

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 postures¹, in the contemplation of icons or images, or through listening to music². 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*.

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,

¹ 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.

² 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.

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 man³ 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 mother⁴. 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 servant⁵. 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 minors⁶. It is therefore necessary to unmask these conscious and unconscious

³ 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.

⁴The 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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 themselves⁷. It is possible that some women who hear the call to Consecrated Life have been used, or perhaps suffered sexual abuse from relatives or friends⁸ or that they have also suffered them within the ecclesial context in Religious Life⁹. 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.



⁷ «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.

⁸ 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

⁹ 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".

- 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?

