



Mary, the New Woman

Mary is the expression and synthesis of what we live as the Order of the Company of Mary. It is how it is expressed in the last Article of our Constitutions. This text summarizes the charism of the Company of Mary. The Constitutions look to Mary and present her as the image of what we are called to live. We will develop the ideas found in this text revealing who Mary is for us.

The article begins with a sentence that demonstrates the vision of the charism of the Company of Mary:

"The path traced out by the Constitutions has as its goal that we become New Women, who have put on Jesus Christ in order to build the Kingdom." It follows by presenting Mary as the New Woman, par excellence. The text notes that for this reason she is the synthesis of the identity of the Company of Mary. It continues explaining what this means with a brief but dense paragraph: "As the first follower of Jesus, in simplicity and humility, she participates in the Paschal Mystery, and, in the strength of the Spirit she walks with the apostles toward the fulfillment of the new order revealed by God in Jesus Christ." The Article continues with a second part directed to all of us, expressing what we want to live in at depth regarding what has just been said about Mary. In fact, this part begins with an important word, "Like Mary".

With this commentary, we can try to understand more deeply Mary's experience: the New Woman whose existence was shaped according to the Gospel, who lived according to the style of Jesus sharing his way with the company of believers, placing all their energies at the service of the Kingdom.

As a follower of Jesus, in humility and simplicity, she shares in the Paschal Mystery. Mary agrees to enter God's saving plan. The story of the Annunciation in Luke (cf. Lk 1 26s) presents Mary as a woman with inner freedom, self-possessed and ready to do God's will. She enters into dialogue with God and agrees to participate in this plan of salvation. We have a God so respectful that He does not intervene in our human history if we do not allow him to act. Mary is the woman who agrees to cooperate with God. Luke's text expresses a surprising strength. Here, obedience consists basically in listening and adhering to the Word of God. Mary the handmaid is in harmony with the rest of God's servants (Abraham, Moses ...).

Mary's collaboration comes about through motherhood, lived together with Joseph. They tenderly accompany Jesus in his personal growth process on all levels. They integrate him into the cultural and religious tradition of Israel. Mary's motherhood, as is the case with all experiences of maternity, develops, grows, and matures. It is a dynamic motherhood with moments of bewilderment. Repeatedly Luke tells us that Mary keeps all

things in her heart and ponders them (cf. Lk. 2,19:51). This expression refers to a deep creative activity that consists of a heart that resonates, knows how to embrace challenges, and seeks the deep meaning of everything that occurs.

Mark speaks of Mary and Jesus' brothers and sisters going to look for him because they believe that Jesus has lost his mind and that the honor of the family is at risk. In their presence Jesus expresses that his family are all those who listen to the will of God and fulfill it. (cf. Mk 3: 31-35). Mary entered this category wholeheartedly.

The Constitutions present Mary as a follower of Jesus who in humility and simplicity participates in the Paschal Mystery. We need to delve into the Paschal Mystery to gain a clearer understanding. First of all, we look at the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, we cannot separate the Paschal Mystery from the rest of Jesus' life. He turned the everyday experience, lived in fullness, into one that is lived for others. Jesus, open and willing, is accessible to all. He recognizes the full dignity of every one and restores dignity to those who have lost it; he becomes a compassionate and supportive brother and in this manner experiences life. Jesus shows this with his whole being, in his actions, his words. He says: "Whoever saves his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it (Mk. 8, 36). And also: "I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12, 24). This consists of going out of one's self and self-interest to be immersed in God's being and interests, trusting in his fruitfulness, even if it means going through death.

Mary shares in this Paschal Passover. The Gospel accounts give us some indications: Mary responds to a need and goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth (cf. Lk 1, 39s); at the wedding in Cana she is concerned about the lack of wine for the wedding party (cf. Jn 2, 1-12). But perhaps, it is in the Magnificat where we get a greater sense of the Paschal process (cf. Lk 1, 46-56). In this text, Mary does only one thing: she is exulted with joy and celebrates God's action in all. It is God who has the initiative and acts in history. Mary invites us all to take a contemplate look at our own personal history.

She first states what God has done in her: God has looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid. The Lord has directed his gaze to Mary and seen her lowliness. Mary experienced this gaze as one of salvation, dignifying her. In this experience Mary understands who God is: holy and merciful. That is, only from life itself and history can we discover who God is. He is faithful in his actions.

Here Mary extends her vision to all of history and proclaims God's action: "He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty." (Luke 1:51-53) God comes down and lifts up the lowly, filling the poor... in accordance with the dynamics of the Paschal Mystery that is made present everywhere, often in small ways, sometimes imperceptibly in the overwhelming presence of injustice, violence and inequality. Now, probably one of the most significant aspects of the Magnificat is found precisely in the fact that these two

verses are in the same hymn. What do we mean? Mary sings of God's deliverance of his people and herself, in her lowliness; God incarnates himself in these oppressed people.

God looks upon the lowly, and Mary's whole existence becomes one with him and is understood as a service to the work of salvation. Mary has discerned who God is, where and how he acts and she proclaims it in song. Her singing is parallel to the Beatitudes. The Magnificat can only be understood in light of the Gospel, from the proclamation of the Kingdom. With the strength of the Spirit, she walks together with the apostles, to the fulfillment of the new order revealed by God in Jesus Christ.

The Constitutions continue with a phrase that turns our attention back to the Pentecost experience. The book of Acts reflects this fact. After Jesus' ascension, those who believed in him remain in Jerusalem and Luke tells us who they are: "All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." (Acts 1:14). Moreover, the community of John presents Mary and the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross (Cf. Jn 19, 26-27). At times this scene has been interpreted as Jesus' filial expression of tenderness by entrusting his mother to his disciple. However, exegetes say that, taking into account the entire Gospel of John and his theology, this scene of the mother and the disciple entrusted to one another, in fact, refers to the creation of the Christian community. This scene occurs just before the cry of Jesus saying that it is finished, after which he gives up the spirit. This is very important, as it implies that the Christian community, i.e. the church, is the fruit of God's saving will.

We can say, then, that in both scenes Mary is placed within the community of believers. After that, we do not find more specific information regarding Mary's activity in the community, but references to her come to us in the early books of faith and in the writings of the early Christians. Mary is remembered as our sister who together with many others responds to the gift of the Spirit. This is a source of life-giving creative love. One other work is the communion of saints; companions who make her present and through her existence the remembrance of Jesus by adopting the attitudes, actions and life-style of the Master.

In this manner, the memory of the Lord is kept alive. This helps them consider a future filled with promises of life for all, especially for the lowly. They keep the memory of the Lord alive in ways that are practical and liberating in their thrust toward the future. And in this dynamic, in their context, they celebrate in the Eucharist the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the community of believers, they are mediation for one another. Certainly we are in fellowship in sin; in this, we all find each other. But also, and above all, in grace: no one is insignificant. We are mediators of salvation for others. We collaborate with the God's grace in relation to our brothers and sisters in faith through our actions, words, life witness, and prayer for one another. And here we find Mary's action in the midst of the community of believers. Thoughts from X. Pikaza can shed light on what we mean: She does not want to replace the believers; she does not place herself above them. She opens a path of faith

and life for all (the way of Jesus), and when she completes her function, she remains among them, as a member of the group convoked for the building of the Kingdom (of the Church). Therefore, her final title is: friend, companion. From this understanding we say that she is a person who: helps others along the path that she has herself walked; she gives what she herself has, thus building among them (with them) the community of those who are saved.

Being the first, she is not the only one, nor the most superior. She is the first of a group of brothers and sisters who take the path of Jesus and who follow him awaiting His Kingdom. In this manner she remains always in the consciousness of the Church, and in its song. (cf. Lk 1,48)

Fill your name ...

As previously mentioned, after presenting Mary Article XVII of the Constitutions directs itself to us and invites us to make our own the life of Mary: "Like her, faithful in the service of the Kingdom, we will live our charism renewed by the Spirit in each moment in history. We will collaborate as educators in the formation of new men and new women in order to build a world of mutual love, where faith is manifested in its works of justice."

Let us embrace the Paschal experience of death and life so that signs of resurrection may spring forth in a world that is divided and not in solidarity. Gathered in the Company, in union of hearts, we will seek with joy and hope, the ever-greater Glory of God.

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