

Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

AUGUSTINE PLANQUE
Witness of Gospel culture



INTEGRATION

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Accompaniment of
Sisters in Temporary Vows

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Introduction

During the formation meeting in Ghana in 2011, the accompagnatrices indicated the need to have tools for accompanying the few young Sisters who prolong the time of temporary vows beyond 6 years. They suggested incorporating already existing documents with specific contents for the young Sisters.

For this purpose we thought of using the text of the PowerPoint and the Questionnaire prepared for the month of Formation in Interculturality **“Augustine Planque: Witness of the Culture of the Gospel”** and to add, with this appendix, texts and questions for the young Sisters.

We thank the Sisters who worked on these documents that we are giving to you, young professed, and to the sisters who accompanied you during this last stage before your perpetual vows.

Following the example of our Founder, may the Gospel be your guide and your strength!

The General Council
June 2013

1. ROOTED IN FAITH IN THE LIVING GOD

«My daughter, your faith has saved you» (Mk 5 :34)

The power of faith

Here, it is a question of the faith of which Jesus speaks : faith in God as a Father who loves and forgives. Faith as a particular form of consciousness, the awareness of God, or of the divine as a loving and benevolent power / force towards us. That is why the faith of which Jesus speaks includes trust, it is because he put all his trust in God that Jesus was able to do what he did. In the life of the others was transformed when in their turn, they learnt to trust in God.

The faith of which Jesus speaks presupposes the confidence that God will do what is best, which does not always correspond to what we want. Real faith asks of God that his will may be done.

The secret of Jesus as a healer, is his extraordinarily powerful faith. He trusted in God without any hesitation and without reserve. He saw in the healings, a fruit of faith. He did not say « I have healed you » nor « God has healed you » but « Your faith has healed you ». He had a way of provoking the lame, the paralytic, the crippled by simple order « lève-toi et get up and walk ». Strengthened by his trusting faith, ces gens prenaient conscience que soudain ils those people became suddenly conscious that they could get up and walk.

(Albert Nolan, *Following Jesus today*, pg.116ff.)

Read and meditate each of these texts

Be silent and ask the Spirit to guide you. Read the text. Take time to re-visualise the scene and to situate yourself in that scene. Dialogue with Jésus. Give thanks for his presence in your journey of life.

Lk 17 :11-19

I put myself in the place of the leper : I identify my illness – engage in a dialogue with Jesus on that point – thanksgiving for the benefits received.

Matt. 9 :27- 31

I put myself in the place of the blind - I identify quels what my blindnesses are and ask for the grace to see!

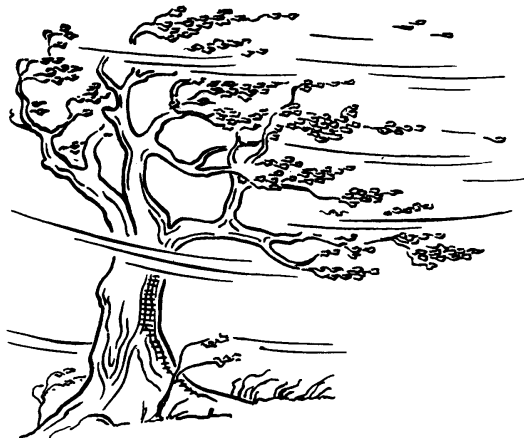
Mk 5 :21-35

I approach Jesus to touch him like the woman with the haemorrhage who saw herself as impure according to the law.

Personal Reflection

Since my 1st vows in OLA, I consider the journey made so far with its bright and dark moments (lights and shadows).

I identify : a) what is the obstacle on my way;
 b) what has enabled me to progress / grow.



2. WELCOMING THE WILL OF GOD AND PLACING COMPLETE TRUST IN HIM

« For the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. »

(Evangelii Nuntiandi n. 41)

“Here is the witness which the People of God expect from you the religious: it is the witness of men and women capable of accepting the abnegation of poverty, and of being attracted by simplicity and humility; it is that of those who love peace, who are free from compromise and set on complete self-denial—of those who are at the same time free and obedient, spontaneous and tenacious, meek and strong in the certainty of the Faith. This grace will be given to you by Christ Jesus in proportion to the fundamental gift which you have made of yourselves and which you do not retract.”

(Evangelica Testificatio n. 31)

The more we advance in religious life, the more we realise clearly, thanks to the Spirit who speaks in the humility of life, that the Lord is totally different from our dreams.

The experience of the vows is necessarily a process, made up of progress and withdrawals, of growth and of losses. It is not in any way a point of arrival, a port or a terminus of the human spiritual journey. (...)

The deprivation of the religious life which resists the crumbling of idolatrous beliefs also passes through multiple confusions, cowardices and even betrayals. Fidelity, eventually, is always repenting and the return of the prodigal son. Between the arrogance of the pharisee and shame, the full confidence and love, of the

publican, in the parable of Jesus (Lk 18 :9-14), religious life is situated resolutely on the side of the publican. (...) Like the publican, or, better still, like the prodigal son, let us come back each day to the Father saying to him: « Father, I do not deserve to be called your son, I do not deserve to be called your daughter ». The only design that resists our betrayals and our disillusionings is mercy.

But does fidelity consist only in this sad humiliating repentance? It is equally the joyous pascal experience. This fragile, humble, but totally stubborn fidelity, awakens to the dawn of the resurrection. That is why we think of fidelity not in terms of us a passive state, or a rigid defensive attitude, but as a growing awakening to the light of the Risen One. It is a matter therefore of allowing oneself to be gradually illumined, by the merciful presence of the Resurrected One.

(Simon-Pierre Arnold, *At the risk of Jesus-Christ. A review of the vows*, pp.78-79)

Personal Reflection

- To read and reread the texts above and allow yourself to be touched by the message which reflects my experience as a young woman consecrated by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.
- What has helped me to keep alive the desire to offer myself to God and to my brothers and sisters?
- « *Such indeed is the will of my Father: that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life* » Jn 6,40
- How do I nourish my deep relationship with the Lord Jesus?

3. LIVING IN SIMPLICITY: HUMILITY AND PASSION FOR MISSION

“We make this appeal to you: keep the simplicity of the “least ones” of the Gospel. May you succeed in discovering this anew in an interior and closer relationship with Christ and in your direct contact with your brethren. You will then experience through the action of the Holy Spirit the joyful exultation of those who are introduced into the secrets of the kingdom. Do not seek to be numbered among the “learned and clever” whose numbers seem inclined by a combination of circumstances to increase. Such secrets are hidden from these. Be truly poor, meek, eager for holiness, merciful and pure of heart. Be among those who will bring to the world the peace of God.”

(Paul VI – Evangelica Testificatio n° 54)

Personal Reflection

Simplicity for us is synonymous to uprightness, of truth ... (cf Constitution n. 9)

- What are the deep intentions that guide my relationship with others in my apostolate, in the community?
- In the face of tensions, do I have the habit of asking myself :
« what do I really want ? »
- How has this question helped me (or can it help me) to better know myself, and to be truthful to myself?

I share my findings with my accompagnatrice.

4. BE AWARE OF THE HUMAN IN ONESELF AND IN OTHERS: PATIENCE AND KINDNESS – FORGIVENESS AND NON VIOLENCE

« "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting us the message of reconciliation...So we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:19,20).

Reconciliation involves a way of life (spirituality) and a mission. To implement a spirituality of reconciliation, justice and peace, the Church needs witnesses deeply rooted in Christ, nourished by his Word and by the sacraments. Thus, they may strive towards holiness, in virtue of an ongoing conversion and an intense prayer life, and give themselves to the work of reconciliation, justice and peace in the world, even to the point of martyrdom, after the example of Christ. Through their courage in the truth, their self-denial and their joy, they bear prophetic witness in a way of life which is in keeping with their faith.»

Synod of African Bishops 2009 - Propositio 9

« Communion is a gift offered which also requires a response, a patient learning experience and struggle, in order to overcome the excesses of spontaneity and the fickleness of desires. The highest ideal of community necessarily brings with it conversion from every attitude contrary to communion..»

(Fraternal life in community n. 23)

“It may be useful to recall that in order to foster communion of minds and hearts among those called to live together in a community, it is necessary to cultivate those qualities which are required in all human relationships: respect, kindness, sincerity, self-control, tactfulness, a sense of humour and a spirit of sharing.”

(Fraternal life in community n. 27)

Personal Reflection

- a) How does the kindness of Jesus manifest itself in the 2nd Testament? (Nouveau Testament?)
- b) Basically, kindness, is another name for talking of charity and daily love.
Reread attentively 1 Cor. 4-7 while replacing the word « love or charity » with « kindness » and allow yourself to savour all the aspects of kindness as it is described by Paul. After that, acknowledge humbly which aspect you have great difficulty in practising at this time/ moment in your life.
- c) What gestures of forgiveness and of kindness have marked your life? Write them and allow gratitude to pour out from your heart through prayer.



5. TO FOLLOW THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT: IDENTITY AND MISSION

The missionary vocation « *ad gentes* » is a "special vocation," patterned on that of the apostles. It is manifested in a total commitment to evangelization, a commitment which involves the missionary's whole person and life, and demands a self giving without limits of energy or time

The special vocation of missionaries "*for life*" retains all its validity: it is the model of the Church's missionary commitment, which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavors. Therefore the men and women missionaries who have devoted their whole lives to bearing witness to the risen Lord among the nations must not allow themselves to be daunted by doubts, misunderstanding, rejection or persecution. They should revive the grace of their specific charism and courageously press on, preferring - in a spirit of faith, obedience and communion with their pastors - to seek the lowliest and most demanding places.

(Redemptoris Mission nn. 65. 66)

Personal Reflection

CHARISM AND APOSTOLATE

Our apostolic activities must be the concrete expression of our charism, because they are the means of carrying out the specific and original mission that God entrusts to us in the Church and the world.

It is not a matter of doing everything (or any activity) but to understand what God has entrusted to us and which nobody will be or do in our place.

How do we go about understanding what we can do?

- a) Drawing from the source of our charism (Who are we OLA? Why were we founded?)
 - b) To be attentive to God who continues to reveal Himself to us in our brothers and sisters who we encounter in our apostolate, as well as in every event. That is why our daily activities should be an integral part of our prayer.
- **How does my charism give a particular style to my way of doing things where I am engaged (teaching, healthcare, studying, doing pastoral work, with the poorest or in Women Animation/promotion ...)?**
 - **In my activities, what shows my identity as a missionary religious woman?**

CHARISM AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

Who am I? . Why am I in the world? What meaning has my life?
Who am I called to be? Am I important for somebody?

The response to these questions (which is never given once and for all in life, but is in continuous evolution) That is what enables me to structure my own identity.

- **To what extent and how is the missionary charism a part of my identity?**



6. LIVING MISSION IN AN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY

« The Church expects much from the witness of religious communities, characterized by racial, regional and ethnic diversity. By their life in common they proclaim that God makes no distinctions between persons and that we are all his children, members of the same family, living in harmony in diversity and peace»

Synod of African Bishops 2009 – Propositio 42

Interculturality... at the heart of mission

In a world torn apart by nationalism, ethnocentrism, exacerbated racism and all the forms of discrimination which put healthy human relationships to the test, interculturality offers us a path towards authentic christian love. We have a chance there, that of living a gospel/ evangelical value.

The intercultural life engages us in a process of conversion and of transformation. That presupposes of course that we question ourselves about our way of entering into and of living in relationship with the other. And it is in this way that formation and community life are enriched, where a very great variety of opinions and creative ideas meet, which, far from stifling it, rather highlight precisely our individual as well as our community life. By having the possibility of living intercultural life in our Congregations, that helps us to become more aware conscious and to grow in love as communities and individuals centred on the person of Christ.

(extracts from the article of Chineaka Ezeani¹, *Multicultural Formation. Some essential elements*, p.37-49, Spiritus Review, Sedos, No 190, March 2008)

Personal Reflection

1. Listening to the Word : time for meditation

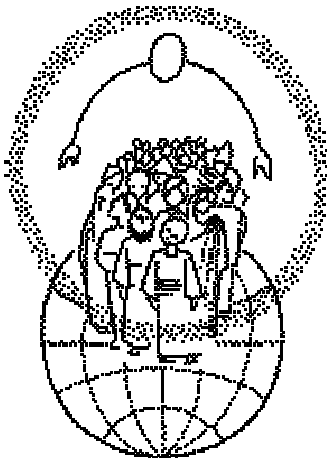
Jn 4 : 5-42; Jn 17 : 20-23; Acts 6 : 1-7

- I underline what me challenges me more in this text.
- **Jesus and his culture** : pick out in the Gospel the passages where Jesus calls certain aspects of his culture into question.

2. Since your entry into OLA, do an appraisal of your intercultural experience : indicate your positive discoveries and the obstacles encountered.

- At the postulate and in the novitiate
- In the communities where you have been sent
In the mission lived in your country and outside your country of origin.

3. « Intercultural life engages us in a process of conversion and transformation. » Comment on this statement by illustrating it with examples drawn from your own culture from your lived experience in intercultural community.



7. OPENNESS - WITNESS – TRANSMISSION... MISSION CONTINUES

« The Church acknowledges the inestimable value of the Consecrated Life, a particular form of the discipleship of Christ, which plays a fundamental role in the life and mission of the Church at the service of God's reign.

The Church particularly values the witness of consecrated persons in prayer life and community life, education, health, human promotion and pastoral service.

The prophetic role of consecrated persons must be emphasized in the process of reconciliation, justice and peace, and the fact that they are often very near to victims of oppression, repression, discrimination, violence and sufferings of all kinds»

Synod of African Bishops 2009 – Propositio 42

Descending towards men/humans in suffering

The mission of God consists in coming out of himself and going towards persons and peoples whose life is broken down and hope is at the dead end of the way. To descend towards suffering humans, is a whole evangelical attitude. To descend not with condescendence and crashing, humiliating commiserations, but with humility. To descend from one's pedestal, from one's appreciations and bookish scientific judgements and sometimes scornful and far from the reality on the ground / of the land. To descend simply and put oneself at the level of those who suffer and share the real, the down-to-earth of their daily martyrdom which no economic analysis riddled with figures and with statistics could diminish in its pain and in its ugliness... To descend with the suffering in their torments of hell and to taste with the heart what it means to be part of the losers, the

victims and of those who count for nothing and whose suffering, often absurd and interminable constitute a cry for help.

In the world in the midst of the greatest distresses, God has but only one presence and one word: the Cross. His heart present and active beside all those who suffer and who and who also sets them in a movement of presence and of solidarity action beside the others. It is in this dynamic that our mission is situated.

(Fr. Jean Sinsin Bayo, extracts of his intervention, OLA Sisters preparing for their Perpetual Vows, Lagos , 2008)

Personal Reflection

1. Pick out the passages which touch you particularly in this text of Fr. Jean Sinsin.
2. **Meditation on the following texts:** to share in the heart of God and pursue his mission today in the reality where I am sent.
 - a) **Ex 3 : 7-12 :** « I have seen the misery ...I have heard the cries ... I descended to deliver him.»

**Identify some fruits of this time of intimacy with the Lord.
How does God continue to be at work today?**

- b) **Ph 2 : 6-11 :** He whose condition was divine ... becoming similar to humans
He did not hold on to the rank that made him equal to God—
he took the condition of a slave

**The movement of «the descent » of God towards humans;
in what way does that challenge my mission?**

Invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mary, image of the Church, the Bride without spot or wrinkle, which by imitating you "preserves with virginal purity an integral faith, a firm hope and a sincere charity", sustain consecrated persons on their journey towards the sole and eternal Blessedness.

To you, Virgin of the Visitation, do we entrust them, that they may go forth to meet human needs, to bring help, but above all to bring Jesus. Teach them to proclaim the mighty things which the Lord accomplishes in the world, that all peoples may extol the greatness of his name. Support them in their work for the poor, the hungry, those without hope, the little ones and all who seek your Son with a sincere heart.

To you, our Mother, who desire the spiritual and apostolic renewal of your sons and daughters in a response of love and complete dedication to Christ, we address our confident prayer. You who did the will of the Father, ever ready in obedience, courageous in poverty and receptive in fruitful virginity, obtain from your divine Son that all who have received the gift of following him in the consecrated life may be enabled to bear witness to that gift by their transfigured lives, as they joyfully make their way with all their brothers and sisters towards our heavenly homeland and the light which will never grow dim.

We ask you this, that in everyone and in everything glory, adoration and love may be given to the Most High Lord of all things, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

John Paul II – Vita Consecrata



C.M.M.J.