

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: « Here is the servant of the Lord ... Mary »

In the month of May, we are proposing a reflection on a homily by Pope Francis Given during a Marian mass held on the occasion of the Year of Faith, in Saint-Peter's Square, October 13th 2013.

Recall: *Our monthly meeting should favor a meeting with Christ. A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and good preparation promotes a communal experience. At the meeting, having a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the Rule and the General Constitutions, will provide clarity and depth for our edification and experience.*

Good preparation – Good reflection

MAY 2018 MONTHLY MEETING

Introduction

In the Psalm, we recited: "Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wonders" (*Ps 97: 1*). Today we are before one of the wonders of the Lord: Mary! A humble and weak creature like us, chosen to be Mother of God, Mother of her Creator.

By looking at Mary precisely, in the light of the readings we have listened to, I would like to reflect with you on three realities: The first, *God surprises us*; the second, *God asks us for fidelity*; the third, *God is our strength*.

The first: *God surprises us*.

The episode of Naaman, head of the army of the king of Aram, is singular: to cure leprosy, he addresses the prophet of God, Elisha, who does not perform magic rites, nor asks him extraordinary things, but to have only confidence in God and to plunge into the water of the river; not, however, in the water of the great rivers of Damascus, but of the little river Jordan. It's a request that leaves Naaman puzzled, and even surprised: what God can be the one who asks for something so simple? He wants to go back, but then he takes the step, he plunges into the Jordan and he heals immediately (see *2 R 5, 1-14*). Behold, God surprises us; he is really in poverty, in weakness, in manifest humility and gives us his love which saves us, heals us and gives us strength. He only asks us to follow His word and trust Him.

This is the experience of the Virgin Mary: before the announcement of the Angel, she does not hide her astonishment. It is stupid to see that, to become a man, God really chose her, she, a simple girl from Nazareth, who does not live in the palaces of power and wealth, who has not

accomplished exploits, but which is open to God, knows how to trust Him, even if it does not understand everything: "Behold the servant of the Lord; let everything happen to me according to your word" (*Luke* 1:38). That's his answer.

God always surprises us, he breaks our schemes, upsets our plans, and tells us: trust me, do not be afraid, let yourself be surprised, come out of yourself and follow me!

Today, let us all ask ourselves if we are afraid of what God might ask of me or what he asks of me. Do I let myself be surprised by God, as Marie did, or do I lock myself into my security, material security, intellectual security, ideological security, security of my projects? Do I really let God enter my life? How do I answer him?

Reflection:

Take the time to answer the questions in the preceding paragraph. (About 15 minutes)

When the members have finished sharing thoughts, continue reading.

The second, *God asks us for fidelity*

In the passage of Saint Paul that we listened to, the Apostle addresses his disciple Timothy telling him to remember Jesus Christ, if we persevere with him, with him also we will reign (*2 Tm* 2, 8-13). Here is the second point: always remembering Christ, the memory of Jesus Christ, and this is persevering in faith: *God* surprises us with his love, but *he asks for fidelity in following him*. We can become "non-faithful", but he cannot, he is "the faithful" and he asks us the same fidelity. Think of all those times when we were enthusiastic about something, about an initiative, about a commitment, but then, faced with the first problems, we threw in the towel. And unfortunately, this also happens in fundamental choices, like marriage. The difficulty of being constant, of being faithful to the decisions made, to the commitments made. It is often easy to say "yes", but then, we cannot repeat this "yes" every day. We cannot be faithful.

Mary said her "yes" to God, a "yes" that upset her humble existence of Nazareth, but that "yes" was not the only one, on the contrary it was only the first of many "yes" Pronounced in his heart in his happy moments, as also in the moments of pain, many "yes" which reach their summit in the one said at the foot of the Cross. Today, there are many mothers here; think how far Mary's fidelity to God has come: to see her only Son on the Cross. The faithful woman, standing, destroyed inside, but faithful and strong.

And I wonder: am I a Christian "in fits and starts", or am I still a Christian? The culture of the provisional, of the relative also enters into the life of the faith. God asks us to be faithful to him every day, in daily actions and he adds that, even if sometimes we are not faithful to him, He is always faithful and with his mercy he never tires of reaching out to us to raise, to encourage us to take the walk, to return to Him and tell him our weakness so that he gives us his strength. And this is the definitive path: always with the Lord, even in our weaknesses, even in our sins. Never go on the road of the provisional. It kills us. Faith is definitive fidelity, like that of Mary.

Reflection and Sharing:

Listen to the reading and afterwards share your reflections on its content. Which word or expression speaks particularly to you. (About 15 minutes).

When the members have finished sharing, continue with the reading.

The last point: *God is our strength*

The last point: *God is our strength* . I think of the ten lepers of the Gospel healed by Jesus: they go to meet him, they stop at a distance and they shout: "Jesus, master, have mercy on us! » (Luke 17, 13). They are sick, they need to be loved, to have strength and they are looking for someone to heal them. And Jesus responds by freeing them all from their sickness. It is impressive, however, to see one person come back to praise God, loudly, and thank him. Jesus himself notices it: ten cried out for healing and only one came back to shout aloud his thanks to God and acknowledge that He is our strength. To know how to thank, how to praise for what the Lord does for us.

Let's look at Mary: after the Annunciation, the first thing she does is a gesture of charity towards her old relative Elizabeth; and the first words which she utters are: "My soul exalts the Lord," that is to say, a song of praise and thanksgiving to God, not only for what he did in it, but also for his action in the whole history of salvation. Everything is given by him. If we can understand that everything is a gift from God, what happiness in our heart! Everything is given by him. He is our strength! Saying thank you is so easy, yet so difficult! How many times do we say thank you as a family? It is one of the keywords of life in common. "You allow", "excuse me", "thank you": if in a family we say these three words, the family progresses. "You allow," "excuse me," "thank you." How many times do we say "thank you" as a family? How many times do we say thank you to the one who helps us, is close to us, accompanies us in life? Often we take everything for granted! And that also happens with God. It's easy to go to the Lord and ask for something, but go thank him, "Well, I do not think about it."

Reflection and Sharing:

What draws your attention in this text?

Share you reflections.

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule - Article 9

The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.

General Constitutions

Article 16

1. Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the model of listening to the Word and of faithfulness to vocation; we, like Francis, see all the gospel virtues realized in her. The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the most holy virgin, imitation, prayer, and filial abandonment. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church.
2. Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community. Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, they should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love.

Life-Objective:

During this month of May, pray the Virgin Mary with a devotion similar to the one of our patron saint Francis of Assisi ...

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

If possible, celebrate in fraternity the 40 years of our Rule of life.

End of the meeting: Together pray

Blessed Virgin of Fatima, with renewed gratitude for your maternal presence we unite our voice to that of all generations who call you blessed.

We celebrate in you the great works of God, who never tires of leaning mercifully on humanity, afflicted by evil and wounded by sin, to heal and save it.

Welcome with your benevolence from Mother the act of consecration that we accomplish today with confidence, in front of your image which is so dear to us.

We are assured that each of us is precious to you and that nothing is foreign to you from all that dwells in our hearts. We let ourselves be embraced by your very sweet gaze and receive the comforting caress of your smile.

Protect our life in your arms: bless and strengthen every desire for good; revives and nourishes faith; support and illuminate hope; arouses and animates charity; guide us all on the path of holiness.

Teach us your love of predilection for the poor and the poor, for the excluded and the suffering, for the sinners and the misguided of the heart: gather all the men under your protection and entrust all to your beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus. Amen.