

“SMELL
OF PERFUME...”



**INTERNATIONAL UNION
SUPERIORS GENERAL**

Special Issue
Lent 2025

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Bulletin UISG

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Presentation

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Affective emotional and corporeal process in the different stages
of a Woman following Jesus

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Ma. Rosaura Gonzalez Casas, stj

PRESENTATION

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In this beginning of Lent of 2025, the Holy Year of Hope, we wanted to publish a Special Issue of the Bulletin, in which we present a single text, extracted from the book of Sr. Ma. Rosaura Gonzalez Casas, STJ, *La Casa se llenó del olor del perfume: Hacia una afectividad integrada*.

The text could be used as a theme for a Lenten retreat.

As the author herself writes about her book: “It is an instrument that addresses the theme of *affective and sexual maturity in consecrated feminine life*. To read and enter into the proposal made in this book implies a commitment to personal work, and for those who are willing and able, a community exercise that will help to “walk together” in this process of growth towards an integrated affectivity.

It seems to me that we all perceive the “centrality” of this theme, insofar as it is the natural source, so to speak, of what can become, with the help of grace, the vital force of our consecrated life: the passionate and self-giving love for Jesus, “our only love” and for our sisters and brothers.

In order to have a clearer vision of the implications of this integration process, I will use a biblical image: Mary of Bethany. I will try to enter into her heart, into her affections, to follow in her footsteps and identify the emotional and affective characteristics that she experienced as a woman in love with Christ.”

Happy Lent, happy journey towards Easter!

About the author:

Ma. Rosaura Gonzalez Casas, stj is Mexican and belongs to the Society of St Teresa of Jesus, founded by St Enrique de Ossó. She received her licence and doctorate in Psychology from the Pontifical Gregorian University with the theme 'Gender and Relationships'. She has written numerous articles and several books. She is currently coordinator of the Commission for the Care and Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults of the Latin American and Caribbean Conference of Religious (CLAR) and a member of the Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG). She works full time at the Institute of Psychology of the Pontifical Gregorian University.

La Casa se llenó del olor del perfume: Hacia una afectividad integrada, is the new editorial publication of CLAR - Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, written by Sr. María Rosaura González Casas, STJ.

This Special Issue of the Bulletin is published in four languages: Italian, English, French and Spanish.

“Smell of perfume...”

Affective emotional and corporeal process in the different stages of a Woman following Jesus

María Rosaura González Casas. stj

Introduction:

I have rewritten this book¹, thinking of concrete faces of sisters, consecrated religious, who like the women of the Dawn, desirous and in search of the Lord Jesus, live the great desire to find him, to give themselves totally; to grow and mature in the surrender of life. This book is dedicated to them, from different congregations and geographical origins, who have had or still have the heart lit by the fire of love and want to enter into a process of liberation and growth. Also to those who have lost hope and along the way have been extinguished, those who have been wounded and in the scars of their hearts there are only smoldering ashes of what once was joy, meaning and love. I think of them, wishing with all my heart that this book may have healing effects, care, love and growth for each one of them.

It is an instrument that addresses the theme of *affective and sexual maturity in consecrated feminine life*. To read and enter into the proposal made in this book implies a commitment to personal work, and for those who are willing and able, a community exercise that will help to "walk together" in this process of growth towards an integrated affectivity.

It seems to me that we all perceive the "centrality" of this theme, insofar as it is the natural source, so to speak, of what can become, with the help of grace, the vital force of our consecrated life: the passionate and self-giving love for Jesus, "our only love"² and for our sisters and brothers.

Accompanying various sisters and communities, I have realized that when looking for tools for affective-sexual maturation, different psychological perspectives and group dynamics are used, with the false illusion of believing that by working on the human level, the sisters, especially those in initial formation (but including all ages, since we are always in formation), will make a qualitative leap and will pass as if it were a continuous and direct line to live a mature chastity. However, this human work, very necessary by the way, remains incomplete, if it only approaches

¹ In 2007 I published a book with this title. Part of what I wrote, I reworked it for the Claretian Sisters in Rome who asked me for this work for their Congregation. The feedback I received on the application of this work instrument was very good, and as several congregations ask to approach this topic, so fundamental in the formation and in the line of care and prevention of abuses, it seemed to me that offering it to all the religious sisters could help to respond to the needs of many communities. I hope it can be of great personal and community use.

² Pope Francis. "C'est la confiance": *Apostolic Exhortation on trust in God's merciful love on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face*. 8.

the affective-sexual dynamics from a psychological horizon³ , because to grow towards an affective maturity that is oriented to live consecrated chastity, needs simultaneously an integral and interdisciplinary perspective, since the direction and the goal to which all the affective-emotional strength should be oriented and directed: is the desire to respond to a personal call of Jesus Christ.

The vigor, the energy, the fire of attraction of this call, together with the deep desire to respond with fidelity, has such a great vitality and inner strength that it unifies and unites all the affective-sexual dynamics, orienting it towards the profound desire to follow Jesus, to know him, to love him and to make him known and loved with one's own life, given to sisters and brothers. In other words, it is an existential choice of life that is made throughout a concrete, historical process, where all the human forces, capacities and potentialities are integrated towards the "One Love" until arriving at the total donation of life. It is a process of slow growth, with moments of progress, falls and redemption (cf. Lonergan). In this process of integration, with its ups and downs and possibilities of redemption, the human and the divine of each person are interwoven simultaneously, involving our whole being, our heart, emotions, affections, sexuality, corporeality, in a word, the totality of the person in all stages of life.

In order to have a clearer vision of the implications of this integration process, I will use a biblical image: Mary of Bethany. I will try to enter into her heart, into her affections, to follow in her footsteps and identify the emotional and affective characteristics that she experienced as a woman in love with Christ.

To enter into the life of Mary of Bethany, I will do it following what appears of her in the Gospel of John. I distinguish 7 stages characterized by the content of some Gospel verses. In each of the stages there are three sections; one refers to emotions, affections and the body, another deals with relationships and the last section takes into account the context. In each of these three sections I have put some questions that can help you in your personal work (others may come to your mind).

Perhaps some communities would like to live this process together, so I thought that after some personal work, each of the stages could be shared in community. If so, it would be a good idea to set up a community space to pray together and share freely. We could begin the moment of encounter with a song to the Holy Spirit and read the biblical verse of the stage to be shared, pray for a few minutes in silence, and then move on to the second moment, which would be to share in common each stage, simply answering these questions: what touched my heart? what have I realized? what do I feel invited to do?

For this work to be fruitful, I invite you to pray personally, to meditate, to listen to your heart, to be honest with yourselves. What each one lives in truth before God will give the possibility to grow and mature. In case the community decides to make the journey together, there are two aspects that I would invite you to take into consideration:

- 1) the meetings should be spaced out, for example once a month, so that each sister has sufficient time, in the midst of daily activity, to process her personal work.

³ There are different psychological approaches that do not include the possibility of transcendence and of living a "consecrated chastity". It is therefore necessary to consider an interdisciplinary perspective that opens the horizon to transcendence.

2) during the sharing it is not necessary to say big and brilliant ideas, it is rather to create the possibility of walking together in this process, respecting the stage that each one is living.

Now without further ado, and wishing that this little book-workshop will bear much fruit in each of you and in your communities, we will now enter into the subject following in the footsteps of Mary of Bethany.

Key words: body, feelings, affections, stages, context, woman.

1. CONCERN: First stage of growth

"Many Jews had come to the house of Martha and Mary, to comfort them for their brother. When Martha found out that Jesus had come, came to meet him, while Mary remained at home" Jn 11:19-20.

Mary of Bethany is faced with two strong experiences: the death of her brother Lazarus and the absence of the Friend she trusted. Faced with this situation, surely the questions and concerns were crowded within her, but she still could not formulate them like her sister Martha (Jn 11:20). However, she expressed her pain and cried. Her sister Martha had *gone out of herself* to meet the Lord (Jn 11:20). Mary instead stayed at home. *What does it mean to stay at home?*, is it something symbolic?, does it mean to be within oneself?, maybe. Mary does not understand the mystery of death, there the meaning of life is put to test, she sought answers in Jesus, and her *Friend* had not presented himself. The Jews comforted her, but surely this consolation did not touch the depth of her questions (Jn 11:31).

Mary's crying manifests in a bodily way the *restlessness* she possibly had in her *heart*, a restlessness she felt throughout her body. She cried, she allowed herself to be comforted, but she was not at peace (later she verbally expressed her concern Jn 11:32). In various ways, people who seek the deep meaning of life begin their process with a *restlessness*, a *dissatisfaction* that is generated in contact with life and reality⁴. We are questioned by the Truth. Similar situations in many seekers of God tell us that this is the starting point of every process. Restlessness is usually a sign of something deeper, of the "thirst for God" that every human being experiences (Jn 4).






- What was or is the main concern of my youth and your life today? What was the concern that moved me to respond to my vocational call?, what did I feel?, what events are related?
- How do I feel today in relation to the life I am living as a consecrated woman? are there tears in my eyes? joy, sadness?

1.1 Emotional and bodily affective characteristics

Restlessness is felt in the body, it is experienced in the soul, it is lived in the anxiety that nothing fills the human heart. It is a physical, affective, cognitive experience that touches the whole person, an existential restlessness that involves the totality of those who allow themselves to be questioned.

⁴ This concern refers to the dialectical experience experienced by every human being who asks questions and questions the meaning of life with desires of transcendence. Cf. LONERGAN B.J.F., *Method*, 235-245.





This restlessness, functioning as a bridge between the temporal and the eternal, reflects physically, psychologically, and spiritually, that we are created by God, and that we have an insatiable thirst for infinity. Some women and men, especially during their youth, but it can be at any age, experience within themselves, in various ways, a personal and social dissatisfaction with the world in which they live. They have desires for change, a thirst that speaks of the seed of eternity present in their heart, and that puts into play the dialectic of the whole person. This also manifests itself in the body.⁵

-  There are many types of restlessness and anxiety... What causes me anxiety and restlessness?
-  What feelings, affections, and bodily manifestations manifest that I am not at peace?
-  Do I hear the deep restlessness of the soul, of my life?

1.2 Relational aspect from the female perspective

Dissatisfaction or anxiety, to which reference is made, is not born of a personal problem, although it converges with personal concerns and moves in the psychology of people. In the development of this dissatisfaction, the woman's capacity for empathy and connection can function as a double-edged sword: as an ally that helps generate restlessness and thirst for infinity or in a contrary way as a "calming" that silences the inner cries of eternity. Many have lived this dialectic and the evangelist makes it present in Mary of Bethany: she remained at home, wept and was comforted by her Jewish friends (Jn 11:31). The consolation of friends is one of the reasons given by the evangelist why Mary did not go out to meet Jesus.

In Mary of Bethany, as in so many other women, the relationship and the capacity for connection can function as silencers of the deep restlessness of the heart. The Friend she wished to meet was at the door of her house, but she remained inside, amid consolations that prevented her from leaving. Only silence allows deep and profound listening to what inhabits the human heart.

-  Do I silence the deep concerns of my heart? How and what do I do?
-  Can I identify what my inner conflict is today?
-  What do I look for in relationships with others and others?
-  Is it possible that I use some relationship as "soothing" that prevents me from hearing from the depth of my heart what I feel and what is happening to me?





1.3 The body, affections and emotions

We are interested in the connection between the inner states of the spirit, the psyche and the emotions and affections that manifest themselves in bodily expressions, so that we can live a spirituality that includes the whole person. In today's culture, the body is given excessive importance, as a symbol of youth, health, sexuality, and beauty. Cultural meanings are created to which people feel enslaved to respond, and which definitely influence the way they conceive of their being as a

⁵ It is necessary to make a distinction between what would be a somatization that has its origin in unconscious conflicts, and the restlessness that arises from the inner dialectic between the call to transcendence and the confrontation with the reality that is lived.

woman. With fashion, patterns of beauty, health, sexuality, ways of dressing and responding to the consumer society are created. Above all, women in the mass media are presented as an instrument of sexual consumption, as an object.



There are also today, more than in other times, bodily signs that indicate the presence of internal conflicts, for example, anorexia, (especially in the countries of the first world), as well as bulimia. The body records the experiences that each person lives, and manifests conscious and unconscious conflicts in various ways, and occasions somatizing. It is necessary to make a space of inner silence and run the risk of listening and recognizing the language of the body⁶. Women tend to live in greater connection with their own body and with the various bodily sensations. The menstrual cycle makes you experience the changes you live, the pain, the tiredness, the rhythm of life. These are elements that will help you make this connection.

-  My body speaks: do I hear my body?
-  What do you say to me and what can I hear?
-  Are there any events, disappointments, or conflicts that are related to any illness in my body?
-  What should I do to start listening to my body?

1.4 My being as a woman in my cultural and ecclesial context

In some cultures, the excessive emphasis of the female role linked to an image of an object woman or heroic mother (super-woman), can cause dynamics of rejection in young women, and unconsciously create guilt, since by the fact of being women they have to live an automatism of generosity and service with which they annul their own freedom. The desire for self-giving must be forged in the maturation of the person until freely deciding the donation, it cannot be given as the result of a role that must be performed. The victimhood that is generated on many occasions as a result of an expected heroism to live as mothers, creates a state of lamentation, bitterness and apparent self-denial that prevents genuine attitudes of donation.

It is necessary to decode, and deconstruct these cultural concepts that are ordinarily unconscious and that many women assume without realizing it and cause them sadness for not being those super-women that they must be according to these sociocultural criteria.

-  What is the concept of women in my culture?
-  Does this concept have anything to do with my way of developing, of feeling, of giving myself as a consecrated woman?

⁶ There are techniques to listen to body language, for example, the technique of Focusing, Cf. GENDLIN E., *Focusing*, or a type of therapy that manages to unite the language of the body and the word bringing to light unconscious conflicts. Cf. DOWNING G., *Il Corpo e la Parola*. It is necessary to listen to the body and go to the cause of the conflict that may be of unconscious origin. This requires special techniques that help people enter into themselves. In the body the tensions and anxieties of the human being are manifested. In medicine and quantum mechanical studies, the close relationship between diseases, moods, tensions and unconscious conflicts is increasingly delved into.

2. Muting the outside to listen to the inside: second stage

*"Martha went to call her sister Mary
and said in his ear:
Master is here and calls you.
Mary quickly got up
and went to meet Jesus" Jn 11:28-29.*

We start with the unsettled and restless heart of Mary of Bethany in the face of the death of her brother Lazarus and the absence of Jesus. In that circumstance, she hears the Master's call: "Martha went to call her sister Mary, and *said in her ear*: The Master is here and *calls you*" (Jn 11:28). Jesus' personal call makes her come out of herself. It is the moment in which the inner knots are untied and the possibility of initiating a dialogue between interior and exterior is given. This is the beginning of the stage of inner and outer unification. External consolations give space to silence and listening: "*Martha said to her ear.*" They appear with more force, the questions, the unsettledness and the restlessness. Boundaries have been created between the interior and exterior. Through mediation, in this case Martha, her sister, begins to listen to the call of the Lord, who invites her to stop what she was doing, to come out of herself and follow the voice of Jesus.



2.1 On the road to integration: affective-bodily aspects




Silence and listening help to create a connection between body and spirit, communication between interior and exterior is given. Through this connection a person can listen, discern, and follow the promptings of the Spirit, rather than instincts and pursuits creating bodily dispositions that express what moves the inner spirit and take it to action: "Mary rose quickly and went out to meet Jesus" (Jn 11:29).

In different cultures, there are means that help to create these connections between body and spirit: through various postures⁷, in the contemplation of icons or images, or through listening to music⁸. The connection between body and spirit should not be limited only to moments of prayer. It is about connecting the body with all existence and the choice of life. The means to realize it is silence and listening. There *the person can realize his-her own feelings, questions, anger and concerns and gradually identify and name what nests in his-her heart.*

⁷ Sitting, kneeling, barefoot, prostrate. St. Ignatius in prayer considered the body, and posture is like a disposition that helps the spirit. It also considers the body in the prayer of application of senses. Cf. LOYOLA I., *Exercises Spirituales*, 239, 247, 252.





⁸ GOMEZ-ACEBO I., ed., *Five Women Pray with the Senses*. It tries to create a connection between the body and the spirit, not to silence the interior with excess of words, music or images.

At this stage, self-knowledge and embracing oneself with the cross are key elements. These two elements help to initiate a "self-recognition" in the truth. Necessary elements for listening and authenticity that must be given in everyday life, since knowing oneself in truth necessarily carries *the painful recognition of one's own limit*. With *listening*, the time of trial has begun to discern the call that becomes new and personal at each stage of life and to clarify it. This process requires a discipline, which is referred to by St. Paul as what athletes do to run in the stadium (1 Cor, 9,25). With training and effort, the new customs acquired, help overcome the past habits of escape from themselves, and dispose the person to listen to the Spirit of God. At this stage, encounters with Jesus in prayer, in listening to the Word, in joint reflection, the Eucharist, and the relationship with sisters and brothers begin to have a privileged place in the life of the person.

-  What means do I use or can I use to listen to myself internally?
-  What feelings and emotions do I hear?
-  What does my body tell me?

2.3 Relationships

At this stage you want to live and you can start a process of personal relationship with the Lord Jesus: begin to know him and know yourself, and in the relationship go towards totality and an affective relationship. These dynamics, limits, abilities and gifts to know yourself in truth will be put into play. Mediations at this stage have a fundamental role. They can be the words of friends, readings of books, historical events. The social reality challenges us, the concrete relationships in the life of each day put into play the dynamics of the person. Silencing yourself to listen to the inner echoes is quite an effort.







-  What are my affections for Jesus?
-  Do I sense that any relationship with some person or way of relating which separates me from Jesus?
-  What relationships lead me to Jesus? Why?
-  What prevents me from entering into inner silence to listen to Jesus, any feeling? fear?

2.3.1 Relationships with other women

"Martha went to call her sister Mary." The woman who enters this process will find keys to assume her feminine being in relationships with women and men. In their relationship *with other women*, it is possible that an identification with them is given and elements of the relationship with the mother (submission, dependence, rebellion), or with other significant women in life are revived. Relationships between women are more intense and complex, precisely because of the presence of transfers that repeat the bonds established with the mother.

It is the opportunity to get to know each other, re-elaborate the relationship and assume one's own identity as a woman, sexuality and corporeality from a positive perspective. Spaces of empathy that tolerate the different emotions that will live one and the other are necessary, as well as spaces of autonomy so that they can freely exercise their own decisions. This point is key since it still occurs in the ecclesial religious environment, women and men who have a distorted image of women and see

female sexuality as something sinful, tempting or devalued, and this is transmitted, consciously or unconsciously to other women, so that they experience shame and guilt just for the fact of being women. It is necessary to recognize the very dignity of a woman as the image of God. This will enhance a better quality of relationships and communication between women.

-  How do I relate to the women in my community? How do I relate to authority?
-  Do I notice throughout my religious life repetitive problems in the relationship with other women?
-  Does the authority remind me of someone in my family?
-  When I think of my mom (or person who has been like a mother) what feelings come to me? (different from thoughts. Please don't judge yourself, just listen)
-  When do I think of my dad (or person who has been like a father) what feelings come to me?
-  Do you see any relationship between the feelings you feel (or have felt) about authority

2.3.2 Relationships with males

It is also necessary to analyze what kind of relationships we establish with men, including clergy who exercise a service in religious and parish communities. Are they relationships of friendship, of mutual service as brothers and sisters in the Church of God?, of servility?, of power and domination? If we consider the relationship of women towards men, it is possible that an idealized image of the man⁹ will occur, in a more accentuated and unrealistic way, which fosters in her attitudes of dependence, submission, as well as attitudes that imply hierarchical relationships.

If we consider the relationship from the male to the female, we perceive that in the ecclesial institutional context there are ordinarily two attitudes with respect to the religious and other women: they are idealized or devalued as it happens in the relationship with the mother¹⁰. If she is idealized, she can be regarded as someone angelic, almost out of this world, pure and holy.

Avoiding the encounter with the reality of the woman, and a relationship with someone similar to him and at the same time diverse, who confronts him as a woman with everything that this can imply. If he devalues her, he does not give her a voice, nor a word, he considers her as a second-class being and servant¹¹. Thus, within the Church, "worldly" schemes of society are repeated with regard to relationships, work, spaces for participation in decision-making at all levels of the Church, considering them minors¹². It is therefore necessary to unmask these conscious and unconscious

⁹ Parents are not usually close to the family in general and daughters in particular, this makes the attachment to the father idealized and that is given in fantasy. It is usually repeated in his relationships with other men.

¹⁰ The fear of the mother has its roots in the experience, which the child lives, of total abandonment in the hands of the mother, and therefore of a "powerful mother". When there has not been a mature integration of the heterosexual relationship, the male needs to defend himself from this power and can do so in two ways: idealizing it or devaluing it, thus avoiding a personal relationship of equality, where he can be vulnerable.

¹¹ The place of the religious in the Church, and in general of women, it has been the one in the background, and if it must be paid, especially when working in parishes or in service to priests, it is underpaid, like cheap labor., without giving sufficient space to express their opinions and participate actively in ecclesial decisions. Sometimes, there are women, who despite having the same quality of work and perhaps with more hours and better preparation than men receive a lower salary, just because they are women.

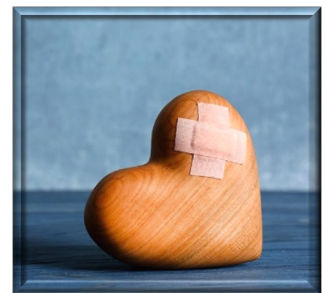
¹² Religious Orders and Congregations, of which three quarters are women, have for the most part been docile and effective in following the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, especially with regard to formation and preparation. However, at the ecclesial level, the financial means of support for the formation of the religious given to candidates for the priestly ministry are not given, although we are both part of the Church.

concepts, which can nourish relationships and roles that have nothing to do with the call to live evangelical relationships in ecclesial service (Mk 3:33-35). Outside of the clerical environment, it is sometimes more feasible to live equal relationships between women and men.

- What do you feel and how do you feel about the men you relate to?
- Does what you feel has something to do with your family history?
- How do you feel and behave in front of men who are priests?
- Anything in particular that you feel in this area and would like to work on?

2.4 Women in the social and ecclesial context

In the neoliberal and violent society in which we live, both in the first world and in the third and fourth worlds, sex has become an element of consumption and turns women into a fragile side where aggressions and violence manifest themselves¹³. It is possible that some women who hear the call to Consecrated Life have been used, or perhaps suffered sexual abuse from relatives or friends¹⁴ or that they have also suffered them within the ecclesial context in Religious Life¹⁵. To get their whole person back in their hands, they will find themselves with the painful process of accepting their history, sexuality and gender identity, until they see it as something positive. If other women in the community, or clerics conditioned by prejudice, or by their own immaturity, devalue the sexuality of the woman, and encourage inferiority and guilt considering the female bodily aspect as an object or as something bad, or less good than other aspects of the person, they will condition and negatively influence the integration of affectivity and sexuality whose fruit is chastity.



It is necessary for women to be able to unmask these conscious and unconscious concepts and work on the discovery and acceptance of their own dignity as a woman blessed by God as his image.

- How do you feel and how have you felt about being a woman in your family?
- Is what you feel part of the cultural context where you were born?
- What do you feel and how do you feel about being a woman in the Church?
- How do you feel about your sexuality? joy of being a woman? What is sinful to you? What is humiliating? shameful?

¹³ «One in three women on the planet has suffered abuse at some point in your life at the hands of state agents, members of your own family or acquaintances». Amnesty International.

<http://207.44.202.102:82/dmirror/http/www.es.amnesty.org/nomasviolencia/datos.php> (19/09/2005). Women are the unrecognized victims of wars, and it is adult women and girls who are the people most affected by armed conflict today.

¹⁴ Cf. LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN CONFEDERATION OF RELIGIOUS AND RELIGIOUS. GONZALEZ CASAS MR (2022). *Vulnerability, Abuse and Care in Women's Religious Life*. Claretian. Argentina

¹⁵ Women are victims of the exploitation of this consumer society that takes them as a sexual object. For the football world championship in Germany 2006, a network was organized that aimed to bring young women from different countries for the fun of those who wanted and could afford it! They are called prostitutes with an offensive word because perhaps they are poor and have no chance of finding work and supporting their children, yet there is no talk of those who are pimps, traffickers, exploiters and "prostitutes".

3. Outdoors, disciple and subject: third stage

"When Mary arrived where Jesus was seeing him, she fell at his feet And she said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" Jn 11:32.

We find in the text three moments that we can identify as characteristic of this stage:

In the first: *Mary arrived where Jesus was.* Mary turned with her whole being to Jesus. When she set out on her way, she left her Jewish friends who comforted her, freed herself not only from her affective dependencies, but also from what they might think because of her new attitude since they were Jews (Jn 11:31). The call gave her strength to come out of herself in dispossession and inner poverty. To find Jesus in the truth of herself, it was necessary to stay out in the open, without "protections" that would give her security. *She reorients her whole being* customs and habits to turn to the Lord.

Silence the exterior to listen to the interior, the body postures, the meals, the hours of sleep, the distribution and use of time, the way of life, its relationships and social commitment, the spaces of prayer, the Eucharist, readings, the encounter with sisters and brothers, apostolic service, *everything is re-oriented to be ready to follow the call of Jesus.* However, at this stage a temptation may appear; a certain rigidity, to put security and justification in external works. Deception is thinking that by following a predetermined way of acting, dressing or behaving, you will be able to possess the Lord. She falls into the fantasy of believing that by her own merit and power she will be able to cling to God, as if justified by her works and by them they deserve the presence of God. It is an exaltation of one's own omnipotence, and a defensive flight from the acceptance of one's own limits. Only the humble recognition of the truth of self, together with the loving experience¹⁶ of God's mercy, which goes



beyond one's own virtues and shortcomings, will help a woman to recognize who she truly is. This authenticity is a prerequisite for true conversion.¹⁷

In the second moment: *"seeing him, she fell at his feet."* Mary, seeing Jesus, falls at his feet as a disciple¹⁸. By "seeing" him she feels looked at, knows she is recognized, loved, welcomed in her pain, and gives in totally. When a person experiences God's love, realizes that the learned external forms were only a help, and that by clinging to them as idols, she loses the truth and availability to the voice of the Spirit. It is time to get rid of the attitudes that guaranteed security and a certain power, to surrender and *be left out in the open*¹⁹. By stripping herself of her ego, her most genuine and authentic self is born, she begins to be herself, not wanting to possess God through moral standards, or to

¹⁶ Cf Teresa of Jesus. *Book of Dwellings*: M. 3.1.5. and ss.

¹⁷ "Man achieves authenticity in self-transcendence", "For a man is his true self inasmuch as he is self-transcending. Conversion is the way to self-transcendence. Inversely, man is alienated from his true self inasmuch as he refuses self-transcendence, and the basic form of ideology is the self-justification of alienated man". LONERGAN B.J.F., *Method*, 104, 357.

¹⁸ Be at the feet of Jesus is understood in light of Acts 22.3.

¹⁹ It is time to die to defend your own image and persevere in "this nakedness and abandonment of everything" by love. Cf. Teresa of Jesus *Book of Dwellings*. M. 3.1.8.

protect herself through relationships with others. You can truly say what is in your heart without fear of losing love. She begins as a disciple at his feet.

In the third moment: Mary opens her heart to Jesus and confesses to him what she has inside: *"if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* Mary faces the issue of death and trust. It opens questions about the meaning of life, human limitation, and relationships. She expresses her concerns, questions and claims from her most genuine self, with the certainty that she will be welcomed and loved despite her weaknesses and uncertainties. Their relationship is in poverty; it begins in a closer relationship with Jesus, without protections, and²⁰ the meaning of existence is raised. A process of reconciliation and liberation has begun. At this stage we live the fall of the self, as well as the need for accompaniment of a sister or brother who is ahead on the road. It is important that this accompaniment is qualified, able to help the person to identify their own motivations, welcome²¹ them and reorient them. At this stage there is an important moment of acceptance of one's own history of vulnerability and personal fragility. Many conscious and unconscious resistances can appear that block this moment of grace.

3.1 Acceptance of affections and corporeality

The total surrender of the person as a gift received by grace is expressed in the body image that Mary of Bethany manifests when she "falls to her knees" at the feet of the Lord.²² This surrender can only occur as a result of the acceptance of the human limit and of total surrender.










The posture expresses in a bodily way that one has bowed to the Other, that one has surrendered, that one does not defend oneself, that one does not hide, and that one is there in nakedness. *This acceptance of self occurs in the totality of her being and is reflected as acceptance of her own body, with its gifts and its limitations, acceptance of sexuality, in this case of her being as a woman, of the temporal limitation of life with diseases and fatigues, of one's own physiological and bodily needs. Falling to your knees is a symbol of the acceptance of one's own creatureliness and death, an icon consistent with the inner state of the person. Omnipotence itself has fallen. This acceptance of reality can awaken feelings of despair in the face of loss of meaning and annihilation.*

²⁰ Every human being who faces the limit and death from the most profound truth He gives of himself and in dialogue with transcendence, he can open himself to the communication of God. Cf. RAHNER K., *On the ineffability of God*, 31.

²¹ "That in a great way he takes advantage of in dealing with those who already know him to know us, and because some things that seem impossible to us, seeing them in others so possible and with the softness that they carry, encourages a lot and it seems that with their flight we we dare to fly", Teresa of Jesus Book of Dwellings: M.3.2.12.

²² It is very interesting the path that ETTY HILLESUM makes until she falls to her knees. This bodily posture in her expresses what it meant to be overcome by God to the point of death. er in worship. LEBEAU P., *Etty Hillesum. An Itinerary spiritual*, 93-107.

The loss of self is such a crucial point in psycho-spiritual development, that when the esteem of the person is threatened, unconscious defensive mechanisms are unleashed that can lead her to live in deception or in lack of authenticity. Only the experience of God's love opens the door of hope in the face of the mystery of death. Mary of Bethany can verbally formulate her questions, her pain and inner resentment, humbly surrendering to the feet of Jesus what she carries in her heart: Jesus is merciful, and his love is overflowing towards limitations and sin. In our vulnerability he invites us to start a new life (Rom 5:8). To lose oneself and gain it for eternal life, to grow in freedom, to come out of oneself, and to open oneself to a diverse experience of faith and to a new knowledge: *"I am the Resurrection and the Life, He who believes in Me, even though he has died will live; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die"* (Jn 11:25). Jesus had made this revelation to Martha. Now he reveals it to Mary by raising her dead brother. He connects the life of God and the life incarnate in time in a living body.

-  What feelings and affections do I have a harder time accepting about myself?
-  Do I accept myself as a woman? Do I accept my body? Are there any aspects of my body that I have a hard time accepting?
-  For me, what is very important to feel from others? When I don't receive it, how do I feel? Is there an event or circumstance or perhaps an ongoing life experience that has created resentment for me? What do I feel called to leave and forgive?
-  How do I view my sexual affective experience in light of this loss of myself?
-  What aspects of my sexual affective life do I have to enhance to live the evangelical chastity?, what aspects would I have to accept?, what attitudes or behaviors would I have to renounce?
-  How do I live the theme of motherhood in relation to my chastity? (not theoretically)
-  How do I live menopause, old age, illness in relation to the total surrender of myself?





3.2 Relationships

At this stage of the relational level, the person leaves personal and moral self-protections. Everything that makes her a guarantor of her own personal well-being, everything that makes her a center and reference. Now the reference is not her, it is the Other, now she approaches death, her brother's grave and accepts it in another way. In the encounter with one's own truth, there is a deep connection with the Lord Jesus, from an empathy that goes beyond a mere feminine tendency.

In the following verses of the Gospel, when Mary manifests to Jesus her pain and despair in the face of death, He is moved: *"Jesus, seeing her weep, and the Jews, who were also weeping, made a deep sigh and was deeply moved"* (Jn 11:33). She unites herself to Jesus from the deepest truth of herself, as a human being limited in death. There she discovers that her pain is the same pain as Jesus'. Her humanity is embraced by the Humanity of Jesus who weeps in the face of death.²³

²³ In this case it seems that Mary's crying makes Jesus participate affectively and emotionally in his human pain, at the same time allows Mary to join the Humanity of Jesus.







However, at this stage we must expect human resistance to the loss of self, which is manifested in the mechanism of self-deception (conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious), established in the human being. The defense of self-esteem, secondary gains in relationships, appearance, ideologies that offer false promises of life and prevent touching the bottom of one's truth. In all human beings there is a personal dynamic anchored in the desires for power and being that leads them to defend themselves from the loss of themselves.

-  What is my truth? What do I feel in front of my own truth? If I were to die today, what would I say about myself? What have I used and want to use my life for?
-  What are my limitations? Do I accept them?
-  Do I identify some "false promises" that attract me, deceive me, and let me be carried away by them? For example, believing that the success of my mission depends on me and not on God being able to act through me.
-  What are my struggles and conflicts for the "loss of myself"?



3.3 Women in the social-ecclesial context

In some cultures, idealized or devalued images of women are encouraged: the super female hero as mother, guarantor of pleasure, inferior to the male. An image of a woman similar and equal to the man in rights and duties, is incipient in some culture. It is possible that some women, as part of the female identity, have assumed a role of heroic mother (super-woman) but with an unconscious attitude of victim. This creates a dynamic that leads you to respond to expectations that you will never reach or to a self-pity that can border on masochism that has nothing to do with true compassion. Affective manipulations can also occur. This mode of self-pity paralyzes and blocks growth. It is necessary to unmask the cultural-psychological trap that links certain roles or images with female identity, as they can lead to blockage and false humility. If a person is able to bend, and surrender to the truth of herself, to limitation and death by accepting the loss that this entails, she will not have to invent any tricks to obtain secondary gains. She has gained freedom in her life (Lk 9:24). It is the moment in which false promises anchored in ideologies or idols woven into the escape dynamics themselves fall. It is necessary to go through this process of dispossession to realize that everything is a gift, the fruit of the merciful and gratuitous love of God in Christ. In Him is Life.

-  Do I ever give myself without there being a love for people, but rather because my image is at stake?
-  How do I feel if I am not recognized?
-  What is victimhood?
-  What is masochism?
-  What does self-denial and sacrifice mean in Christ and what is the difference with the other two attitudes of victimhood and masochism?
-  Are you trying to react with victimism to the community, to the responsibilities they give me?

4. Reshaping Desires: Fourth Stage

*"Six days before the Jewish holiday of Passover,
Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived,
whom he had raised from the dead.
They offered a dinner there in honor of Jesus.
Martha served the table and Lazarus was one of the guests.
Mary showed up with a very expensive perfume bottle,
almost half a liter of pure tuberose..." Jn 12:1-3.*

What Mary lived between the passage of the resurrection of Lazarus and the anointing at Bethany, remained in the gloom. We know that, reconciled inwardly, she approached the mystery of death and pain. With the experience of the resurrection of her brother Lazarus, she knew in a new and experiential way that the love of Christ Jesus gave life to the dead, and that He was the Resurrection and the Life.

We don't know how many days passed after that fact, but the narrative says that, a short time later, Jesus was back in Bethany. In this scene Martha and Mary find themselves in a situation contrary to the previous scene. Martha is at home serving. Mary, on the other hand, is attentive to Jesus, possesses herself, is a subject of herself, and after what she has lived her heart overflows. She wishes to give herself, to give thanks for she has received, and she presents herself at dinner "with a bottle of very expensive perfume, almost half a liter of pure tuberose".

This jar can symbolize the life of Mary, a life that she now holds in her hands, because she has known herself and possesses herself. A life that she considers of great value, precious in the eyes of God and her own. Mary has become involved, she is no longer divided internally, she is qualitatively diverse in her deepest self on an affective and cognitive level. From her inner center she wants only one thing: to give her whole life to Jesus and seeks the opportunity to do so.²⁴

4.1 The affections and the body




Mary, with all freedom, shows up at dinner with the perfume bottle. If before she sought consolations, now detached from them and from everything that others could say (detached from prejudices and desires to look good), she openly manifests with bodily gestures her surrender of love for Christ. Acting with this freedom, in which self-possession is perceived on the one hand, and on the other, decentralization of oneself, speaks of a "reorientation" of desires and liberation from one's own egoisms.

The person who is at this stage,²⁵ manifests with clear gestures, that her life is all of the Lord and that she wants to give herself. She frees herself from excessive self-care, from her own health, risking herself for the Kingdom in ordinary life. They are gestures of great freedom in apostolic service, for example, going to places of mission despite the physical and health risks that this may imply, or manifesting with concrete gestures of presence their adherence to the poor and marginalized despite the social or political pressures that this may entail, or giving themselves in love and charity to the

²⁴ It is more cohesive internally and is able to re-orient all areas of your life in one direction. Cf. Teresa of Jesus Book of Dwellings. M. 4.2.1, M.5.1.2.

²⁵ Before, she was held back by the fear of bodily suffering and losing her health: «The penances that these souls do are as concerted as their lives; *love her very much* to serve our Lord with her [...] Do not be afraid that they will kill themselves because their reason is very much in itself, there is not yet love to get out of reason», cf. Teresa of Jesus. Book of Dwellings M.3.2.7. Now it is free from these fears and nothing stops its surrender.

community and to daily services. In the field of prayer and apostolic giving, she will not deal so much with herself, but with how to please the Lord. In our cultures, women have been inculcated more than men in submission to customs and good social behavior. For a woman, the fear of looking bad, of losing social approval, can be an impediment to the free manifestation of prophetic gestures that announce the Kingdom. Only love gives freedom to express in concrete actions the passion for God and for humanity.²⁶²⁷

-  Do I know or have I ever known any sisters who give themselves freely and lovingly to Christ to the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven? (Can I identify some of their characteristics... such as What are their affections? What are their body gestures?)
-  Have I experienced at any point in my life this freedom and this affection of love in surrender? I remember the moment
-  How dependent am I on the theft of others? am I able to free myself from this? if I don't receive social approval that I feel? What's wrong with me?

4.2 Relationships

At this stage, *desires*, motivations, small decisions, relationships are reshaped, and the whole being and acting are oriented towards a cause: Jesus and the Kingdom. She is moved by the relationship of love with Jesus in which *all her affections are involved*. Women have a greater capacity than men to live intensely the emotions and manifest them. If a woman from the depths of herself, opens her affections in the relationship with Christ, or with another person, she will tend to live with greater integration between her thoughts, affections, desires, and attitudes.

The difficulties appear because one must go from having oneself as a reference to putting one's center in Christ in *a habitual way*. This point is of paramount importance within the female dynamic since it is about discerning when the relationship seeks a personal and selfish interest, or when there is a "love without interest".²⁸ A dialectic between the apparent good and the real good may be at play due to the presence of unconscious motivations²⁹. For example, one *can give to receive something in return*, and so one's self-giving is only in appearance. This stage calls for a total following of Jesus, where the disciple or disciple *learns from the Master to "love gratuitously."*

²⁶ "Maybe we don't know what it is to love, and I won't be very frightened; for it is not in the greatest taste, but in the greatest determination to desire to please God in everything", M.4.1.7.




²⁷ In CAIN K.M., «Development of Individual Differences in Helplessness: Relations to Gender and Psychodynamic Theory», 41 appears as girls tend to be more controlled by parents giving them rules of behavior and social adaptation: "Parents appear more likely to give critical and controlling feedback to girls than to boys".

²⁸ When St. Teresa refers to a mature love, detached, in a way that makes the person come out of himself, putting more interest in the good of the other than in himself. Speaks of a love without interest St. Teresa. Book of Dwellings. M 4.2.9

²⁹ Following St. Ignatius, Rulla L. proposes that in the dialectic that occurs between the apparent good and the real good, conscious and unconscious dynamics appear and the person can seek an apparent good unconsciously motivated by secondary gratifications, so that his freedom and responsibility are restricted insofar as he is not aware of the motivation that leads him to act in that way, nor free to decide. Therefore, in this dimension there is the non-guilty error. The decision for the real good implies losses in which the psychodynamics of the person is interwoven, so sharing with others and / or others their process can help clarify their motivations. Cf. RULLA L.M., *Anthropology* 180.




The tendency of every woman to live in connection with others can become a weak point, if she allows herself to be carried away by the desire of "possession" or "retention for herself". Some symptoms of these pretensions can be, seduction, manipulation of affection in relationships. At this stage the person integrates her affections and is free to manage her impulses, as well as being able to express love generously and receive detachedly. Paradoxically, in order to have oneself, it is necessary to lose oneself, and "love without interest" occurs when freed from egoistic desires, she decenters herself in a *habitual way*: that is, this way of proceeding has been configured as part of her personal structure. This is the remodeling of desires, so that the person out of love can give herself totally like that bottle of perfume that is poured out at the feet of Jesus.



-  What are my strongest desires? Those who help me discover the meaning of my life.
-  Have I ever experienced the desire to "own" others in a relationship? to own my workplace? To possess a place and a role in front of others?
-  Do I live more focused on myself than on the desire and call to give myself to others? What are the signs?

4.3 Women and the socio-cultural and ecclesial context

The experience of totality is leading women to a liberation from socio-cultural and socio-ecclesial conditioning. It can be said that the prophetism³⁰ of women appears when in the lifestyle there are countercultural elements that face conflict, resistance to change, and follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. In the same way today there are cultural preconceptions that can condition the apostolic and prophetic mission of women. These preconceptions can be subjective, that is, the person has them and they trap her, or objectives, insofar as they are external rules or customs that do not allow her to realize what God wants from her. Mary of Bethany breaks with the socio-cultural schemes of women, and the gesture she makes is unusual. It transcends the traditional concepts of what a woman could or could not do, it is a prophetic gesture that is outside the socio-cultural context of the time.³¹

-  What is my concept of a consecrated woman in the Church? What do I think is their role? What are the possibilities and what are the limits?
-  What do I feel about the role of women in the Church?
-  What do I think God calls women in the Church today?



³⁰ Teresa of Jesus, in the sixteenth century, makes these desires for liberation evident precisely in the fourth dwellings. The force of love and inner fire burned her soul and propelled her to free herself from the cultural gender ties that prevented her from going out to found, write, and teach mental prayer to her nuns.

³¹ The anointing of the dead was normally performed by women, but never the anointing of the dead.ón of the living. This was a task reserved for God's priests or elect to anoint. Cf. RIGATO M.L., "Mary di Betania nella redazione Giovannea », 211-212.

5. Concretizing love: fifth stage

*«... anointed the feet of Jesus
and she dried them with her hair" Jn. 12,3.*

The biblical scene presents a gesture that has no parallel in the Bible, except that of Lk 7:36-50³². We will try to decode in this stage the meaning of Mary's relationship with Jesus. Mary symbolically represents humanity's search for its Savior, the relationship of the Beloved with the Bridegroom, who is the King, the Anointed One, the Christ. In the Humanity of Christ is the Divinity. By her loving relationship with Him she is sanctified, transformed. Christ, through His Incarnation and Resurrection, makes every human being the temple of God in Him. So love of the Holy One, God, and love of neighbor come together inseparably in the Humanity of Christ. We clearly place ourselves in an experience of intimacy with Christ, where affections are ordered and unity of life is given: love of God, love of neighbor.

5.1 Affections and the body

Mary is totally involved in the loving relationship with Jesus and manifests it "showily" in front of all the guests. This "waste of gratuitousness" is rooted in the love that has "taken her out of herself", and she can no longer do anything but manifest it in corporal and concrete gestures of totality and donation. She is not interested in what others may say, she is not interested in posture, nor what she has to do, she gives herself totally, she takes even her own hair to anoint the Lord. This implies enormous freedom from oneself. She does not love to retain, nor to possess, she touches the Lord free from her own sensuality, with a heart sanctified by the same loving action she performs. She is no longer afraid of risk, of danger, of losing her health, as in the past stages. With her bodily gestures she makes an oracle: "Sacrifice and oblation you did not want; but you have given me a body. Then I said, 'Behold, I come to do, O God your will!' (Hb10.5b.7).

³² There's elements Biblical that we can help deepen the text: **a)** The tuberose is a voice that appears only in John and in the parallel passage of Mk 14:3. However, it is found three times in the Song of Songs.³² (Ct 1,12;4,13.14), in which *the beloved manifests her love to the beloved identified as the King*. **b)** Another passage that seems to resonate in this text is that of Ct. 7,6 "with his mane, just like the purple; a king in those braids is imprisoned!". **c)** The fact that the protagonist is king, is immediately associated with *the idea of the Lord's Anointed One*. The verb "anointed" corresponds to anointings that are in relation to the Sacred. **e)** From the word "the feet" in the context of John, it can be deduced *the whole body*: Mary washes Jesus' feet with her hair (Jn 12:3), Jesus washes the disciples' feet with a towel (Jn 13:5). The literary connection between the two passages appears. All of it is sanctified and anointed through the action it performs in anointing Jesus. "Washing Jesus' feet with her own hair, Mary has re-absorbed on her head the tuberose with which she has perfumed the Lord. Mary by this action has been at once perfumed, anointed, and sanctified by her contact with "the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69). She too "had been washed" and could have "part with" Him like Peter: "If I do not wash you, you will have no part with me" (Jn13.8). **f)** The allusion to the "day of the burial" of Jesus, to his death, is linked to Jn 2:13-21 in which Jesus refers to the destruction of the Temple: "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it" referring to the "Temple of his body". Jesus affirms that his body is the visible seat of the Invisible God. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). The presence of the Divinity and Humanity of Jesus appears strongly. He is the Temple that dwells among us "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling place among us" (Jn 1:14). Mary has physical contact with the Temple-Body of Jesus (reserved only for priests in a condition of ritual purity) and is anointed, sanctified by her contact with the Holy One of God. **g)** The Pauline interpretation of the temple can be extended, in which the Temple from the Resurrection of Christ is every human being: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? For the temple of God is sacred and you are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16,17b). So in the risen Christ every human being is the temple of God. So when Mary anoints her feet to the Humanity of Christ, she washes the feet of the new temple that is every human being. This same gesture is made by Jesus with his disciples, explaining what true love means and making the invitation to manifest love for one's neighbor through the symbolic gesture of washing one another's feet (Jn 13:12-14).

There is a deep unity between your inner and outer body maintenance. We can extend the gestures of Mary of Bethany to the brothers and sisters who are the Temple of God, it is time for you to embody love for your neighbor, to heal the wounds of humanity through a loving dedication to their service. Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, thirsty, strangers, imprisoned, naked, sick "whatever you did to one of these least of my brothers and sisters you did to me" (Mt 25:40). Jesus washes the feet of his brothers.

- What does it mean to you to live in love with your brothers and sisters in your life?
- Have you ever felt called, impelled to do a small service for sisters or brothers without anyone noticing?
- We are called to live the fire of love for God and for sisters and brothers, do you have any concrete example of a sister in your community or yours of this love for others? Is there anything that prevents you from living it? what do you feel? What would you have to work on a personal level?

5.2 Relationships

A deep relationship of friendship has begun with the Humanity of Christ, and at the same time, the identification of Jesus with brothers and sisters profoundly challenges the type of relationships of the person. We cannot say that we love God if we do not love our neighbor (1 Jn 3:17) How far can love of neighbor lead? to love enemies (Mt 5:44), to forgive seventy times seven times (Mt 18:21), to lay down our lives for sisters and brothers (1 Jn 3:16).

In this sense the love with which we love is the same love with which Jesus loved us. This new way of loving has its costs: surrender, expiration, self-denial, humble and selfless service. Resistance is not lacking because human selfishness always appears, however, a relationship of intimate and deep friendship with Christ transforms and strengthens the person to face the costs of daily surrender. Love makes her go out of herself and transcend. Whoever matures and lives in this stage, lives the same life of Jesus that fills the person with joy when she shares his sufferings (like the apostles). It is naïve to think that one can maintain a tone of surrender that is rooted in the love of God, without a daily relationship in prayer and listening to the Word. The shared Eucharist is nourishment in the faith that bears fruit of love for sisters and brothers. The relationship with Christ and with others is from the totality of the person, and in it is involved one's cognitive, volitional, affective, sexual part. We love as sexed beings. The fruit of love for Christ and concrete love for others is chastity that makes us love with pure love, without interest. Women, like Mary of Bethany, have human capacities³³ that, developed from generous love, enhance their apostolic fruitfulness in welcome and hospitality.

Our sense of solidarity with brothers and sisters leads us to do something concrete for others. If we see a need, we do not stop to make great plans, but sense what the other needs and respond. In this sense, our capacity to welcome people, together with intuition, are great feminine resources to live charity and do good. The person who has reached this stage reproduces with her attitudes and behaviors, the same gestures of Jesus who spent doing good to all (Acts 10:39). The weak point to work in this stage, is the excessive attachment to some people.³⁴

³³ Each religious family has a spirituality, and the concrete service it performs manifests various aspects of the face of Christ. This is done through different types of relationship with the recipients of his apostolic mission.

³⁴ "More if this soul neglects to put its hobby in something that not, lose everything, and it is as great a loss, as are the mercies that it is doing, and much greater than you can to make it more expensive", Teresa of Jesus. Book of Dwellings. M. 5.4.4.

- 📖 In prayer, in the relationship of friendship and love with Jesus, does love grow every day?
- 📖 Do I listen to the feelings that appear in my relationships with the sisters of my community, with each one, I analyze them and I ask myself what I feel towards each of them?
- 📖 What can I do to grow "love for one another" in the community?
- 📖 Can there be love without renunciation?
- 📖 To what do I feel invited by the Lord?

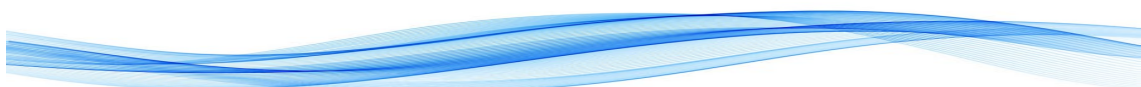
5.3 Women in their socio-cultural and ecclesial context

Just as Martha confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God in words (Jn 11:27), *Mary made this oracle with gestures*. This was certainly a prophetic proclamation, not only because of what she was doing, anointing Jesus, but because of the way she did it, as the prophets (Hos 1:2-8, Ez 12:1-20) *did their preaching with gestures* that put their own lives at stake. Mary in the anointing performs an act that transcends cultural customs (as we have already said, women anointed the dead, but never the living, and even less the Chosen One).

Throughout the history of Salvation, many saints on various occasions have performed actions and gestures with which they created new meanings. Their actions and words docile to the inspirations of the Spirit departed from ecclesial roles and perhaps also from the forms imposed by culture.

Let us say that his way of acting was a living oracle, capable of creating a dialogue between heaven and earth. They manifested with their actions, signs of the new order of grace established by Christ after his resurrection. With their gestures, they made explicit the love of God, and proclaimed that we are all his daughters and sons and brothers among us "All of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28-29). Their lives are living icons of Jesus' gestures and words for every age.

- 📖 Do my gestures, actions, and behaviors manifest who I am and what I want to live?
- 📖 Are they gestures that, (without saying words), are clear to the people I deal with? (important to hear if they are clear to people or what I think)



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.

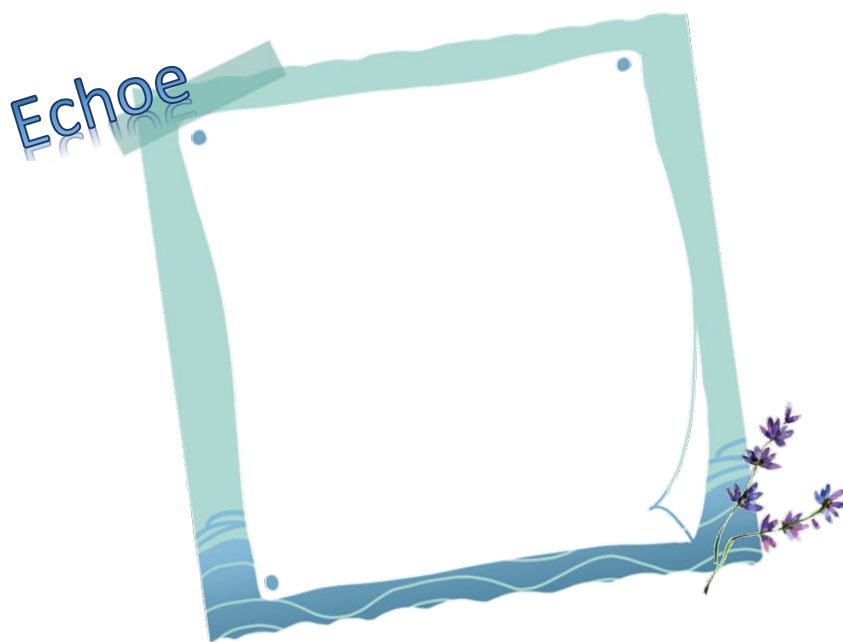
³⁸ The historical and cultural situation that Teresa of Jesus lived, in which the woman could not study because it was forbidden to her, made Teresa put the truth in the lawyers, all men, since they were the only ones who received preparation. In a stage of deep personal purification, he realizes that 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?



7. Woman, Living Face of Christ: Seventh Stage

"The house was filled with the smell of perfume" (Jn 12:3c.)

The verse of the biblical text graphically expresses what happens to a person who has allowed *herself to be Christianized*. The author of the letter to the Corinthians says so (2 Cor 2:15), and Origen refers explicitly to this image to say that we are the aroma of Christ:

"If the groom has touched me, I also become a good smell, I am anointed with perfumes. And their perfumes are communicated to me so that I can say with the apostles: 'We are the aroma of Christ spread throughout the world.'"³⁹

To be the aroma of Christ means that there is a deep identification between the smell of perfume and Christ, so that Mary of Bethany is the image of the bride, of the New Jerusalem, and at the same time as a living presence of Christ; she radiates her smell with the gestures she makes. She has been anointed with the holiness of the Saint. It transmits the life of Christ by giving himself in love of service, and thus creates communion among all who are in the house. The smell of perfume brings them together in unity, giving rise to a common experience. "The aroma of the divinity of Jesus, floods the house of the world" Who can retain an aroma when it has come out of its jar? it is in the air, it is contagious, it expands, it is like fire. The life of the person who is at this stage is a source of life for the community in which she lives⁴⁰ (although she may not feel it sensitively), for the Church and for the whole world. Their relationships can heal, cast out demons, and breathe new life as Jesus did. It creates community around the experience of the Risen One, which becomes expansive. It is the time of great apostolic fruitfulness.

The profound experience of communion with Christ sanctifies her and leads her to communion with the Trinity, with the community. *The house is filled with the perfume in which all guests enter into communion.*

7.1 Affections and the body

Mary's way of acting, her gestures, words and actions manifest the life of Christ. She has reached the integration of the whole person in the donation. At this stage she loves herself with the whole being of a woman, in a sexed way, without fears or naivety. Relationships with men and women are from God and for the Kingdom. This is not limited to the coherence of bodily gestures. Relationships are the fruit of what you live inwardly, as well as the relationship with the materiality of your life. The person who has reached this stage is indifferent to having a long or short life, and takes care of his health to serve the Lord. It is experienced in universal communion with God, with others and with the world. This is transmitted in concrete physical gestures of reconciliation, of welcome, of forgiveness, of peace. In her the fruits of the Holy Spirit are present and she creates with her attitudes and way of being with others bonds of communion and love.

- What would I have to work so that my attitudes and gestures such as welcome, peace, inclusion, reconciliation were a manifestation of my following and total surrender to Christ?
- Is there a sister, brother in need of my peace and reconciliation?

³⁹ ORIGINS, PG 13.93. cited by SCHÖKEL L.A., *Marriage symbols*, 62.

⁴⁰ ORIGINS GCS VII, PG 3. Op. Cit. 56.

7.2 Relationships

The person who reaches this stage has been configured as a new creature, however, she must always be vigilant so as not to be separated from God. Their way of *relating habitually* infects the life of God; it helps to heal, grow, expel demons, reconcile. Her relational life, detached from herself, is fruitful in creating community and communion around Jesus and his apostolic mission.

There is an integration between the human and the divine, between activity and passion, between dependence and autonomy resulting in interdependence. At this stage one lives as a mother, sister, friend, companion on the way and at the same time, performs any type of activity to make present the love of Christ. It does not stop in front of roles assigned to men or women because its main interest is to proclaim Christ. Her life and actions are discreet, silent, humble, she does not put herself at the center. She reflects well the image of what the perfume does, the good smell is perceived, but it is not seen.

- With what gestures do I try to create communion in the community?
- Can I say that where I go I try to do good? What do the sisters tell me about this? What do they perceive from me?
- Can other people find in me a person who leaves a mark on them a smell of Jesus?

7.3 Women in the cultural and ecclesial context

In this stage of freedom nothing prevents her from carrying out her mission. As a historical subject, she is capable of a new socio-cultural construction of what it means to be a woman according to the order of grace willed by Christ. Her transformed life and her transmitted experience question the concepts that can be had about women inside and outside the ecclesial context, because her new life as an Icon of Christ is a proposal that goes beyond any culture.

- Do I listen to the Lord's calls to me to follow him and announce his presence in my context, within the community and in my ecclesial environment?
- Is there any that prevents me from doing what God asks of me today?
- What do you ask of us today as a Congregation?
- At this stage emotions that were characteristic of the beginning may also appear, but they are lived in another way, for example Fear, anguish?, persecution ...? In all this we win by the love of Christ Jesus!!

CONCLUSION

At the end of the personal and community process you will have realized that in the different stages you live an inner posture that leads you and leads us to feel, and to position ourselves with others in certain attitudes and affections, but the maturation of this inner posture leads to mature the way of feeling until all our feelings and affections are transformed to live a generous and passionate love like that of Jesus. It is important that you be faithful to the invitations you have felt from the Lord.

