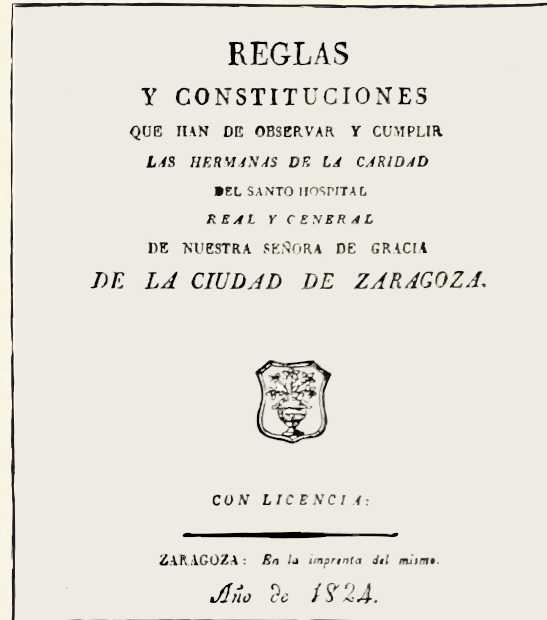


200th Anniversary of the approval of the
CONSTITUTIONS OF 1824



**POOR, CLOSE TO THE POOR, LIKE JESUS,
AND IN FREEDOM**
EVANGELICAL COUNSELS
-VOW OF POVERTY, GIFT AND COMMITMENT-





INTRODUCTION

Celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Profession of the First Vows of our Sisters, means for us, in addition to the grateful celebration, the gift of an ideal time, to delve into what the Vows of our Religious Profession mean today and in a perspective of the immediate future.

In this shared reflection, we will focus on the Vow of Poverty, on how our First Sisters lived it and how it has remained the axis of our spirituality and our mission. We will approach the human and social reality of our time, to rediscover how to live and express this vow today, to be a sign of the vital commitment of Consecrated Life in the Church.



1. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE VOW OF POVERTY IN OUR ORIGINS AND IN OUR CONGREGATIONAL JOURNEY.

From the beginning of our Congregational journey, our Founders and First Sisters lived a fundamental experience, which would be decisive in their Spirituality and in their way of life. They wanted to give themselves to God, to follow Jesus, identifying themselves with Jesus the poor, incarnated especially in the poor (Cf. Phil 2,3-8).

“The Sisters of Charity, when they enter this Brotherhood, leave the world...to serve God in his poor” (Const 24, Cap 24, Pg. 80).

They live as in a single global reality, the desire to follow Jesus, to identify themselves with Him, poor and humble, to live the features of his abasement and to serve especially like Him, the poor, “his poor.” And all this expressed in a simple, austere, humble life. The core, then, on which their following of Jesus is centered, is the identification with the poor Christ, which generates a way of life, a style of living simply, especially for the service to the poor.

“They serve Jesus Christ himself who likes to be recognized and revered in his poor and receives all the services they do for them, as if they were done to his very person” (Const. 24, Chapter VIII, page 34-35).

From this basic foundation and, throughout the Congregational History, the different updates of the Constitutions, integrate nuances that the spirituality of each era contributes, always maintaining the same global experience: Following Jesus Christ, who is the one... Jesus poor, serving Him in the poor, and through Him, in a simple and poor life (Cf. Const 1980. Numbers 24, 25, 27).

The entire section “Poverty” of the Constitutions of 2012 (Numbers 28 to 32) reflects these same realities, incorporating concrete dimensions of how we understand and want to live the Vow of Poverty,

And in the Chapter Agreements of the XXIX General Chapter, we express that God dreams of us as *“Communities in which the poor, His favorites, are the first in our hearts and in our service, and they help us to live simply and austere and to simplify life” (First Chapter Agreement).*

2. CHANGE OF PARADIGMS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WAY OF EXPRESSING THE VOW OF POVERTY.

In the course of our time, significant changes have occurred and continue to occur at different levels, which shape different life models, which affect the way we understand and live reality. We point out some of these changes, which although known, influence the way we understand poverty and exclusion today: Economic globalization, socio-economic and political changes, climate change, the awareness that the earth belongs to everyone and everyone is responsible for caring for it and sharing it.



The experiences of suffering pandemics, droughts, and other natural disasters; the loss of strength and the limitations of old age that have also favored the recognition of our vulnerability and accepting it as a human condition of weakness and poverty.

The increase in refugees, migrants, exiles, experienced as a form of exclusion, but which also opens us to the richness of accepting diversity, respect for other cultures, the right of everyone to live with dignity.

The consumerist model of development, the culture of success, the power of money and appearance. Economic inequality, which continues to grow between people with fewer economic resources and those who possess large amounts of capital.¹ All this reality has been expanding the types of poverty and exclusion, which affect an increasing number of people. And the analysis, reflection, assessment and commitment, in the face of all these factors, has been creating new paradigms, new sensitivity, new ways of relating to people and things, a new sense of caring for nature and natural resources, a new way of understanding the reality that surrounds us, which helps us to contemplate discover and project new ways of responding to current needs, from our founding and charismatic values.

3. HOW TO LIVE AND EXPRESS THE MEANING OF THE VOW OF POVERTY IN OUR CURRENT CONSECRATED LIFE.

From this global perspective, contemplated and prayed from within, we need to open ourselves to reflection and ask ourselves how to live and express the meaning of the vow of poverty in our today.

We are aware that Consecrated Life is living, in these times, a situation of crossroads, of challenges, of the need to rediscover itself in a different context, which not only presents significant changes, but supposes a new model of society.

WE NEED TO TURN OUR GAZE TO JESUS.

“Have the same feelings among yourselves as Christ. He, though he was in the form of God, did not regard his own dignity as a thing of greed, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and becoming like many others. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8).

The text of Philippians shows us the humility and poverty that shaped his life. He emptied himself, emptied himself, did not use his prestige or his power, and became “one of many” of those who suffer, of those who go hungry. He bet on the humble and simple and recognized the last as the first.

The vow of poverty commits us to give ourselves without limits, without conditions, in freedom, as Jesus did. It is the option to live in his style, free, without ties, available

¹ To delve deeper into this aspect: Social exclusion as a consequence of inequality processes” FOESSA Report, PAGES. 211-217.



to welcome and serve. It makes us aware that we do not belong to ourselves, that our life is in the hands of the Father and it is a life given in the service of others.

The Vow of Poverty springs from the experience of feeling ourselves a gift from God, from his free love which, being vulnerable, radically in need of Him, welcomes us and invites us to share his life and to share ours with the poor.

WE NEED TO RETURN TO OUR ORIGINS.

To rediscover the values that gave us charismatic identity and a sense of mission, to rediscover them and express them in a meaningful way for today's world. We need to savor the simple words that continually refer us to the most genuine part of our choice:

“The Sisters are charged to take care of themselves, and to care with the greatest tenacity and diligence for the sick, for God cares for them” (Const 1805, page 88).

“...they will have great subjection to the poor and sick, respecting them and recognizing them as their masters” (Const. 1805, p. 81).

We need to delve again and again into the text of Matthew, key for us, and charismatic principle of spirituality and mission:

“Then the King will say to those on his right: Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. “For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Mt 25, 34-40).

We need to let the “You did it to me” resonate as a call and commitment to continue updating care and service to those most in need, and to see Jesus present in them, receiving the small services performed, reactivating the contemplative experience of seeing him in people, in events, in the most vulnerable, in life.

WE NEED TO WELCOME THE CALL OF THE CHURCH.

In light of all that we have contemplated, around the process of situations of exclusion and poverty, the Church calls us to live in “going out” towards the existential peripheries. The words of Pope Francis have expressed, from the beginning of his pontificate, how he “would like a Church that is poor and for the poor.”² Words that mark and guide his preference for the poor: refugees, the sick, migrants... like Jesus, who had a special sensitivity towards the last. And this preference is expressed by Pope Francis with his personal attitudes, his pastoral gestures and with his doctrine,

² “Option for the poor, renewing proposals”. José Juan García. Introduction 1. University of Cuyo.



which, from the First Apostolic Exhortation: “Evangelii Gaudium” (Nos. 53 and 60) to the different nuances of the content of his “Days of the Poor,” always keeps alive the call to the commitment to live poverty and serve the poor.³

Our creative fidelity that is committed to living a mystical and prophetic Consecrated life at the service of life,⁴ needs to harmonize mysticism, the permanent, serene encounter with God, with Prophecy, with the commitment to be attentive to any type of poverty and exclusion that causes wounds in the heart of the world. And therefore, it calls us to accompany situations that may impede the right of people to live with dignity and to share effort and journey, so that all may have life, and a life in “abundance”.

Hence, it would be good to deepen, value and express the experience of the Vow of Poverty from different attitudes, dimensions, actions that offer the global face of the charismatic commitment to follow poor Jesus, close to the poor, with a simple lifestyle, and offering service and life, so that all may have “more life”.

These could be some features that show with simplicity our Vow of Poverty:

- Living the Vow of poverty as the passionate experience of following Jesus, God incarnate, poor, vulnerable, who invites us to share his same life, sharing it with the poor.
- Creating relationships of equality, service, respect and acceptance of diversity.
- Trying to live in freedom, facing the pressure of consumption, the desire to accumulate, the desire for power and to dominate. In an attitude of continuous dispossession.
- Assuming and sharing one's own vulnerability.
- Making responsible and sustainable use of the Earth's goods.
- Being willing to go out onto the roads of the existential peripheries, in solidarity and freedom.
- Assuming affective and credible commitments for the poor, prioritizing care, service and the defense of their rights.
- Expressing these values in a shared life in Community, simple, humble, detached, free.
- Living these attitudes of priority for the weakest, even if our vital contexts are not those of real and concrete poverty.
- Maintaining as a criterion of discernment the preference for the poor.⁵
- Sharing and collaborating with other services and entities that support the poor.

3 Cfr. 7th World Day of the Poor’ “Do not turn your face away from the poor”.(Tb 4,7) nº 1.

4 Cfr. “The reality and the challenges of Religious Life today”.(H: Alvaro Rodríguez,fsc. Revista CLAR,nº 1, 2007,Pag. 7.

5 Cfr. “Charity made Hospitality, Humility and Heroism”. Darío Molla. SJ, Pages 27-28).

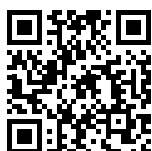


Following Jesus, with the vital commitment of the Vow of Poverty, also means walking with our contradictions on our backs, perhaps far from our dreams and projects. But above all it means passionately following a God who has become «one of us.» Who is embodied in a situation of helplessness and exclusion. Who is presented as fragile, homeless, rejected. Assuming, from the beginning, all human fragility, as an expression of the free love of God that liberates and saves.

Perhaps it is a good time to repeat to the Lord that we want to give our lives in poverty and freedom, accompanying the weakest, and allowing His “You did it to me” to be the impulse and commitment in our lives.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION:

1. With what attitudes of Jesus should we continue to make present today the Vow of Poverty?
2. What gestures, services, actions with which our First Sisters lived, should we prioritize in our daily life?
3. What realities of our personal, community and Congregational life should we modify, at the level of poverty, to be credible in today's world?
4. How can we harmonize the reality of our forces with the commitment to respond to the needs of poverty and exclusion in our society.
5. Send to the Provincial Delegate of Formation and Spirituality of your Province a headline that summarizes your community sharing.



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Sisters of Charity of Saint
Anne