

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 experience¹ 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.²



In the second moment: *"seeing him, she fell at his feet."* Mary, seeing Jesus, falls at his feet as a disciple³. 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*⁴. By stripping herself of her ego, her most genuine and authentic

¹ Cf Teresa of Jesus. *Book of Dwellings*: M. 3.1.5. and ss.

² "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.

³ Be at the feet of Jesus is understood in light of Acts 22.3

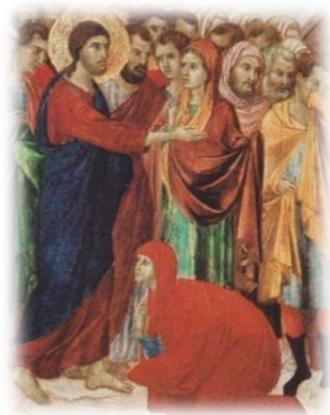
⁴ It is time to die to defend your own image and persevere in "this nakedness and abandonment of everything" by love. Cf. Teresa of Jesus *Book of Dwellings*. M. 3.1.8.

self is born, she begins to be herself, not wanting to possess God through moral standards, or to 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, and⁵ 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, welcome⁶ 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.⁷ 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.*

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

⁵Every 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.

⁶"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.

⁷ 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.

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.⁸

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.

⁸ 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.

- ☁️ 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.



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