

# HOSPITALITY TELLS US ABOUT CARE AND PROTECTION



CHARITY MADE HOSPITALITY, by Darío Mollá



# A welcome without limits

There is no excuse for not welcoming, not even the rejection that their state, their behavior or their ethical quality may provoke...



# THE FOUNDATION OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is the way of understanding and living Charity proper to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne. It is so essential to their spirituality and life, so defining of their own charism, that it is a specific vow added to the three common vows of Religious Life: "Each sister, in response to God's call, publicly expresses her full donation of herself through the vows of Obedience, Poverty, Chastity and Hospitality in the service of the Kingdom <sup>1</sup>. "

Hospitality is the charismatic key through which the missionary, community and personal spirituality of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne unfolds, and which gives a concrete face to their way of loving in different places and times.

Hospitality is a value that has been present throughout the biblical tradition since its beginnings, and with a particular value in the Jewish tradition <sup>2</sup>. The Constitutions of 2011 point out that "Hospitality, the core of our charism, is a reflection of the Hospitality of God who loved us first and showed us his love by sending his only Son into the world <sup>3</sup>." This value of hospitality takes on a decisive dimension for the follower of Jesus, since the Lord himself wanted to identify with the poor or the sick or the imprisoned in need of welcome (Matthew 25:31-16) <sup>4</sup>.

In the light of Jesus' words in the Gospel, Christians are aware that in welcoming their suffering brothers and sisters they welcome the Lord himself who is present in them <sup>5</sup>. The Sisters are called to this evangelical form of contemplation in the midst of their task, which reveals the presence of the Lord in all people and especially in the poor.

This is how the first Sisters of the Congregation expressed it in a simple but very clear and forceful way in the founding Constitutions:

"...they must not consider that they serve helpless or abandoned people of the world, perhaps rude, vulgar or sinful, as the sick in a hospital appear to the physical eyes, but rather creatures made in the image and likeness of the Most Holy Trinity, neighbors created to see and enjoy God, brothers of theirs in Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ himself who likes to be recognized and revered in his poor and receives all the services done for them, as done to his own person, which the eternal and ineffable truth of God presents to the eyes of our faith <sup>6</sup>. "

We are talking, then, about a universal charity, which knows no limits, but with preference for the poorest and most needy <sup>7</sup>. There are no geographical, social or personal boundaries for this welcome. There are three details that are important to highlight and explain in the text we have just quoted.

The **first** is the **progression of reasoning**. Both in the negative and in the positive. When it comes to presenting the limitations of the person who needs to be welcomed, there is a gradation: from helplessness to ignorance, and from ignorance to sin. There is no limit or reason to avoid or diminish such acceptance: neither social, nor cultural, nor moral. Every person must be welcomed whatever their limitations. There is no excuse for not welcoming, not even the rejection that their state, their behavior or their ethical quality may provoke.

The gradation of the motives for welcoming is also suggestive. We begin by speaking of welcoming God's creatures, made in his image and likeness, our brothers and sisters, and end by affirming that it is not only the creatures that are welcomed,



but the Lord himself who draws close to us in them. This consideration places the quality of that welcome at the highest possible level and limit.

There is a **second detail** that stands out in this founding text. Because, furthermore, it is a detail that will be repeated and expanded with enormous consequences in other texts and other aspects of the spirituality of the Congregation. It is the **possessive adjective "his"** when speaking of the poor of Jesus Christ. The text perceives that there is a special relationship between Jesus Christ and the poor: he feels them and presents them as his brothers in a particular way. This will generate, and must generate, a particular relationship between the followers of Jesus, the friends of Jesus, and the poor, who are always for them the poor "of" Jesus.

**Finally**, it is interesting to underline the **contrast** in the text **between "the eyes of the body" and the "eyes of faith"**. Hospitality such as that requested, without limit or exclusion, will only be possible if we approach life and daily action with eyes other than the "eyes of the body" that are those of the first and superficial glance. We will have to learn to look with "the eyes of our faith".

This **change of outlook** is the spiritual process of being "contemplative in action," an absolutely essential process, whose basic content is the transformation of our outlook into the compassionate gaze of the Lord. This transformation occurs in the exercise of evangelical contemplation. Contemplating the Lord in the intimacy of prayer enables us to find him later in the action of life, when we discover his presence in events and people <sup>8</sup>. This gaze from faith is what underlies treating all people "with all detail, with all care, with the greatest love."

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# THE EXERCISE OF HOSPITALITY

The Constitutions of 1824 also describe, in minute detail, how to exercise hospitality. Every detail, even the smallest, is important and is taken care of when we value the person we want to welcome: therefore, welcoming the suffering and the poor requires not forgetting any detail because it is the Lord himself whom we are welcoming:

"...they will always have a spare bed ready and well prepared in each infirmary. As soon as a sick person arrives, they will receive her with affection and demonstrations of attention and compassion; they will seat her in a chair that they will also have prepared so that she can catch her breath, they will undress her with the greatest care that her delicacy requires, and in the meantime a Sister or maid will warm her bed in winter, and at any other time if the sick person's condition requires it, and they will lay her in it with great care, and they will inquire whether it has been a long time since she has had food; and if it is a long time before the distribution of what the Holy House gives, they will provide her with a cup of broth or some other reinforcement that cannot harm her...<sup>9</sup>"

In this text we find two particularly significant expressions: "to prepare" and "to take care of". The first indicates a readiness to welcome, a welcome that is not improvised, either materially or psychologically, that does not have to be put into practice every time, but is a habitual disposition. Hospitality is, for the Sister of Charity of Saint Anne, a habitual disposition that must be worked on. A disposition that is first and foremost internal, but that is also reflected externally. A disposition and readiness to welcome.

The second of the significant expressions, "be careful", It expresses the quality of welcome, the delicacy of love, the detail in the relationship with the weak, sick or poor person. Things cannot be done in any way, or in a hurry, when the body that is being cared for is the body of Christ. Caring for the poor is the reverence that is due to the Lord<sup>10</sup>.

It is also illuminating to see the quality of the welcome that is being talked about at the beginning of the quoted paragraph: "they will receive her with affection and demonstrations of attention and compassion." Because, without a doubt, the first step in caring is for the person to feel welcomed as a person, and from there, all the other details flow and are explained.

**Is it excessive to go into such detail and such minute matters when describing the form of welcome?** It is certainly excessive for those who consider it from a purely technical or professional point of view. However, such a thorough and detailed description is admirable for those who discover in it the welcome that is born of love.

The hospitality of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne is born from love for Jesus Christ, who is the one who is welcomed, and from love for the poor of Jesus Christ. Love is availability, desire to serve, promptness in welcoming, and love is also care, delicacy, detail. Love goes beyond all protocol and is not limited to a logic of obligation that is limited to fulfilling what is prescribed or prescribed. Hospitality is the form of charity and welcome of those who, by welcoming the poor, live in response to the Lord who has also cared for them with detail and care, even greater, throughout their lives<sup>11</sup>.

This welcome, full of human and evangelical quality, which is hospitality, is made possible by a "contemplative" way of approaching the people we meet in life. The contemplative gaze is an attentive gaze, which avoids superficiality and haste; it is a listening, an attentive listening that not only perceives words, but also heartbeats; it involves using all five senses to enable an experience of encounter, as deep as possible, with the other person.

There is a beautiful expression in the Constitutions of 1824 that defines this way of being: "being aware of what is offered to the sick" (chap. VIII, p. 40): anticipating with our gaze the needs of others. This is very important and necessary with the poor, who so often find it difficult to express their needs, either because they lack the words, or because they are ashamed, or because they do not want to be a nuisance. And so this "being aware of what is offered to the sick" is the necessary condition of authentic service, which is nothing other than the most generous, adequate and creative response to the needs of others.

Hospitality and quality of welcome are also visible in the personalized attention, because each person is different, because each person is valued for who they are and because the specific needs of each moment and situation are understood.

When we are aware of people's needs, we also discover deeper, more intimate needs than those that can be satisfied by external care. These needs can be accentuated or made manifest in a special way in situations of poverty, exclusion or illness;

"...to help the sick to keep the memory of God alive, and to encourage them to have holy patience and resignation in their illnesses and to draw spiritual benefit from them..."<sup>12</sup>

Our hospitality project is not only about caring for people on the outside, but also about accompanying them in their inner processes and strengthening them in the face of difficulty and adversity. The hospitality described in the Constitutions of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne aims to ensure that the welcome offered makes people stronger on the inside and brings them closer to God. This hospitality aims to ensure that in its closeness, in its care, in its delicacy, in its details, the poor and those who suffer, those who feel excluded and abandoned, experience the mercy of God and can encounter the Father who also loves them in the midst of their shortcomings and their pain.

## THE "ATTITUDE" THAT IS GENERATED IN THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE HOSPITALITY

In Chapter VIII of the Constitutions of 1824, a true jewel of spiritual literature on hospitality, there are three words that express the disposition that the practice of hospitality generates in the person who devotes himself to it. It says that such persons become (because this is a dynamic process) "long-suffering, compassionate, affable." The exercise of hospitality, in the way we have described in the previous section, transforms and shapes the person. It makes him affable, compassionate, and long-suffering.

- **"Affable"**: welcoming someone who is suffering makes us capable of conversation and dealing with others full of kindness and understanding, which makes it easier for the other person to trust us and open their concerns and hearts to us completely. It is much more than a mere superficial or first-time friendliness. This way of dealing, as a disposition, facilitates closeness and proximity.
- **"Compassionate"**: in the process that closeness initiates, we come to make the suffering of the other person our own. The "com" of compassion is a "with" of profound humanity and solidarity with the one who suffers. Obviously, we cannot make the pain of the other person our own in its entirety, but we can make many of

their feelings, worries, tiredness our own... Suffering alone is suffering much more; suffering "with", feeling accompanied in one's own suffering, is a relief and a support that makes the pain much more bearable.

- **" Suffering ":** Being compassionate brings about the burden of worry, feelings of anguish and helplessness, and discomfort, and we accept this not with mere resignation but from faith and the option of surrender to God. We accept this from a profound faith in the redemptive value of the surrender of life and the suffering associated with the suffering of Christ in his surrender for his brothers.

In the text of the Constitutions of 1824, all these statements and recommendations are placed mainly in the context of caring for sick people who are cared for in hospitals. However, all of this is easily applicable to contexts of education or social action, where we also encounter so many sick and suffering people. In fact, care for neglected and at-risk children began very early in the history of the Congregation. Hospitality does not define a place but rather a way of being and acting towards those who suffer and towards the poor in any poverty. A way of being characterized by the priority of welcoming the person in need and by the quality of that welcome.

**VIEW:** <https://youtu.be/ak81tAHkXa0>





# NEW HORIZONS OF HOSPITALITY

In the Constitutions of 2011, particularly in number 19, some of the commitments that Hospitality requires in our time are detailed and updated. We highlight two, especially relevant, which show how deep concepts are always open to new interpretations and nuances according to the times:

"...to promote the culture of Hospitality and denounce situations of injustice that oppose it"

"...to promote an ecological awareness that respects our planet as everyone's home, defending life in all its manifestations."

A "culture of hospitality" is especially necessary and urgent today, when millions of people are forced to leave their country and their families in order to survive, driven out by the violence of arms or by the violence of poverty, and when the number of refugees, who have to survive in absolutely inhuman conditions, continues to grow.

At the same time, however, there is a growing feeling of rejection towards those who come from outside, towards those who are different, and who are seen as threatening enemies or competitors for increasingly deteriorating social services. Prejudices and stereotypes that, out of fear or in defence of economic interests, fuel xenophobic feelings.

In this situation, affirming a culture of hospitality is an evangelical duty and one of pure humanity. This culture of hospitality has several components: the initial welcome and assistance in the integration of displaced persons; the prophetic denunciation of the economic and political mechanisms that cause so many human tragedies; the pedagogical and educational task so that our societies

become not only receiving societies, but also welcoming and hospitable societies.

The second challenge that hospitality poses in today's world is to generate an ecological awareness that cares for this planet as a "common home" that is welcoming to our generation and future generations<sup>13</sup>. This means

avoiding the systematic destruction of habitats that have welcomed hundreds of generations, and building the future in such a way that caring for nature and people takes precedence over commercial and profit-making interests.

With these proposals formulated in the Constitutions of 2011, Hospitality opens up to new dimensions that go beyond the necessary and unavoidable "one-on-one", which enrich it and give it a universal and transformative dimension. It places it before institutional challenges of the first magnitude, to which the Gospel also calls.

Because spirituality is also, beyond inner care and more personal attitudes, doing our part so that the Spirit of the Lord is the one who animates human relationships and the complex framework of our society that in its concrete organization, more or less just, more or less respectful of the rights and needs of people, alleviates or increases the suffering of concrete human beings. Spirituality is also committing ourselves so that this painful and broken world is transformed into the Kingdom in which there will be neither crying nor pain (Revelation 21, 4) and broken world is transformed into the Kingdom in which there will be neither crying nor pain (Revelation 21, 4).

**VIEW:** <https://youtube.com/shorts/yt9cH7evX74>



## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

What new horizons of hospitality, in addition to those expressed, do we envision today?

How do I live hospitality in my community, in the place where I work?

## **SHARING IN COMMUNITY**

In small groups and on a sheet of paper, we write down what we each understand by Hospitality.

In the same groups, we share what we have understood from the text we have read.

On another sheet of paper, we write down the new horizons of hospitality we have discovered (we can hang them in a visible place in the community).

What community commitment did we reach? We also write it down on a sheet of paper.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Constitutions of 2011, No. 14.
2. We could cite a large number of biblical texts. See the case of Abraham in Genesis 18, 1-15 or Deuteronomy 10, 17-19.
3. Constitutions of 2011, No. 5.
4. It is appropriate to mention at this point the study of Sister Encarnación Garnica "Hospitality", in which a journey through the connection between hospitality and religious life throughout history. It is published in Publications Claretians, 1990.
5. Mk 12, 28 ff .; Lk 10, 25 ff.
6. Constitutions of 1824, cap. VIII, pp. 34-35.
7. Constitutions of 2011, No. 6.
8. Constitutions of 2011, n 79 and 86.
9. Constitutions of 1824, cap. VIII, pp. 35-36. 18 Constitutions of 2011, no. 19.
10. Const 2011, No. 19.
11. It is the mood of love described in 1 Corinthians 13.
12. Constitutions of 1824, cap. VIII, p. 42.
13. See Pope Francis' encyclical " Laudato si'."



Sisters of  
Charity of  
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