

# **OPENING WORDS OF THE 31<sup>ST</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER**

**Sr. Carmen Mora**

**Zaragoza, July 11, 2025**

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Dearest Sisters,

The time has come to truly begin the work of our Chapter. We have arrived here after having prepared our hearts and our entire being in the Spiritual Exercises we experienced together at Loyola and concluded in the chapel of the conversion of a great saint. In them, we prayed for the graces of listening, indifference, and availability, and we opened ourselves to contemplating the Lord and allowing ourselves to be transformed by Him, practicing gratitude for all the good we have received and continue to receive from Him, mercy, communion with His way of being and doing, fraternity, freedom, unreserved surrender to the end, the office of consoling, and communion with the Congregation and the Church.

We then have celebrated the Opening Eucharist of the Chapter, accompanied by our Founders and Mother Pabla, who, with their silent presence, have imbued us with their firm trust in the God who nourishes us daily and have infused us with their encouragement.

And we are already here in this chapter hall, presided over by the Word of God, which will enlighten each one of our steps.

Although we have spent days together allowing ourselves to be touched and shaped by the Word, it is now that I officially extend to you, on behalf of my Community sisters, on my own behalf, and also on behalf of Sister Paqui and all the Sisters of the Community of Professed Sisters, the warmest welcome to this House, which is the House of all, and where we hope and desire that each one of you may feel as at your home, because this is also your home.

Everything has been prepared with infinite care by the Sisters of the House, the decoration team, and the Central Coordinating Commission so that we may feel at ease and everything may favour our encounter, our listening, our prayer, and our work. However, if you need anything else or think it might help us all, please do not hesitate to ask or suggest it freely.

A Chapter is always for me an experience of universality, of the richness of diversity. It fills me with joy to see so many familiar and beloved faces of sisters who come from near and far, those who live here, and those who come from all the Provinces of the Congregation, from the Delegation, and from the Houses Dependent on the General Government. I look at each one of you and place you in your Communities, surrendering your lives with passion, with the greatest care, with full detail, with all love. I feel a deep gratitude within me for who you are and what you do... and I also feel myself recalling and in tune with the concerns and dreams you have shared with me during visits or other encounters. Thank you for being here as part of this Chapter Assembly.

We are accompanied by a group of six Sisters who will help us with secretarial and translation tasks, and we thank them in advance for their service.

And, beyond the walls of this room, we are accompanied by the members of our charismatic Family, all the Sisters of the Congregation and the Laity of Saint Anne Family, as well as those who have preceded us; and many other people: Bishops, Priests, men and women religious from other Congregations of contemplative and apostolic life, friends, collaborators, people whom we serve... all are concerned about our Chapter and accompany us with their love and prayer. We have a multitude of intercessors!

As you well know, the 31<sup>st</sup> Ordinary General Chapter is a chapter of elections and business, and its mission is:

1. To approve the sexennial report submitted by the General Government.
2. To present the reality of the Provinces and the Delegation.
3. To elect the Superior General and the General Councillors.
4. To work on the topic of the Chapter: "The Consecrated Life today: Identity and belonging. Communion and Diversity. Hope and Commitment".
5. To study proposals and suggestions.
6. To welcome the contributions of our Laity sisters and brothers of SAF who, for the first time, have prepared their own working and chapter documents.
7. To address other issues:
  - 7.1. To determine the topic and representation for the VI Congregational Assembly.
  - 7.2. To review the Chapter Agreements reached at the previous Chapter.
  - 7.3. Other possible topics and agreements that the Chapter deems appropriate.
8. To offer some information about John Bonal Foundation.

The first part, consisting of reports and presentations, will give us a global vision of our Congregation's today.

Within it, I would like to dedicate a minute to my "heart memory" to ask for forgiveness and give thanks.

Forgive me for what I have not cared enough for, for what I have not been able to do better, and also for anything in which I may have offended or hurt you with words, gestures, or omissions... I assure you that this was never my intention, although I may have achieved it as a result of my weakness or my clumsiness. Forgive me and, above all, thank you.

Thanks be to God, who has led me by the hand in this service and brought out of me what I did not think was there, because He Himself has placed it there. Thanks to each one of my Council Sisters: Elsy, Crisanta, Gracy, Pili, Rosa and Alicia, to the Provincial and Delegate Superiors, current and former, along with your Councils, to the Sisters who are here and to all the Sisters of the Congregation... by all of you I have felt welcomed, accompanied, cared for and supported... Thank you!

(I was telling you that the first part is going to show us the Congregation's today...)

The second, through a synodal methodology of listening to the Spirit, will allow us to discern God's will for our Congregation in the coming years and embark on the process of spiritual and apostolic revitalization to which He calls us so that, from our identity and our witness of communion in diversity, we may spread hope to our wounded world, by being signs of God's closeness and deep mercy for all.

Between these two parts, we will elect the Governing Team, which will help us bring the Chapter's decisions to life.

I hope that, in our Chapter dynamic, we may be like the moon:

- That shines not with its own light, but rather reflected from the sun, and coexists with the light provided by the diversity of stars and planets;
- that travels not alone, but in company;
- that does not dazzle, but rather offers a humble light that allows us to enjoy the beauty and nuances added by other stars;
- and that allows those of us who search in the dark a space of freedom and creativity to not only see with our eyes, but to feel, imagine, and sense.

And, since we are celebrating our Chapter in the context of the Jubilee of Hope and we point to it as a key aspect we want to offer to our world, I would also like us to allow ourselves to be stretched out, and to extend ropes of hope to everyone.

Mariola Lopez Villanueva, rscj, in her presentation at the last UISG Assembly, told us that Hope is holding onto something, and that *the Hebrew words that designate hope come precisely from "rope", which, as a verb, also has the meaning of hoping... that Hope is a rope that Someone extends to us and to which we cling.*

From there, we are invited to grasp the ropes extended to us and to weave and throw ropes to others: our Sisters, collaborators, people whom we serve, the people we meet... starting by this hall.

The first rope that we, the middle-aged or older Sisters, are called to extend to the younger ones is the same one that Naomi offers to Ruth when she says, *"Daughter, I want to find you a place where you can live happily" (Ruth 3:2)*... the rope of a place where she can unfold her life and live with meaning... the rope that leads to *search together for a place where a new life can be born, where it is possible to continue to spread love toward others, where it is possible to bless and be blessed in our differences.*

The second is the rope that Jesus throws to an elderly woman with a fever: *"He came to her, took her by the hand, and lifted her up" (Mk 1:31)*... It is the rope of *touch* that is the best language we understand when we find ourselves wounded or in a situation of illness or precariousness... We can *hold each other's hands so we*

*can rise up and be ready to serve and offer our gifts, not out of obligation, but out of deep gratitude that comes from knowing that we are healed and lifted up each time.*

The third is the one the Canaanite woman throws at Jesus, leading Him to *dissolve His own inner borders* and broaden His horizon *to discover that everyone, everyone, everyone, had access to that bread that was also gratuitously given to Him.* Likewise, we, from our different realities, perspectives, and cultures, are called to extend those ropes that broaden our perspective, our understanding, and our compassionate solidarity.

The fourth is the rope of tenderness and mutual care for the vulnerability we share, like the one woven and thrown together in Bethany, at different times, by Jesus, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus... like them, we all need a home and people to rest in, with whom we can cry together, to care for and by whom we allow ourselves to be nourished, cared for, and comforted... we need to offer each other company and presence... to make concrete in our communities those simple and gratuitous gestures that humanize life and make it beautiful.

And the fifth is the rope with which Jesus draws each of us today, the one He throws us, paradoxically, into our failings and weaknesses, into *the secret crevices of ourselves*, visiting us there *undeservedly with his grace. This 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 under my roof, yet I gladly welcome you".*

Holding fast to this rope that God throws us, let us lose our fear of recognizing ourselves as women wrapped in weakness, aware that our own weakness makes us more human and helps us to be compassionate with everything. Let us dare to be fragilely happy and fragilely hopeful women who allow the ropes that God himself throws to others to pass through us, loving them gratuitous and compassionately.

Let us weave these days the ropes of our search for a place where we can unfold our life, the one of touch, the one that broadens our horizon, the one of tenderness and care... let us look to our Founders and to Mary, who were experts at creating links, at grasping the ropes thrown to them and then throwing them to others, and let us be inspired by them...

I DECLARE OPEN THE 31<sup>ST</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER, IN ZARAGOZA, ON JULY 11, 2025.