



On this fifth day of the novena, we will reflect on the figure of Rachel, the beautiful shepherdess.



The history of Rachel is another beautiful story of love, tragedy, lie, escape, struggle, death. Rachel is very young then she falls in love with Jacob who comes to her country escaping from the anger of his brother Esau. Jacob worked for seven years for Laban, father of Rachel, to be able to marry her, but the night of wedding he discovers that Laban gave him Leah, the elder sister of Rachel, as wife. He has to work for another seven years to be with his beloved. Love makes it all bearable. In spite of years of infertility, Rachel gave to Jacob two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. In the people of Israel, she will be always venerated as mother who accompanies her children in numerous crossroads of the history, who cries for their unhappiness, and waits for their return to the promised land.

It is also a story of relationship between the two sisters. Leah is the elder one, the one “of sad eyes”, the one not loved by Jacob, but also the one who will give him six sons. Rachel is the little one, “of beautiful appearance”, the loved and chosen one, but who for many years remained infertile; later she will give birth to Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob who will keep alive the promise of God in his people, and to Benjamin, live which Rachel will pay with her own life. Both sisters are rivals in the battle for love of their husband. Leah until the end will know that she is not loved; Rachel will always feel less important because she could give only two sons. But when the two of them unite together in their feeling and thinking (both felt “sold” by their father as if they were a kind of commodity), they are capable of brave decisions and actions that will mark the history of the chosen people.

*“Who are you? I am Raquel.
Raquel carried in her hands a shepherd's staff ...
I am my neighbors united by love under Christ, my Head ”MR 7, 1. -*

In the writings of Francisco Palau, Rachel represents the social dimension of the Church. Rachel appears as “the shepherdess of the flock of her father” (her name itself means “mother sheep”) and this characteristic will mark the relationship of Palau with the Church. The maternity/paternity of the Church and her pastoral attention has its meaning only when comes given from God the Father and when it’s fulfilled until the end, in the middle of adversities, hatred, persecutions. Rachel represents the Church that takes care and protects her children as the most tender mother, and that at the same time is persecuted and abandoned by her shepherds. Palau discovers in her the Church - Shepherdess and Mother who cares for her children, and who commands him to the same on earth, giving his own life so that they may have this life in abundance. For him it will become the ideal of missionary commitment: called by God to take care of His flock, to give his life for them, to do anything he can for them to live. But not in some distant and general way: the flock of the Father is identified with every village, parish, diocese where Palau finds himself. Rachel is an itinerant shepherdess; her flock is scattered in whole world. Same way, the shepherds of the Church are called to take care and to be

responsible for the portion of the flock entrusted to them.

The palautians “we are mission”. The Church invites us to be the part of her mission among the people, to take care and give life to those who are entrusted to us as our responsibility. It is not mission and relationship “at distance”: the important part is the way we care for those who live near to us, our closest neighbors. We are heirs of the “missionary craziness” of Palau who haven’t kept anything for himself, haven’t stopped to take care for himself or preoccupy for his own health and wellbeing, but was throwing himself courageously to save his daughter “from the lion”. Love has to make us vulnerable, crazy, imprudent, neglecting ourselves. This time of pandemic is being good test for us to see until what point we have assumed this “craziness” in our personal and communitarian life... This mission is shared with our sisters. We can be fighting against each other, filled with jealousy, wounded self-love, envy, rivalry, or we can unite our strengths to keep alive the promise of God.

Which path do you choose?





intercession

Make present at this moment, the Church, the flock entrusted to you in the mission that you are carrying out, and intercede for them.

Let us finish this moment of reflection listening to the words of Francisco Palau. Let us consider it as “missionary commandment” that he left us in legacy:

“My daughter, the Church is your neighbors united in body to Christ, its Head. She is your beloved daughter that over the earth battles against those diabolic wolves that devour her sheep. Prepare yourself for the gear battle against those wolves. God has wanted that the Church would have on the earth represented his maternity, and with it a love of a mother, that’s why he gave you for her, together with maternity, the love of a mother for her. Go crazy for her! May your love for the Church remove your healthy judgement! May you be like a mother who seeing her adored son among the lions, without calculating her strength would throw herself on them to save him; may you be like this poor mother of family who walks over the flames, who throws herself into the depths of waters to save her daughter; and because love believes it all possible, without looking if she has means of salvation, she kills herself, ruins herself, throws herself. The Church has discovered to you her sorrows. There can be no longer in you any repose since you already know them. The maternity for the Church open thousands of wounds in your heart. Love is so cruel! Do not abandon her, do not delay in helping her. Be a mother that She has on the earth” (Cf. MR 9,28-30).

Let us ask for the grace that we desire through the intercession of Bto. Francisco Palau

Almighty and merciful God and Father, we thank and bless you for instilling

in the heart of Blessed Francisco Palau a singular love for the

Church, the mystical Body of Christ, by revealing to him her

beauty as illustrated in Mary, and inspiring him

to serve her through prayer and apostolic activity.

Grant us his prompt canonization in the Church and the special grace we are asking

through his intercession. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

