move internally)
- Am I faithful to my relationship with Jesus and to what I discover that invites me to live despite the difficulties I may experience?
- What are the personal calls to take a risk and give myself up for his love?
- What are the community calls to live differently? What do we have to change?
- What are the Congregational calls to risk and commit ourselves to Christ?

6.2 Relationships

The relational characteristic at this stage is *fidelity in the test* (Jn 15:4). This can manifest itself both in the experience of presence or absence of the Loved One, and in circumstances of persecution or support for the mission she performs. Their relationship is riddled with loneliness, darkness, and doubt. The temptation will be sadness and abandonment. Faced with the threat of death, physical or mental annihilation, the temptation to withdraw can be very strong. Jesus invites us to live in nakedness, without protections, dismantled. They are the costs of tracking in times of darkness.

Remaining faithful implies overcoming some regressions that can give security to the person and that are part of the same personality. In moments of trial, one's own needs become more evident, for example: in situations of loneliness one can seek affective compensation, in persecution fall into aggressiveness and criticism, when there is injustice to keep resentments. And this happens because union with Jesus and solidarity with Him is not yet strong enough. If love is such that it "has taken her out of herself", the persecutions she suffers will certainly give her pain, but the experience of love and

fidelity to the Friend will produce great inner joy in sharing his sufferings: "They marched from the presence of the Sanhedrin happy to have been considered worthy of suffering outrages for his Name" (Acts 5:41).

At this stage, *the person is ignited by love* and this makes her take the qualitative leap to transcend, especially in the tendencies of the personality that can make the defects or limitations are encapsulated and do not surrender to total surrender. These tendencies to repeat behaviors that gratify unconscious needs can be overcome with God's graciousness and on a human level with qualified accompaniment.

One of the relational characteristics of women is fidelity. This gift can humanly enhance permanence in times of trial and darkness. At the same time, fidelity in solitude, suffering and persecution will need strength and autonomy, which is possible when there is a separation³⁶³⁷ and liberation from one's own dynamics and the consequent breaking of the vicious circle of one's own repetitions to flee from incomprehension and suffering. The women of the Gospel manifest this characteristic of faithful permanence in times of trial (Mk 15:40-41; Jn 19:25).

- What does faithfulness mean to me? How do I live it in the concreteness of life?
- This fidelity includes not only in a general way the relationship with God, with the Congregation and the community, with concrete sisters and with friends. Am I faithful to my friends in the congregation? Have I felt misunderstood or perhaps judged, betrayed by one of the sisters I considered my friend, someone I trusted? How do I live that relationship in my heart? Can I talk about it with Jesus? What do you invite me to?
- Surely, I have lived some test throughout my life ... How have I overcome it? Have I grown up in the test or has it just been a passing of the leaf?

6.3 Women in the socio-cultural and ecclesial context

The maturation of the person at this stage leads to the fall of myths and idols. It has internalized Jesus' way of being, his values, his struggles, and desires. She knows that the Truth is not found in this or that person or in this or that ideology or authority, but only in God and his Kingdom. Ideas or concepts that gave her security have fallen.

The Gospel of John presents us with the weakness of one of the apostles and makes it clear that every human being is fragile and carries within the tendency to sin,³⁸ therefore, it cannot be considered as an absolute reference. Those who have reached this stage know of their own weaknesses, so only Jesus, the values of the Gospel, the Kingdom, God, are the reference. This freedom that is born of

³⁶ The religious experience, if it is not defensive, insofar as a compensatory relationship that flees from reality can be sought, functions, as a structuring experience of the person who frees him from his own tendencies.

³⁷ Cf. BISSI A., "Il tema della donna: un contributo psicologico", 34-35.

³⁸ The historical and cultural situation that Teresa of Jesus lived, in which the woman could not study because it was forbidden to her, made Teresa put the truth in the lawyers, all men, since they were the only ones who received preparation. In a stage of deep personal purification, he realizes that only God is the Truth, that every man and woman is a liar before Him and that only in God can all trust be placed. At the same time at this stage she lived the prohibitions that prevented women from leaving the convents, conditioned by the sociocultural concept of woman, however, the experience of a liberating God pushed Teresa in her mission and went out to found despite the persecutions of the Nuncio and others who wanted to hold power over women. Cf. GONZALEZ CASAS M. R. *Subversive Memory* 36-37.

deep purification frees the person and broadens her capacity as a subject capable of transforming history with her own life.

There has been a process of falling in love with the Humanity of Christ. The person opens herself in fruitful love and solidarity to the sisters and brothers. It is about a love that is faithful in persecution, in loneliness and in misunderstanding. It no longer depends on gratifications and assurances. It is free and has been confirmed in love regardless of the presence or absence of consolations. From the third stage, a person has begun to live in the open and has opened herself to God's communication. Now the transformation depends not so much on his effort, but on his loving fidelity to the calls of God, which make the gift received operative. Desires are redirected towards a single cause: love for God and his Kingdom. A person is sanctified in love by preparing herself to a total and authentic self-giving. There is internal coherence between bodily attitudes, relationships with God and with others. Live the unity between love of God and neighbor.

Her gestures and words are prophetic, they announce a new way of being that question the motivations of false followers, she endures persecutions with joy because she is lovingly united to the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord. She is purified of her personality tendencies and freed from everything that prevents her from freely carrying out the mission entrusted to her. She has integrated her woman's being into the total donation. She now lives regularly in fidelity to the love that transforms her into Christ and participates with Him in building the Kingdom of God in the world not only by doing good, but by overcoming evil by force of good.

- I listen to our congregational reality and our mission and I ask myself: as women, is there anything we have to change in the way we are in the community and accomplish the mission?
- What are the Lord's calls to us today?
- What conflicts do we have to face?
- What do I feel in the face of this reality? What are my fears and hopes?

