

Viva Memoria n. 36

The Redemptoristine's Theological Journal



November 2014



Editorial

Viva Memoria, n. 36

The Redemptorist's - Theological Journal

November, 2014-11-03

Mother Maria Celeste's Virtue Number 1: "The Union of Hearts and Mutual Charity"

Dear Sisters, Dear Readers,

It is our hope that our Readers will find inspiring thoughts and sources of reflection in this Viva Memoria #36 on the theme of "Union of Hearts and Mutual Charity." Hopefully you will discover the depth of the charism of Mother Maria Celeste in your 'contemplation' of the articles on this theme of "Union and Love." We, your editors of the Service Board, are confident that you will!

We have chosen as the lead article for this Journal an article by Father Majorano, C.Ss.R.. It is a conference which Father gave at Scala in November, 2001. While the theme of Father's conference is "Charism", that is charism lived, Father notes that each sister has her own 'gift' which she "*lives as a service to others,*" even as she in turn accepts the gifts and service of her sisters.

An example: "*St. Paul tells you where your care and love must go by preference. It is to those who have the most need of it, because in this way we are faithful to God's way of loving.*"

This observation is a fitting echo of Mother M. Celeste's charism as noted in her first virtue of union and love.

There is much to ponder in the inspiring article by Fr. Alfonso V. Amarante, an Italian Redemptorist and professor of the Alphonsian Accademy in Rome, especially on Mother Celeste's virtue of Charity, of mutual love, as "*commanded by Christ.*" Father Amarante has quoted from Celeste's own treatise of her first virtue, showing the virtue of love necessitates a total self-giving on the part of those who follow her charism. Father summarizes M. Celeste's teaching on LOVE by quoting from her treatise on this virtue of love.

"You will give to your neighbour your whole soul; ... give to the level of My mercy; ...give your will; ... give your heart, with your affections for love of Me."

It is time now to hear from our own Sisters on the theme so dear to Mother Maria Celeste, her first virtue - "Union of Hearts and Mutual Charity."

Sister Maria Pierzchała, O.Ss.R. writes from her lived experience and has titled her article: "Reciprocal love according to Mother Maria Celeste Crostarosa."

Sister reminds us that nothing is more - "typical of the life of Jesus, than love without confines." This is the Gospel, as well as Sister's reminder that - "Such Gospel living in community often requires a true spirit of self-abnegation." This is the mystery of the Cross always the safe road to Resurrection.

Sister Kazimiera Kut, O.Ss.R. of Bielsko-Biała, has presented her article as a continuation of her former one titled: "The Eucharistic Community – A Living Memory of Love," which was published in Viva Memoria 33. The Eucharist was union, love, humility, suffering, joy – everything for Mother Celeste, her very life. The Eucharist is Jesus. Sr. Kazimiera has done well to remind us that our thoughts can ever turn to the Cenacle for a "Crostarosan Thursday."

Sister Ewa Dobrzelecka, O.Ss.R. of Bielsko-Biała, has very aptly continued the theme of mutual love. The Redemptoristine rule was written by Mother Celeste in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Sister Ewa "wonders which comes first – love of God or the love of our neighbour." After a short reflection she concludes: "*Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a **single commandment**. Both live from the love of God who has loved us first.*" Sister Ewa's conclusion is a quote of Pope Francis on Our Blessed Mother – the model of Gospel Love.

Sister Hildegard Pleva from Beacon, USA, shared her insights on creative ways of living our "first Rule" and the inherent challenges of "spirituality of communion, other words for what Redemptoristines may call a *viva memoria spirituality...*", which "*will never be perfectly lived out in this world*" ...

AN APPENDIX

The editors of the Viva Memoria and members of the Service Board have followed the policy and willingness to "hear from everyone." If we receive shorter articles which may not be appropriate for the "Theological Journal" but which are too long for the Crostarosan newsletter, please find these fine articles in an Appendix.

Sister Helena Aquino of Liguori has taken up her pen and thus given us some valuable insights on: "The Greatest of These is Charity." Sister Helena wisely refers to our Constitutions on this subject. She quotes:

"Charity for us is a participation in the infinite love which from all eternity unites the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

We share in this love for: "*Love never fails!*" - as Sister Helena concludes:

For - "CHARITY SURPASSES ANY LAW OR RULE."

Sister Maria Sidorova, O.Ss.R. of Dublin – has shared personal reflections, well founded in the documents of the Magisterium, as she prepared for her Solemn Profession. These reflections will perhaps lead the reader back in a spirit of renewal to the moment of grace at the time of her own Solemn Profession. Sister Maria reminds us that our Mother Maria Celeste and with her every Redemptoristine – "has been given a special mission."

This Mission: "*Jesus wants the Redemptoristine to espouse all the souls in the Church. In doing so she will love them in Jesus and He in them, and take care of their spiritual good.*" (M.Celeste's Dialogues).

Sister Maria, congratulations for your Solemn Profession.

Your editors:

*Sr. Joan Calver, Sr. Gabrielle Fox, Sr. Magdalena Schumann,
Sr. Ewa Dobrzelecka, Sr. Imma Di Stefano*





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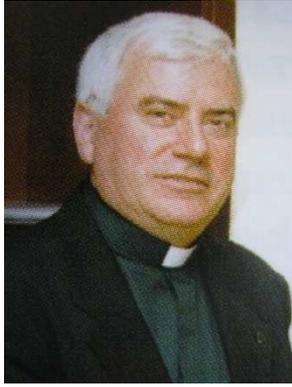
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Thank you	Dziękujemy	vielen Dank	ขอบคุณมาก	RINGRAZIAMO
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THE CHARISM LIVED: REDEMPTORISTINE SPIRITUALITY

P. Sabatino Majorano, CSsR, Roma

What is spirituality? What relationship does it have with our charism? I begin by giving a brief definition of a charism. This is a gift given to a person in the service of the community, a grace from the Spirit.

In order to speak of charisms, we must always begin with a fundamental Pauline text, 1 Cor. 12 and link it with another two passages of Paul, Chapter 12 of the Letter to the Romans, verses 1-4, and the letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 4 – the central part of the Letter in which we find what we mean by “charism”.

Considering the etymology of the word, we have *charis*, which means a grace or gift; and then we have the suffix *-sma*, which in Greek means that the activity indicated by the root, *charis* becomes something stable. Therefore a *charism* is a stable grace, which is what we are able to say if we translate it literally.

When we look at the vision of St. Paul, we are able to confirm that a *charism* is a grace which the Spirit distributes as it wills, by which the Spirit is not limited by conditions, and which is differentiated from the other graces, because once it is granted it becomes something stable in whoever receives it. Therefore the *charism* of each one of us is a gift at the personal level which the Spirit gives, and which remains and configures our personality. The gift which configures us personally is the vision which Paul has of charisms. Then there are more specific charisms, for example, those that give us the gift of languages. But I am speaking of the fundamental charism which is first and foremost the charism of faith. Faith is given to us by the Lord, and is given by the Spirit and it makes us what we are. We *are* persons who believe, not persons who *have* faith, because it is not a possession. Faith therefore gives us our structure. When you look at reality, do your eyes see only what everyone else sees, or do they see something more than reality? For example, when you look at a fellow Sister, you can see that she is a baptized person and a vocation with you in the same community. And so it is the eyes of faith which permit us to see in others not just what appears before us physically, with the human experience which we have, but allows us to see things in greater profundity. And so faith as a charism is a gift which the Spirit gives us and which structures us and makes us what we are at the personal level, in a manner which also distinguishes us from those who are not believers. I am not superior to those who do not believe, but my eyes, as a believer, go beyond what one who is not a believer is able to see.

This is the common charism which all the baptized have. But what happens according to Paul? When we receive this personal gift which makes us believers, then we are called together to form the Church. And what I have received personally puts me in rapport with others and makes me become Church. Faith is my faith, but it is

simultaneously the faith of the Church. I become a person with the gift of faith and, while I become a person, I also become Church. To explain this, Paul uses what Greek thought had already used: the apologue of the human being. This is in Chapter 12 of the First Letter to the Corinthians. Note that in our head all the members have something in common. The DNA in my hand is the same as what is in my eyes, and it is not true that my hand has a different DNA from what I have in my hair. And so we have an unitarian reality of the body, but in this body, what is common to everyone is diversified by an additional gift, which is the specific charism. And it acts in such a way that the hand is a hand, an eye is an eye and teeth are teeth.

If we reason at the level of humanity we can say that the Spirit gives us what is our fundamental charism. It makes us all baptized and all in communion with equal dignity. It makes us become Church, and in making us become Church, that common gift becomes a specific one by particular gifts. And so each one of us becomes a person who, with the particular gifts of grace she has received, is connected to the common gift that has made us baptized. When we speak of these things, it is a good idea to look at number 9 of "Lumen Gentium" where it speaks of the condition of the baptized. It is a number we ought to learn by heart because it tells us our status as baptized.

To sum up. We have a dignity, we are a gift of the Spirit, and the Spirit has given us the gift of faith. When we become believers, we become Church, and in becoming Church, the common gift of faith is then enriched by other specific gifts which lead us to become integrated into the Church with our own identity, and our own specific capacity. We can use the same reasoning with the different realities which are then created in the Church. In other words, what I have explained about the Church is also true about the charism which makes us a Congregation, makes us an Order, and makes us a community.

What happens? It happens that the Spirit has given each one of you a certain manner of reading the Gospel, of looking at history and planning your lives. It is what we call – to use a generic term – the Redemptorist or Redemptoristine manner of believing. This gift has been given to each one of you and so you have been called together with others to form a community. And so, I am the community, not I and the community, two separate realities. The charismatic gift that makes me a Redemptorist is what makes me a community together with others. Within this common charism, which is my being a Redemptorist, there is the richness of each one of us. Besides the common charism which makes us a community, we have a series of other gifts which the Spirit gives us and which we must experience and put into action so as to enrich the common charism and make the community grow. And this explains the reasoning which Paul gives in Chapter 12 with the image of the body. He uses three expressions which I would like you to bear in mind: an eye cannot say to a hand: "you are not an eye, and therefore you are not a body". I cannot think that others must think the way I do. Things in common, yes, because between us we have that common gift that makes us a community. But then these things in common are made specific by the richness that each one of you has. It is the beauty of your Rule that it is founded on this. It does not ask me to be mass-produced, but asks me to contribute, in this sort of communion, the personal richness which the Spirit has given to each one of us. Each one of us is therefore a synthesis of the charism that makes us a community, and the charism that makes us that special member of the community.

Like the example of the body – my hand is simultaneously made as part of the body and as a hand. What it has in common with the other members develops constantly, as does that which makes it in actual fact a hand. Nothing, out of everything we have and what the Spirit has given us, must be lost; but everything becomes part of our personal lives and is linked with that common charism which makes me a community. And thus it is possible to have communion in the community, because by this line of reasoning, what distinguishes me puts me in rapport with others, and not in conflict with them. What distinguishes me, and which is specific to me, tells me that I can serve others. And then comes the charismatic understanding of the defects that a Sister may have. For example. When I have a fall, my arm is fractured, and what does my arm say? “I must think of myself, yes, but how do I think of myself? Protecting the head. My own fracture means nothing, but I have saved the head!”

That charism is personal. We have the common charism of faith that for Paul is the basic charism which then in baptism configures us as Church. In this process of being configured in baptism as Church, we find the common charism enriched with specific gifts. We have the gift which we call the Redemptorist or Redemptoristine vocation, but in the moment when we reflect on the common gift that we call a Redemptorist or Redemptoristine vocation, we notice that each one of us, besides the common element, has received a series of other gifts which enrich what is in common. Here is the joy of being a community, because I must feel myself in a mutual exchange with others, and I must also feel that what is specific to me – and which I will never renounce – I must live as a life of service, as a gift, and also learn to accept the gifts and the service that the others contribute.

We arrive at a conclusion: the defects of the Sisters tell me that there is a reason why I also live. I must complete what is missing in the Sisters. What do we usually do? We look at the defect and then use the scissors, don't we? Instead, let us look as the example I just gave, where the head is about to get broken and my arm moves to protect it. The Sister with that defect must reawaken in me the gift I have received in order to complete what she lacks. And this is what it takes to live in a community serenely. This is not an ideology. It is the nub of what Paul forcefully suggests in Chapter 12. Try to read it a bit more in this manner.

There is another element which Paul mentions and which is very important. God wants us – in this project in which He gives us something specific, but always to make us one body – to give more honour to the members who are less honoured, because those who are honoured have no need of being honoured. Christ in His kenosis has particularly highlighted this reality. And so, in our community life who will we be best friends with? With those who have the most gifts, with those who are worth the most, or with those we get along with best? If we are to be consistent with the logic of the body, we will love the Sister who is the least esteemed, the least loved and the most problematic, because it is there that there is a need to bring the healing energy that the Spirit gives us. In the logic of our body, when a member is sick she becomes the centre of attention of the whole body. Paul then tells you where your care and love must go by preference. It is to those who have the most need of it, because in this way we are faithful to God's way of loving. Remember those pages about the vocations of Levi and Zacchaeus. Remember those pages of Luke. They are pages that we have meditated on so many times. How did Christ reply to the Pharisees? “It is not the healthy that have need

of the doctor. I have come for those who are sick". This is the charismatic logic which must become the spirituality in a Congregation and in an Order.

There is something which makes us become a community, something common which, when it is enriched with many other specific goods becomes our spirituality. And what do we actually mean by this term? A manner of seeing, or valuing, and a style of life. Something by which we will be able to say that spirituality is our own mentality. The Redemptorist mentality is the Redemptorist style of living, the Redemptorist style with which we face a problem. Spirituality becomes something that specifies our common reality without us clashing, but putting ourselves in harmony with the other realities there are in the Church. So there is an identity and a manner typical of us in regard to our manner of seeing reality, our manner of evaluating things, and our style of life which is part of our own body and then finds many forms of expression. Our expression of this identity can be in the way we pray, the way in which we welcome people and things, the way in which we live and the relationships between us. *The charism we live is our spirituality*. And so, if I lose my rapport with that charism, I cannot say that I have our spirituality. Or rather, I have a spirituality, but I cannot say that it is a Redemptorist or a Redemptoristine spirituality. And vice versa, a charism which does not become our spirituality in the practical issues of life, becomes sterile and no longer bears fruit in the Church. And so our spirituality is not something that is added. Spirituality is the charism that becomes our life. It is a common charism enriched with particular gifts which becomes our life. If we lose this development of our charismatic gift, we do not truly have our spirituality.

But what are the instruments with which we can measure ourselves in order to know our own spirituality? I think that the first fundamental instrument is the *Gospel*. And by "Gospel" I do not mean what is written but the truth that the writing is trying to tell us. At the beginning of your Rules, Sister Maria Celeste says: "the Truth contained in the Gospel". By this she is telling us that the Gospel is not some kind of magic! Each one of us must draw forth the Word from the writing. We cannot have a spirituality without this constant real contact with the living Word. And do not forget that the three "places" where the Gospel is revealed as a living reality are the Liturgy, the Magisterium and the sense of the faithful.

The second instrument is your *Constitutions*. It is here that you will find your spirituality. And I believe that one of the steps which the Order must take is to take another look at the Constitutions and really understand what God wants. The Constitutions are the "second Gospel". But Constitutions understood as a living text, that is, as a text lived by a community at a given historical moment. And to be able to read the Constitutions in an adequate manner, it is necessary to *remember our origins*. Because in our origins we can find our charism in the clearest manner, in a fundamental manner, and it is like going to a spring of pure water. Our origins give us this purity which we must go back to continually. And what are these origins for you? They are Sister Maria Celeste, Saint Alphonsus and the Redemptorist reality in its fullest terms, both masculine and feminine. But we must not stop at our sources. We must also have the memory of our journey throughout history. It is now a matter of great sadness to see how all the monasteries of Northern Europe have been sold. The history of Northern Europe, and of what your fellow Sisters have done there, is very important for the Order. There are some lives of Redemptoristines which are really marvellous.

Finally, we must act in the same way as those from whom we have come and who tell us the charism we have received. *Our teachers are the poor*. You will tell me: we are not for the poor like the Redemptorists! Yet those who tell us what our charism is today are precisely those for whom we are in the Church. I think that anyone who is a Redemptorist is for those who have the most need of encountering God, because perhaps they are the ones who have become the most alienated from our Church, because of the internal events of the Church or for social reasons. First and foremost we are for them.

And so we have the common charism of the faith, made specific by the Redemptorist charism, and finally made specific by the personal charisms each one of us has. All of this is I, there is no I and the Redemptorist or Redemptoristine, but only the unity of my person. Beginning with this charism, at the moment when we begin to live it, it becomes our spirituality, and enriches us continually with all the gifts that the Spirit continues to pour out on us.

But, if we do not wish to travel along erroneous ways, we must make use of the instruments: the living Gospel, the Constitutions, the memory of our origins and the subsequent developments, and finally those for whom we are in the Church. These are the instruments which we must make use of so that we do not forget our charism. Otherwise we may journey along paths which may also be valid, but which take us far away from our spirituality. As St. Augustine says: "let us progress, but not on this path!" If we do not make our charism the basis of our lives, we risk running along a road which is not the Redemptorist or Redemptoristine one.

Conference by Father Sabatino Majorano
Scala, November 2011





The Virtue of Charity in the spirituality of Sr. Celeste Maria Crostarosa

Fr. Alfonso V. Amarante, CSsR, Rome

A theological premise:

Before beginning to outline the idea of the virtue of charity according to Sr. Celeste Maria Crostarosa, it's good to take a synthetic glance at what is the meaning, in theology, of virtue in general and of the virtue of charity in particular.

A brief premise: both virtues and natural gifts are 'operative habits', in as much as they move one to action. The word virtue itself means force (or power). Therefore the virtues are a natural force which develops the human faculties and disposes them towards good.

The word 'habit' means a quality, a permanent disposition. In the case of the natural virtues the repetition of acts inclines the will to the natural good.

In the light of this premise it's possible to explain what we understand by supernatural virtues. They are a supernatural operative habit infused in everyone by God, and they direct and incline the soul towards God, as a supernatural end.

In order to direct oneself to God, as a supernatural end, the natural virtues are not sufficient. For this, the supernatural virtues raise the powers of the soul in such a way that they become proportionate to the attainment of the end.

The infused virtues are of two kinds: the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) and the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance). The theological virtues are directly related to God.

With regard to the virtue of charity, it is that theological virtue by which we love God in himself, and God in ourselves and in our neighbour. The primary material object is God, the Supreme Good, in himself. The secondary object is the person himself/herself who loves him or her self in the spiritual order. Then the neighbour and finally one's own body. The formal object of the virtue of charity, on the other hand, is the goodness of God in himself.

Theology teaches us that one has perfect love when one loves God for himself or for his attributes in as much as they are identified with God. For this reason we understand that Jesus the Redeemer is the formal object of our perfect charity, and at the same time the most efficacious means of stimulating it, by our loving others.

The theology of the virtues in the thinking of Crostarosa

In the light of this theological premise, we'll try to go more deeply into the theology of the virtues in Sr. Crostarosa, and in particular into the theology of charity.

To understand the depth of the virtues, as understood by Crostarosa, we must start either from her lived experience, or from the idea she had of the religious project of the

new institute. This latter was based on and arose out of the mystery of Christ, which is the norm of the Gospel, and the very idea of the Order is rooted in the plan of the Father.

When Sr. Celeste speaks of the plan (or intention) of the Father, she means the dynamism of communion and sharing in Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. This passage is clarified by Crostarosa herself in the rule of the manuscript of Foggia:

“Therefore, so that my creatures may remember the eternal charity with which I have loved them, I have been pleased to choose this institute, so that it may be a living reminder /viva memoria/ to all the people of the world of everything it pleased my only-begotten Son to accomplish for their salvation throughout the space of the thirty-three years during which he lived in the world as a wayfaring human being. And his works have life in my eyes and are of infinite value. For that reason, you souls chosen for this enterprise, will be glorified with him on that day of eternity”¹.

In the light of what she writes, one can understand that, for her, the memory of the Saviour is such only in the moment in which it’s capable of making people understand the eternal charity with which the Father loves us. *“the works of Christ are in the ‘memory’ to the extent that, although they took place during the length of the earthly life of the Lord, they have the value of everlasting life”*².

The virtue of charity in the spiritual proposal of Crostarosa

The spiritual message of Sr. Celeste, her proposal of a communitarian plan, are certainly directed by a regulation but the physiognomy (the face of the thing) – whether of the spiritual life or of the community life – is shaped by the practice of the virtues. In this perspective the norms which regulate community life spring from the virtues as internal laws reinforced by a shared rule.

In the Nine Rules on the virtues it’s possible to grasp the richness and the depth of the spirituality of Sr. Celeste by a personal and communitarian way of living memory of the love of Christ. Christ as head and principle, model of every human being, leads and strengthens the virtues of human beings from imitation to true memory. It’s just this spiritual dynamism which is able to become a living image of Christ himself. The nine rules on the virtues are divided into two parts: in the first, the virtues spring from the life of Christ, while in the second part the virtue is related to the life of the sisters.

The first rule “of reciprocal union and charity” is clear in Latin in the following Joannine passage *“This is my commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: to give his life for his friends”* (John 15, 12-13). In the light of this biblical passage Crostarosa was to write:

“I came down from heaven to give myself completely to you and to give my life not only for my friends but for my enemies also, to glorify my Father and for your salvation. Hence with the wisdom of my intellect I

¹ Cf. S. MAJORANO, *L’imitazione per la memoria del Salvatore. Il messaggio spirituale di suor Maria Celeste Crostarosa*, PUL, Roma 1978, 151; cf. also *Florilegium*, 1.

² *Ibid.*

gave clarity and the disclosure of the eternal truths to human minds, obscured by the darkness of sin. I gave them my memory, to remind myself of my ancient mercies, lived out by my rational creates. I gave my will, loving you with that divine love with which I love my heavenly Father, having given my own life for your eternal salvation.”³

In the biblical passage and then in the description which the Venerable sister gives of it, the emphasis is not on “friends” but on “giving one’s life”. The power of love is seen in the sacrifices which it is ready to make so as to give his own life to others. In the Crostarosian perspective, the “divine Saviour’s” giving of himself to humanity is a full sharing of “life and being”. That’s the living experience in which one reaches the sacrifice of oneself for the love of God.

In the second part of the first rule the Venerable Sister, beginning from the mutual love commanded by Christ, writes:

“Therefore you will give to your neighbour your whole soul: your intellect, raising it to the level of my mercy for his benefit: never judging him in any kind of evil. You will give him your memory, by forgiving him from the heart and not recalling offences received, giving him back benefits, spiritual as well as temporal. You will give him your will, by loving him certainly, treating him so well as others would treat yourself, wishing him all the good that is possible. You will give him your heart with its affections, for love of me, having compassion for his afflictions, infirmities and torments, spiritual and corporal. You will employ your body and your senses for his benefit: your eyes to observe his needs and not notice his defects”⁴.

The theological virtue of charity is seen and lived by Crostarosa as the gift – total and complete - of one’s own life for the eternal salvation of our neighbour. We could speak, as it were, of a circle where the one who experiences the love of God, becomes the picture, the image, the living memory of Christ, and thanks to this encounter, the need is born to give oneself completely to the neighbour, so as to live out the fullness and the depth of the love of God. In this perspective, the community becomes the face of the charity of Christ, experienced and lived and given to others. The virtue of charity in the experience of Crostarosa lies in giving oneself to the neighbour so that he/she may be able to gain eternal life.

In the same page, mentioned by the first rule a little earlier, Sr. Celeste underlines some passages which make us understand how the gift of charity should be totalizing.

She writes that to the neighbour is given all the intellect, that is, everything in our understanding, to help him reach salvation. This way brings with it the capacity to annihilate wrongs undergone. On the contrary we need to repay the wrongs with benefits, whether spiritual or temporal. When we know how to set aside the memories which disturb us, or which could incline our actions to evil, to make space for the true love which makes us become the image or the living memory of Christ, then we can also give our will to the other and we will succeed in loving him as we ourselves would wish to be loved.

³ S. Majorano , referred as “Foggiano II”. Cf. *Ivi*, pp. 166-168.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 168.

This way of perfection will lead the soul to grasp the needs of the other even before they are expressed. The face of the charity of Christ will lead us:

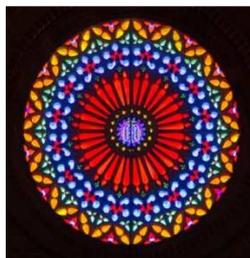
“Not to judge him (the neighbour) in anything; your ears to listen to his torments; your mouth to console him in his afflictions and to teach him the eternal truths in his ignorance of them, to help him and defend him. In substance: your body and your life should be ready to sacrifice themselves, if charity demands it for the eternal salvation of others, so that as I have done, you may do also.”⁵

For the Venerable Sister, charity is a fraternal unity which is able to be a ‘memory’ on a par with the relation that existed between Christ and his disciples and between the three divine persons. In fact it is the Spirit who leads charity to perfection by the living memory. We could declare that the key notion in the spirituality of Crostarosa about imitating charity, is to act as Jesus Christ lived and taught the commandment of love: to give one’s own life for the neighbour. In this perspective our “charity” towards the neighbour is the “memory of the love with which the Saviour loves us (which also is the same as that with which he loves the Father); the fraternal reality which derives from it is a “memory” //or, better, a memorial or reflection. (Eamonn) // of the trinitarian and saving charity. Finally, our “charity” towards the neighbour, thus understood, presents itself as faithfulness to the Gospel: on this “virtue” indeed is based the “evangelical law of Christian perfection”⁶.

To conclude

On the level of spiritual theology, the proposal of Sr. Crostarosa is rich and articulate. The object of the love of Christ is the image of the Father and his own image; as a result the soul which unites itself to Christ has as object the love of God and of the Son. This love comes to be in loving the souls which are in their turn images of God. But in order for this love to reach its fulfilment, it needs the power of the Spirit, of the Paraclete, who at every moment makes us make a living memory (memorial) of the love of Christ in ourselves, in our soul.

Even though the Venerable was not a professional theologian, she offers a spiritual theological proposal of unique depth. In fact in her writings she knew how to make intelligible the richness of love, by pointing it towards God, the neighbour and oneself, by means of the Spirit.



⁵ Cf. *Florilegium*, 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.



Reciprocal love according to M. Celeste Crostarosa

Sr. Maria Pierzchała , OSsR

“So that my creatures may remember my eternal charity with which I have loved them, I have been pleased to choose this Institute, so that it may be a living memorial to all the people of the world of everything my Only Begotten Son has been pleased to work for their salvation”.⁷

Our Institute must then remind the world of the boundless love of God which was made manifest in a full manner by Jesus – the Incarnate Word, during his earthly life. Therefore his life, his gospel, and He Himself, must be the rule of the new Order and the Religious who live in it must make themselves similar to Jesus in everything so as to be for the world an image, a sacrament, and the living memorial – just as M. Celeste desired.

It is very significant that Mother Celeste’s first rule treats of unity and **reciprocal love**. Nothing is more typical of the life of Jesus than love without confines for human persons and the desire for mutual union. Moreover, it is a consequence of the choice of the Gospel and it is also the Rule – the basis of the new Institute. Sr. Crostarosa begins her Rule with a passage from the Gospel of St. John 15:12-13, that is to say, with the commandment on fraternal love. Jesus offered himself totally to humanity and wants us as well to offer ourselves totally for others.

“So you must give your neighbours your whole soul: your intellect, raising it up to my mercy for their benefit; not judging them in any kind of evil way ... you shall give them your memory ... you shall give them your will desiring their every good ... you shall give them your heart ... You shall employ your body and your senses for their benefit: your eyes ... your ears to listen to their troubles...”⁸

According to Sr. Crostarosa, the most distinct feature of Christ in us is precisely this reciprocal love because only by “being love” can we become a clear image of God and reveal his mercy and his loving face to the world. Sr. Crostarosa writes very frequently and in a convincing way about charity, loving one’s neighbours with the love of Jesus, looking at them with the merciful eyes of Jesus who does not judge them, but helps them to rise up, using all the possible means to help them live in an authentic freedom, in the joy and dignity of the children of God. Unity and mutual love are in fact an essential characteristic of the Crostarosan community. M. Celeste sees the model of this human

⁷ Florilegium, 1.

⁸ Florilegium, 25.

unity in the Most Holy Trinity, the unity between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Redemptoristine community is to attain this by becoming for others an authentic sign of fraternal love.

In her other texts Sr. Crostarosa sees mutual love as “the wedding” of all her brothers and sisters with Christ. Therefore a Redemptoristine, choosing Christ as her only Master and Spouse, also chooses all those whom He has loved and for whom He gave his love.

Putting the first rule into effect in daily life creates a climate of fraternal joy which can be possible only if we take up our cross with courage:

“The life of charity, proper to our communities, often requires a true abnegation, which will help us to liberate ourselves from the different forms of egoism so as to think of others, by means of the practical realities of daily life, accepted and lived with simplicity, in a spirit of service. Liberating ourselves thus from our own selves in order to put on Christ, we shall live the kenosis of the Word Incarnate in ourselves, thus completing in ourselves what is lacking in his passion and participating in hope in his resurrection”.⁹

The imitation of Jesus is living with our eyes constantly fixed on Him, and it is the way to becoming made similar to the Lord. In this act of following, the principal source is the Eucharist, according to our Foundress. In her work: “The Spirit of the Institute” – the text which accompanies the rules and which seems to be M. Celeste’s spiritual testament, we read that Jesus desired us to truly become like Him. But because of this, we have need of a miraculous food which can guide us to such a transformation. Therefore, his boundless love has prompted us to become our simple nourishment – *the substantial Bread, royal and divine*. Jesus considered it the best way for him to enter and dwell in us, and unite us to himself, even though for him it is the greatest humiliation possible. However, He does this so that man may become like God and *to transform him into the Most Holy Trinity*. According to Sr. Crostarosa, the Eucharist is also the best remedy for our unchecked pride – the greatest and most painful illness of mankind – and for our lack of love. In the Eucharist, Love itself enters our hearts and becomes ours, and so we too can become the bread for others – and we can become the Eucharist. God was willed to make us receive this bread right until the end of the world. He has remained with us in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar, under the species of Bread, hiding his immensity, so that we may be united with Him and transformed into Him. Thanks to this, everything which is ours, even if we are full of stains and limitations, becomes sanctified. God shares himself with us without jealousy, and without leaving anything for himself. *“Behold the salvation of the just, behold the fount from which drink all the lights, and all the knowledge of the eternal truths, and there they receive a river of charity”* and above all – *“this sacrament is charity”*.¹⁰

Prayer too – according to Sr. Crostarosa – like the Eucharist, creates the possibility of being filled with God and becoming his transparent crystal. In her work *“The Grades of Prayer”* which is like *“The spiritual canticle”* of St. John of the Cross, where she describes

⁹ Const. 9.

¹⁰ *Florilegium*, 74.

the various gifts of prayer, M. Celeste writes that the culmination of prayer is intercession and supplication – the prayer which is called charity.

“This prayer is a charity which God infuses into the soul for the needs of the Church or the public or some sinner or the souls in purgatory, according to /what/ pleases the Lord, or for the profit and perfection of good souls. God wishes to give the soul an internal burden, which is born of confidence in God, and where the soul sometimes for days on end prays loving God; with the internal gaze of the soul, she shows her Lord what she longs from him, in a filial and secure spirit of her God. And then it is the same God who moves her, wishing to diffuse his mercies out to his creatures”.¹¹

For Sr. Crostarosa, the culmination of contemplative prayer is the prayer of supplication: she believes that this prayer is a clear manifestation of the divine life in us, the result of our transformation into God. When our hearts are moved by God’s tenderness and embrace the problems our brothers and sisters have, then God loves in us, and completes, his works of salvation. For a Redemptoristine, in every moment of profound union with God – Love becomes the ardent supplication for all the miseries of the world.

Another way to the life of Christ, according to Maria Celeste’s advice, is humility, which is our self-annihilation and diminution, so that only God may be seen, and our total transparency, when we become more Him than ourselves.

In order to develop this we need to accept the poverty of Christ, He who *despoiled himself, assuming the condition of a Servant*, so we need to accept the humiliations which are a marvellous manner of purification from our overbearing egoism. On this path – as Sr. Crostarosa writes – God can break the bonds of our egoism, our illusions and our attachments, making use especially of the humiliations which we must endure from others. When we experience the contempt and rejection of others, we feel ourself rudely handled and struck, but at the same time, we note that we have not managed to love gratuitously, and that our love is very egotistical, and offered only to those who are good in regard to us, and so – as Maria Celeste says – our love is only a natural inclination of the heart and not the pure, unconditional and merciful love that lets Christ live in us. And so she strongly recommends her spiritual daughters to carefully examine all the movements of their hearts, going back to their source and their most profound motivation, and to value all the aspects of the cross and the humiliation which serve to make us pure and let God take every control over our hearts.

In concluding these reflections, we can assume that Sr. Crostarosa maintains that the lives of her Religious must be based on a profound experience of God, which leads us into an interior and radical transformation into Him. M. Celeste proves to us that only an authentic contemplation of Jesus and a total submission to the transforming action of the Spirit can give birth to the irradiant apostolate of the Redemptoristine community, which we also can see written about in our present Constitutions:

“An assiduous contemplation of the mystery of Christ will develop in us that characteristic of a smiling and irradiant joy, a clear simplicity and a true fraternity which

¹¹ *Grades of Prayer*, p. 107.

is specific to our community. We do not seek a rigid and austere style of life, nor extraordinary mortifications, but we attempt to live according to the spirit of the Beatitudes, in a climate of recollection and prayer evoking that of the Cenacle".¹²

Our Lady was the most authentic living memorial of Jesus – the most humble handmaid of the Lord, and she is considered by Redemptoristines as the best Mistress in following Jesus: *"I have recourse to you, Mother of love, so that through your intercession, the living image of Jesus may be well stamped in me, so that my heavenly Father may look upon me with that infinite love with which he beholds his beloved and divine Son in himself"*.¹³



¹² *Const. 10.*

¹³ *Florilegium, 12.*



Love one another... do it in memory of Me...

**Sr. Kazimiera KUT, OSsR,
Bielsko-Biała, Poland**

This reflection is the continuation of the article **“The Eucharistic community – the living memorial of the love of Jesus, who has loved us until the end”** (Viva Memoria nr. ...) It has been worked out by the laity who, at the monastery of the Redemptoristine Nuns in Poland (Bielsko-Biala), are seeking to learn more about the spirituality of Mother Celeste Crostarosa in order to live it in their daily life.

Crostarosan Thursdays

Every Thursday in our Redemptoristine community there is a very special atmosphere. Thursday is a more joyful day, and different from the other days of the week. This very beautiful tradition has been passed on to us by the Sisters of our community in Scala, where the roots can be found of our Polish community and also those of the entire Order. The Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours are celebrated more solemnly on this day and the atmosphere in the community is more festive.

We think that this is how the Venerable Servant of God, our dear Mother Celeste lived it, because she wrote in the Rule of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer, that light can be shed not just on the spiritual journey of the nuns, but also on the spiritual path of the laity. And as we know, Jesus Himself told her His will for us, expressed in the Rule, and gave her the power to write it down for an hour after holy Communion. When she wrote some spiritual exercises for particular days of the week, Maria Celeste intended them for all Thursdays in particular.

On Thursday ... our thoughts turn to the Cenacle.

Thursday – on this day Jesus showed us the greatest love, leaving Himself as food in the Eucharistic Bread and did something which totally surprised the Apostles – He washed their feet. Saint John, whose Gospel Maria Celeste tells us to read every Thursday, calls our attention in particular to this action by which Jesus builds an intimate relationship with every disciple. This is how He expresses His closeness and friendship, as if He was seeking it on His knees, humbling Himself at the feet of each disciple¹⁴.

And the same with the Redemptoristines and all those who wish to nourish themselves on the same spirit – Jesus asks them to be the **living memorial of this event**. In other words, to bear within themselves the living record of this GIFT, which IS

¹⁴ Don. Krzysytof Wons, *Trwać w Jezusie* (Persevere with Jesus).

THE GREATEST gift we can receive; and we should live in Him and do everything to bring others to Him, acting so that everyone remembers what He has done for them by loving them.

The Constitutions of the Order express this very clearly:

“It was the will of the Father that the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer should have a specific role in His Church: to be a clear and radiant witness of the love He has for us in Christ. It is through Him, in fact, that we have known and received this love which is directed towards all, but in a very special way towards the poorest. In order that our brothers and sisters may be fully aware of the love by which they are eternally loved by Him, the Father calls us today to be a living memorial – a Viva Memoria – a constant reminder of all that the Son accomplished for our salvation during His life on earth. It is in this way that the Redeemer is able today to accomplish His work of salvation in us and through us” (Const. 5).

I. Interesting and worthy of remembrance are some **events which happened in the first years of the Order**. In the history of the first Redemptoristine community in Scala, God intervened in an extraordinary manner, and we can say, in an Eucharistic manner.

It was in the year 1732 and the forms of the nascent Congregation of the Redemptorists could already be seen clearly enough. The Redemptoristines had already been in existence for a year. And just at that moment, shortly before the official inauguration of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, on the Thursday, during the adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament, all those who were praying in the nuns' chapel, amongst whom were our first Sisters, Maria Celeste, St. Alphonsus and others, were able to see with their own eyes the signs that God Himself worked in the Sacred Host in the nuns' chapel. The local Bishop Santoro sent to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Ant Banchieri, in the Holy See, about 20 depositions – testimonies “col ad Sancta Dei Evangelia” (with to the Holy Gospels of God). He wrote:

“I have the honour of including the summarium of the little Process drawn up by me, with the depositions of all those who were found admiring the prodigious signs which appeared in the Sacred Host on divers expositions made in the month of September, and for all of November in the past year in the little church of the monastery of the Most Holy Saviour in this city of Scala”¹⁵.

This always happened on a Thursday. We can see that at the beginning of our Redemptoristine history God willed to give us a very eloquent sign.

We recognize our spirituality as an Eucharistic spirituality, not on the basis of these personal signs, but from a profound study of the spiritual journey of Maria Celeste and her spiritual message. But we do not forget this sign from Heaven, given to us by God Himself. *“The vision is not essential, and is not the most important thing. The most*

¹⁵ SH. 1953, letter of February 1733,

important thing is understanding what God wants to tell us by means of the vision". Yet these signs "furnish us with a better comprehension of reality and help us complete some specific tasks".¹⁶ Without doubt, these signs can be read as an unique gift of the Father for us – for the Redemptorist family.

II. In the Rules for all the Thursdays of the year, Maria Celeste writes:

"Every Thursday they shall assemble in the Chapter room and she who shall hold My place shall intone the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (Come Holy Spirit), and when this is done, she shall accuse herself of her own failings... **Then the Holy Gospel about the supper shall be read** (it can also be sung), and **then she who shall have My place shall wash the feet of all the Sisters one single time a month**".

On the other Thursdays: "*the greatest of them, who follows she who shall have My place, shall kiss the feet, so that there shall be effected in them what I said to My disciples: **Just as I have done, so you must do mutually***" (Jn. 13:15). All the Sisters "*shall have a devout composure, humbling themselves like Saint Peter*" – writes Maria Celeste in the Thirteenth Constitution (Of the Chapters and the Faults on the day of Thursday).

In the 18th Century they did not take communion every day. It required special permission to receive Jesus in Holy Communion, but in Mother Celeste's community, on all Thursdays (other than feasts and solemnities) the nuns could receive this Great Gift, and even the novices.

III. What should we continue to do even today?

It is easy for us to perceive the differences between the modes of expression of values in Maria Celeste's time and in our own times. However, we must note that some forms and habits may have changed, but not the values. In our community we are trying to continue:

- a) The solemn character of the Eucharist every Thursday and the whole Liturgy on this day;
- b) The more festive climate in the community every Thursday; (the laity can do so in their families);
- c) The care of the spiritual heritage of Holy Thursday;
- e) The reading of the Gospel of St. John 13: 1-15 every Thursday, before supper.

IV. The spiritual heritage of Holy Thursday

It is a good idea to read and meditate on the entire passage in the Gospel of St. John 13-17. It is a testament of Jesus, and not a farewell, but *the beginning of His new presence*. In community we read only this one part of the Gospel of St. John 13, verses 1-15 (every Thursday before supper):

¹⁶ Card. Tommaso Spidlik, from his commentary on the Gospels.

“Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'Never!' said Peter. 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me.' Simon Peter said, 'Well then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has had a bath needs washing, such a person is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you”.

How can the Cenacle illumine family life?

1. **The Cenacle speaks to us of the good feeling and closeness between Jesus and the disciples.** It is Jesus who convokes the community and also the family, and it is He who forms it and creates unity between His own. *In the Cenacle we can see that the familiar style means a mutual self-giving: giving and receiving.* Jesus gives Himself and the disciples receive Him. In our own giving of ourselves and receiving others we can re-enact the miracle of the Cenacle – we give ourselves with love, like Jesus and we are received with love, like Jesus.

2. In the Cenacle Jesus told His disciples that ***they are not servants but friends.*** In the family, in the community, *if we are friends one with the other, then service is a joy and acquires a profound meaning.* The climate of friendship in the family is the climate of the true community and the true family. Then every act of helping, service, etc., generated by love becomes an expression of the most profound reality. In the family, as in the monastic community giving oneself and accepting the other takes place in different ways, but it is a reality that is very close to us – the daily work which we also call service on behalf of others. St. John points out that everything must be born of love. He shows us Jesus who bows down at the feet of the apostles at at our own feet. He shows us Jesus kneeling at the feet of the apostles, Jesus who takes the foot of each one of them into His own hands and washes it. A love that serves – this is the style of Jesus, and it is the heritage of Holy Thursday, which is continued by those who love Jesus and are His friends.

3. The Eucharist, when it is lived authentically, makes us an Eucharistic community, and generates the fruit of a true mutual listening, harmony,

forgiveness and communion and makes us capable of being a gift to others. This finds its practical expression in the daily dedication of our own person to others, just as Jesus Christ did. And so what matters is the style of this dedication. It is not enough to offer up our work, but we need to work so that every action, every word and every effort can be a sign of love. This is also true in regard to prayer. We need to pray in such a way that my prayers, in harmony with others, will be a sign of my love for them and for God. And so we need to meet at table in such a way that *our presence will be a sign of the Eucharistic love*. And thus we must accept others just as Jesus accepts them in the Eucharist, and we must offer our own presence to others so that they may “eat” it like the good bread.

4. In the spirituality of Maria Celeste the most important thing is *the look*. We can also say that her spirituality is the spirituality of the look. We already know the marvellous reflections of Father Majorano on the *Eucharistic look towards one's neighbour*. It is the same Mother Celeste who invites us to give that look to others. Father Majorano explains it this way: the Eucharistic look upon others means a look which says: *“I thank you because you exist, because you are with me. Do not be afraid of your limits, because together we will be able to give replies to them. I am certain that you will not reject me because of my limits, and they will be one more reason for me being close to you”*.¹⁷ Father Majorano points out: *“Paradoxically, this is the type of look that Christ gives us when we are in adoration. (...) He reminds us that the limits of our being human does not repel Him from us, but make Him the power and grace necessary for overcoming these limits”*¹⁸.

5. We can apply this to our family life or to the community life. Often when we encounter weakness in others we experience some difficulty. Their physical weakness, certain habits, their difficult character – all this can repel one from another. But Jesus acts differently, He becomes even closer to those who are “difficult”. And more still, He invites His own to do the same. Is it possible? He Himself thinks so, for when we receive Him in Holy Communion, He makes us capable, and gives us the grace, to approach others and be patient, and He also gives us the grace of conversion and the transformation of what causes our difficulty with others. We need to seek Him. When we adore Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament, He is equally present, for the good and the less good. He is just like the sun which shines for both the good and the bad. Parents know this very well. Think of how much attention they pay to the child who is the most problematic!

6. The Eucharist is everything in our lives. The Eucharist is the love that irradiates joy through the possibility of giving ourselves and through the gratitude of being accepted, even if at times it costs dearly. The Eucharist is the look which communicates the goodness of Christ. The Eucharist is the presence in all the common acts, at table, within family gatherings, in our walk with persons in our family or community, in our encounter with persons who come to us seeking help. It is a presence

¹⁷ See: *Una perla nascosta*, Foggia, March 2007, p. 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

we can call Eucharist if at its root there is love, if it spurs us to love. Then everything we do becomes a sacrament of the love of God and then our love contains something much more profound. The Eucharist is the suffering united to the Passion and the Death which is found present on the altar during the Mass. In this love, mutual and ready to sacrifice, Christ is resplendent, and this means being His living memorial, even in the simplicity of family life and our daily work.

7. In our monastic life there is space for **meeting the people** who come to us. This is also true for families. What do we give the people who knock at our doors? "From our communitarian and personal encounter with Jesus-Eucharist depends all the other encounters" – Pope John Paul II has said, and he continues: "Here [in the Eucharist] Christ personally welcomes every man overwhelmed with difficulties, and fortifies him with the warmth of His comprehension and of His love". If we have the experience of such an encounter with Christ, then we shall bring the fruit of it into our families and our other encounters – we radiate Jesus, we have a just word for others, and our listening and care for others will heal them, because it is He who watches over them by means of us.

8. In the Eucharist we become Church, community and unity. Mother Celeste's amazement can become our own amazement, and contemporaneously the prayer for unity in the community, the family and the Church, because only an united community can irradiate the loving presence of the Risen Lord, and thus be His living memorial:

"O admirable Sacrament, ... there we can admire something marvellous - from many grains of wheat a single piece of bread is made which is all the loving and faithful souls, baked with the fire of your divine charity in Your single most blessed humanity in the Church, your Bride"¹⁹.

It is here, together with the Body and Blood of Christ, that the gift of unity and mutual love is poured out into our hearts. Here we are all one and we are all equal, and in Holy Communion we receive the same Jesus. This communion with the Body of Christ is a communion with the body of the Church, which makes us capable of a communion with others, with those who live next to us.

WE REPEAT: WHAT IS THE GIFT OF THE CENACLE and what exercise does it ask of us?

• *After having loved His own who were in the world, **He loved them to the end***, (to make them capable of love until the end).

• *...He began to wash their feet ... If then I, who am your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, **you too must wash one another's feet**. Indeed, I have given you an example, so that you too will do as I have done. (washing the feet hides the act of acceptance, cordiality, and true esteem of the person accepted...).*

• *I give you a new commandment: **that you love one another**. Just as I have loved you, you too must love one another.*

¹⁹ M. Celeste Crostarosa, *Little Spiritual Garden*, 4th June.

• *From this everyone shall know that you are My disciples, **if you have love one for another.***

• *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, because everything I have heard from the Father I have made known to you (Jn. 15:15).*

EXERCISE:1.

How can I live “the spirit of Thursday, that is, the Eucharistic style, in my daily life?”





M. Celeste's First Rule – mutual love

Sr. Ewa Dobrzelecka, OSsR,

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“The virtue of charity to one’s neighbour is the principal foundation of the Redemptoristine Institute, since Our Lord made this virtue the base on which rests the evangelical law of Christian perfection”²⁰.

The virtue of charity is a fundamental Gospel value frequently spoken of over the years in my community. For Mother Celeste it is in fact the Gospel that provides the basic norms of religious life, and is its supreme rule. Her way of thinking was ahead of her time, as in the 18th century there was a greater emphasis placed on the concept of “religious perfection” than on evangelical charity (*perfectae caritatis*). The constitution of Vatican II entitled *Perfectae caritatis* talked about an evangelical way of life²¹, about “evangelical councils” as a way towards “perfect charity”. Since the General Assembly in 2012 recommended that M. Celeste’s “First Rule” on charity be one of the first topics to deal with, and which the Order should reflect on together, it is hoped that these reflections may encourage some further exchange of experiences on this important issue.

We all know what the most important Commandment is and we also know how difficult it is to love to the full - 100%. When writing the Rules, M. Celeste puts the commandment of mutual charity and unity as the first Rule of her new Order, which she constituted, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis has been also sustained in our present Constitutions.

We may wonder, whether the love of God or the love of our neighbour comes first or if they are interchangeable. Certainly the love of neighbour is the verification of our faith and besides we often learn to love God from and through other people. Let us see what Pope Benedict has to say about this. He writes:

“Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. Jn 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. Jn 19:34)²²”.

²⁰ *Florilegium*, 25.

²¹ The pursuit of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels draws its origin from the doctrine and example of the Divine Master and reveals itself as a splendid sign of the heavenly kingdom.... *love of God both excites and energizes that love of one's neighbour which contributes to the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church. This love, in addition, quickens and directs the actual practice of the evangelical counsels (Perfectae caritatis).*

²² Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 7.

“Love of neighbour is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter, which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings...

*Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a **single commandment**. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a “commandment” imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others”²³.*

We recall how M. Celeste talks in her Rules about being a gift of love to others, a gift involving one’s body and soul:

“This is My new commandment, that you love one another mutually as I have loved you: therefore you will devote to your neighbour all your soul. You will apply your intellect in glorifying My mercy on her behalf, and so you shall never judge her in any kind of evil. You shall give her your memory, forgiving her from your heart.... You shall give her your will, by loving her sincerely... You shall give her your heart with its affections for love of Me, compassionating her in her afflictions, and corporal and spiritual infirmities. You will employ your body and your senses for her benefit, your eyes in order never to observe her defects and actions, but in order to see her needs and to succour her; your ears to listen to her troubles; your mouth and tongue to defend her modestly, and to console her in her afflictions, and to instruct her in the eternal truths in her ignorance”²⁴.

Love of neighbour can take many forms, from acceptance to offering a warm greeting, from help given in times of trouble and distress to and empathy and the sharing of the cross with another. But love for other people can cloak or mask a seeking of oneself, of feeding one’s hidden needs, for sympathy. Sometimes it is difficult to discern the truth about ourselves in this regard. To combat this trap M. Celeste stresses pure intention, pointing always to God's glory, operating only because of God as most pleasing to God. *“Do you wish to know which soul in heaven enjoys the greatest level of sanctity? Precisely the one who in life had the purest actual intention in her works” and: “Know that I love pure love in a soul more than all the gifts they possess”²⁵.*

Crostarosa gives some particular and very practical indications, as well: *“The sisters abstain from murmuring about the faults and imperfections of their neighbour and from rash judgments... They will be on guard against, envy, the spirit of emulation, of contradicting one another, of recriminations, of competing against one another in trifles, of upsetting one another over frivolous matters and such like that disturb charity and peace of heart”²⁶.*

Fr. S. Majorano, CSsR, stressed during one of his lectures (given at Scala years ago), that we have to be a “continuation of the Redeemer’s presence”. Giving witness means

²³ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 18

²⁴ M. Celeste Crostarosa, *Nine Rules*.

²⁵ M. Celeste Crostarosa, *Dialogues*, 8 and 2.

²⁶ M. C. Crostarosa, *Florilegium*, 25

for us to be a living image of Jesus. The Lord present in us wants to love and to forgive from within us.

In our relationship with other sisters we receive a lot in return even when we give. There is always some reciprocity, an exchange of gifts. Pure intention is necessary in the relationship, we should not seek ourselves, but it is not possible to refrain from receiving, we need to give and to receive love from others. Such is the nature of love.

Charity, love for other people, connects us with God's love. We receive God's love as a breath, as M. Celeste writes in her *"Grades of prayer"*, 7. Receiving the gift of love from God, his breath, we can pass it on to others. The circle of love continues. There is a Greek word *"perychoresis"* which describes love as a dance within the Holy Trinity - the Father loves the Son and this love is a Person - the Holy Spirit - in their dynamic ever moving love. We are made participants of this exchange, and in turn we can invite others to join it.

We can incessantly look for new ways of expressing love in everyday life, as well as in prayer. An act of delicacy, kindness, noticing others' needs, listening to others carefully, are areas to develop during the whole of life and throughout each day.

A prerequisite for true love is forgiveness, as we cannot imagine a reality on earth, a community, where mutual forgiveness is not necessary - and it should be according to the Gospel "seventy times seven". Why is it so hard to love our neighbour selflessly? Our love is often so fragile, vulnerable to injury. Again and again we must ask for forgiveness and forgive others, asking the Lord for the ability to forgive those tiny but annoying distresses of everyday life, as well as more serious discrepancies and problems. It can be hard to forgive, to forget injuries or lack of acceptance and misunderstandings, which are even inevitable. Pope Francis also asks this question in his message for the World Day of Peace 01.01.2014: *"The question naturally arises: Can the men and women of this world ever fully respond to the longing for fraternity placed within them by God the Father? Will they ever manage by their power alone to overcome indifference, egoism and hatred, and to accept the legitimate differences typical of brothers and sisters?"*

We have to learn continuously that another person has the right to be different, but also in some sense to make mistakes and errors. Already at the beginning of our monastic formation, we learn that a person who hurts others does not accept something in herself/himself, has a wound that needs healing and so she or he needs more love and prayer.

We know that the first step to love others is a proper love of oneself - *"You shall love your neighbour as yourself"* - we all experience that this is not so easy, because we are all marked by original sin, which brings with it a realization of our own weakness. We try to make efforts to transform ourselves, to be more like Jesus, but often it happens that our asceticism and efforts do not bring expected results and with St. Paul we can say: *"For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do"* (Rm 7, 15). Once again we return to the Source of Love, because only in God can we find a solution. He wants to transform us with his love, wants to make us his instrument, to dwell in the deepest depths of our hearts. For M. Celeste the Lord is: "the essence of our being," our "infinite security", our virtue.

Let us quote Pope Francis once again: "*When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity: which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony*"²⁷.

The Holy Spirit's work does not exclude effort on our part, but we have to direct it primarily to opening our hearts, reading God's dream for us, which is, according to M. Celeste, God's liking /gusto di Dio / for us. The way to healing our inner selfishness and involuntary sins is to contemplate with our gaze fixed on the loving God /squardo fisso/ as M. Celeste stresses: "*So it is, and may no soul be deceived, who longs to arrive at perfection, about being able to pursue it by another way than by this assiduous attention of being sure to look with love at her God who is present*"²⁸.

Jesus rewards our prayerful expectation, our patient gaze fixed on him and comes to each of us in a very personal way, lets us experience his love, transforms and heals what needs healing in us. The relationship with him, especially in our contemplative life, should be very personal, full of faith and trust. Such prayerful relationship with Christ, which may be expressed in Jesus' prayer, in the prayer of the heart, enables us to reach others with purified motivation, to accept their otherness, their different paths towards God, and even flaws in their character.

God entrusts us to one another and enables us to watch over each other in order to help them develop harmoniously and for His glory. The gift of a community consists of all the gifts of the sisters' harmonized so as to become one "living memory".

This is possible, if we see the Lord present in another person, perceiving our sisters as God's image, likeness and delight: "*I want you to become espoused to all my souls and to experience the delights in them which I experience*"²⁹.

According to Crostarosa, the Heavenly Father loves us, because he sees the image of his Son, the likeness to him, in our hearts. Writing about love of neighbor, M. Celeste uses images and repeats several times that the Lord wants her (and us – redemptoristines) to espouse all the souls for which she prays, the souls living in Jesus' heart and to pray for their salvation: "*This morning I want you in a special way in My heart... , so that in it you will espouse all the souls that I have in My Church, and also those who are not yet within her bosom... you must think no more of yourself, but about the salvation of these souls that I love so much*"³⁰.

²⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 117.

²⁸ M.C. Crostarosa, *Dialogues*, 9. See also *Perfectae caritatis*, 5: "*The members of every community, seeking God solely and before everything else, should join contemplation, by which **they fix their minds and hearts on Him**, with apostolic love, by which they strive to be associated with the work of redemption and to spread the kingdom of God*".

²⁹ M. C. Crostarosa, *Florilegium*, 28.

³⁰ M. C. Crostarosa, *Dialogues*, 2 (or *Florilegium* 14).

M. Celeste was a prioress and her task, her way of loving, was also to exhort and to teach her sisters without being discouraged if her words were not accepted:

“And if for love of Me and out of a good zeal, you have given some teaching to your neighbour and he has not profited from it, nor taken it well, have no concerns about this, because the good they have received will come back to your own soul... So in future do not keep yourself from saying what is good to your neighbour, for fear that he will not take it the right way or that he will have bad thoughts about you: for then everything would be self-love and not zeal for My honour”³¹.

The interpersonal relationship might be sometimes marred even by mistrust and/or by lack of confidence, but M. Celeste, encourages us not to desist but to love uninterestedly /gratuitously/:

“Daughter, think the same, and simply, of everyone’s actions, with this beautiful spirit of purity, without suspecting any kind of double-dealing in the actions of your neighbour, because if in those souls there is some impurity in their operations, it will not enter into you; and in your spirit I will have that glory of purity that is lacking in the actions of your neighbour; thus you would make up for those souls with the love of your own soul. Thus I want you simple, as My pure dove. This is the way by which I am leading you”³².

The way of Jesus is one of simple, sincere love, of mutual trust and of sharing. This attitude is equally relevant to the relationship between the communities of the Order. It implies thinking about each other in an atmosphere of prayer and mutual kindness and of sharing what is valuable with them.

Let us ask Our Lady’s help to practice it, using Pope Francis’ words:

*“Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom...
Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones,
pray for us”³³.*



³¹ M. C. Crostarosa, *Dialogues*, 2.

³² M. C. Crostarosa, *Dialogues*, 2

³³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*.



First Rule: “Union of Hearts and Mutual Charity”

Constitution and Statutes of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer, Chapter 2, Part 1

Sr. Hildegard Pleva, OSsR, Beacon, USA

“I have been pleased to choose this Institute, so that it may be a living memory ... of my Only-begotten... To you, beloved souls, I have given these laws of love... Hence you, souls chosen for this enterprise ... will be on earth the living image of my holy Only-begotten.”

“The Design of the Father”, Primitive Rule of Maria Celeste Crostarosa, Provisional English translation, 1994

“Note well...that it is not contemplation which vivifies your life but rather the Viva Memoria, the transformation in Christ – charity.”

*Father Sabatino M. Majorano, CSsR
Conferences on the New Constitution and Statutes, Scala, 1985*

The Rule of the Institute as Revealed to Maria Celeste Crostarosa

The original rule for a new religious enterprise as received by Maria Celeste leaves little room for doubt concerning the institutional reason for being. It describes a community with love as its *raison d'être*; the interactions of its members so conformed to Jesus' last supper commandment “love one another as I have loved you” that individual members, as well as the corporate entity they form, will be readily recognized as living memories of Jesus. The specific reason for being is not attainment of pontifical rank; is not monastic enclosure; is not a life ordered to contemplation. The Father gave to Celeste a clear commission for the institute to be in this world, among all people, and particularly in relation to each other in community, living exemplars, living witnesses, living demonstration of the ability to act out of the divine spark within and to be as Jesus who was loving, accepting, non-judgmental, aware of human weakness, and in all things merciful. Everything that follows are means to that end.

It may be argued that this emphasis on creating an interpersonal community dynamic which clearly demonstrates behaviors reflecting the commandment of love after the model of Jesus, places the Redemptoristine Rule within the tradition of the ancient Rule of St. Augustine. In this rule first place is given to “fraternal relationships, insisting on a life lived in community, and on the communion of persons according to the ideal outlined in the Acts of the Apostles 2:44: ‘All believers lived together and had everything in common’, and 4:32: ‘The group of believers had a single heart and soul...’ portraying a horizontal cenobitism.” (*Bresard, Luc. A History of Monastic Spirituality. Citeaux, 2004. <http://scourmont.be/studium/bresard/or-rules.html>*) Augustine's rule (c. 400 AD) begins:

Before all else, dear brothers, love God and then your neighbor, because these are the chief commandments given to us. The following are the precepts we order you, living in the monastery, to observe. The main

purpose for you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart.

To this ancient emphasis on oneness of mind and heart, the revelation of God to Celeste added a reason, a purpose for this quality of communal life. It was God's desire that the manner in which the members related to one another would be a living demonstration of the quality of his love for each person. Any good teacher seeks visual aids for verbal instruction. It is not enough that we speak our values. Visual and experiential examples are necessary. St. Alphonsus de Liguori once said that if people claim they cannot love Jesus it is only because they have never really known Him. It is as if this institutional idea emerged from a need for visual aids, living witnesses, living examples, of who God is and, most importantly, what God's love looks like. It is not enough to proclaim the Gospel injunction in words; "You must forgive seventy times seven." The possibility of such forgiveness in the human heart takes on a real life when demonstrated in relationships between real people, in real communities, in the real world. To be a living witness, to be a living memory of Jesus, is to most effectively preach the Gospel without using words.

The commission is most abundantly clear in the section of the Primitive Rule entitled "Idea of the Institute and Rules of the Most Holy Savior". "Thus I will that whoever sees you on earth, will mention me in the Institute, and I will that it be a memory of the works done by me during my life." The last paragraph includes: "There will not be among them any distinction of honor... all will be one soul and heart among themselves, because that is how I love in perfect charity... Your life will be lived in perfect unity and charity, and simplicity of spirit in all things, just as I lived mine."

The current Constitutions and Statutes of the Order follow the emphasis on charity and unity as the first of the nine rules of life presented to Maria Celeste. The position of this rule at the head of the list is another arrow pointing to the *raison d'être* of the institute. If the divine requirement of the institute is that the quality of relationship and behavior among its members mirrors the attitude of Jesus, then mutual charity and union of hearts must be the penultimate rule. In the Primitive Rule Jesus does not merely direct, "Love one another, as I have loved you." It is followed by a most touchingly human description of how the nuns of the institute are to live out their commission.

Therefore you will give your neighbors all of your soul. Use your mind to raise them up to my mercy for their benefit, and never judge them of evil in any way. You will give them your memory by pardoning them from your heart, and by completely forgetting any offence received from them, but by remembering it in order to repay them with temporal and spiritual benefits.

You will give them your will by loving them unreservedly, treating them as you would wish others to treat you, wishing them all the good that is possible. You will give them your heart with its affections for my love, sympathizing with their afflictions of corporal or spiritual infirmity.

Employ your body and your senses for their benefit: your eyes that you never see their defects and actions, but to watch for their needs

and come to their relief; your ears to listen to their troubles; your mouth and tongue to defend them modestly and to console them in their afflictions and to instruct them in eternal truths when they are ignorant; and your body and your life should be ready even to be sacrificed, if necessary for their eternal salvation, so that just as I have done, you also should do.

This inspired rule lists eight additional virtues through which the goal of charity and unity modeled on Jesus will be attained. These virtues: poverty, purity, obedience, humility, mortification, recollection and silence, prayer (in order of their presentation) are the means which foster in the corporate community as well as its individual members the interior transformation required for the apostolic job description that is *viva memoria*. Only this interior transformation will enable the growth in charity necessary for bearing witness to the life and love of Jesus Christ; the growth in charity which becoming “living memory” in the community, the Church and the world makes necessary.

Constitution and Statutes of the Order Approved 1985

It is a very worthwhile enterprise to compare the various rules of the Order particularly as they interpret the commission received by Maria Celeste. The Rule of the Order approved in 1934 does not include the introductory material present in the Primitive Rule. However this section, commonly referred to as “The Intent of the Father”, is present in the current rule. In concert with additional articles, it provides the theological underpinning of the Order’s reason for being. Article 5 states:

It was the will of the Father that the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer should have a specific role in His Church: to be a clear and radiant witness of the love He has for us in Christ. It is through Him, in fact, that we have known and received this love which is directed towards all but in a very special way towards the poorest. In order that our brothers and sisters may be fully aware of the love by which they are eternally loved by Him, the Father calls us today to be a living memorial – a Viva Memoria – a constant reminder – of all that the Son accomplished for our salvation during His life on earth...

A provisional rule of the Order approved in 1975 presented one stage of effort made to re-capture the original inspirations of Maria Celeste. “We are called to contemplate God the Father as He manifests Himself in Christ the Redeemer and to continue in our lives the mission He received from His Father for the salvation of the world.” (Art.2.5) “The end she [Maria Celeste] proposed to her Sisters was mystical identification with Christ the Redeemer: recollection in Him, union with Him, such that through the power of the Holy Spirit they will participate in His work and be transformed into Him.” (Art.2.6) Interior transformation in Christ is emphasized throughout this rule. However, this document has little to suggest an outward thrust or observable manifestation of this transformation in the soul. The common life, practice of the virtues, and the contemplative stance are emphasized because they are the means to the transformational purpose of the life. Yet there is no mention of the inspired purpose of the institute, the “witness” dimension which requires that the “living memory” of

Jesus be made present in community and observable to others. The connection between interior transformation and fulfilling the desire of God for an institute in which a communal life of charity would be observable was yet to be made.

In 1985, Father Sabatino M. Majorano, CSsR, presented a series of conferences to three Italian Redemptoristine communities at Scala offering commentary on the newly approved Constitution and Statutes of the Order. Father Majorano's notes, translated into English by Father Joseph Oppitz, CSsR, continue to be, second only to his doctoral thesis, a most valuable resource for understanding of Maria Celeste's original inspiration and purpose of the institute. Father Majorano's enthusiasm for the new rule is obvious. Repeatedly emphasized is the new document's re-appropriation of the core of the inspired rule which is to be living witnesses, living memories of the love of Jesus and God the Father. Attention is often drawn to the practical implications of such a commission; one that makes the Christ-like quality of our inter-personal relationships in community and our relationship with the Church and larger world the very end, the very purpose of Redemptoristine life. He wrote, "The whole vocation demands a communitarian concretization of the Salvific Plan of the Father." (Notes: end of Chapt. 1) Thus the community is to be a microcosm of evangelical life. He points out that in approving this text the Holy See endorsed for the first time the original inspiration of Maria Celeste and declared to the Order, "You are the Viva Memoria of the Redeemer." (Intro. P. iv)

Implications

Is intellectual understanding of the purpose of the Order as that of being a living memory of Jesus at all levels and recognition of the critical position of "Union of Hearts and Mutual Charity" in the primitive and current rules of the Order sufficient foundation for living out the Redemptoristine life? Indications are that Father Majorano would caution otherwise. The very text of the current Rule, its Constitutions elaborated upon by the Statues, offer evidence to support the additional necessity with regard to community life of consciously moving into the realm of the highly intuitive empathetic awareness of human social interaction as realistically described in the opening paragraphs of the primitive rule previously quoted here.

"The Life of Charity in Community" (Chapter 3, 1.60-72) characterizes the community as a family bound by Gospel friendship. It defines community life as "essentially a life in relationship".

It must contribute to the development of the human person,
foster relationships and establish a true unity of heart and spirit.

It presupposes that each holds the others in esteem, and is able to
recognize their value and appreciate their qualities.

Building on a point included in the provisional rule of 1975, these articles promote dialogue at all levels extending to all community acts including meetings, recreation, and work in an atmosphere of simplicity, confidence and friendship. "Thus we must live in perfect unity, charity and simplicity of spirit in everything, as Christ lived with his own." (Chapter 3, 1.62)

It is this very emphasis on the life of charity in community that Father Majorano underscores with the injunction: "Note well...that it is not contemplation which vivifies your life, but rather the Viva Memoria, the transformation in Christ - charity." The list of virtues which follow the call for communal charity in the Rule are means to the end, the

Redemptoristine end, which is to be a living memory of Jesus Christ. With this understanding the spotlight shifts to the scene of our commitment to “*viva memoria*”. The scene is set on the communal stage. Community life; its relationships, manner of communication, cultivation of friendships, awareness of joys and sorrows, empathetic attitude; becomes the benchmark of our charism. The character and quality of community life should be what marks us as Redemptoristines, the attribute with which the Order is associated, such that it may be said, “See how they love one another.”

Relationships will not be forged in a passive atmosphere. The requirements called for in our Constitution and Statutes surpass the realm of merely reactive. They call for a proactive stance. The voice of God directs in the Primitive Rule,

Employ your body and your senses for their benefit: your eyes that you never see their defects and actions, but to watch for their needs and come to their relief; your ears to listen to their troubles your mouth and tongue to defend them modestly and console them in their afflictions...

There are challenges here for every personality type. In those for whom silence and recollection naturally provide a comfort zone, moving from reactive to proactive in the social milieu of community may be a truly demanding but valuable and transformative ascetic practice. For those more naturally outgoing, the asceticism of observing boundaries, of giving individuals their space, may be a great challenge, a version of acquired humility on the way to living memory. In any case, the virtues of community life presented in our rule of life call for radical availability for collaboration, communication, friendship, empathy and service to mention just a few qualities necessary for meaningful inter-personal relationship.

These are the very challenges presented by Redemptorist priest Dennis Billy in his book “Living in the Gap – Religious Life and the Call to Communion” (New City Press, 2011). Father Billy cites sections of the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II “*Vita Consecrata*” which may be applied directly to consideration of how Redemptoristines may interpret their charism today.

Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practice the spirituality of communion as “witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.” (Documents of the Second Vatican Council) The life of communion, in fact, “becomes a sign for the world and a **compelling** force that leads people to faith in Christ...**In** this way communion leads to mission, and itself becomes mission...” (Vita Consecrata, 46)

The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing dialogue in charity, especially where today’s world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence. (Vita Consecrata, 51)

Father Billy acknowledges that the spirituality of communion, other words for what Redemptoristines may call a *viva memoria spirituality*, will never be perfectly lived

out in this world. There is a gap between the ideal and lived experience. For him, “the key question is not whether the gap between the vision and the experience exists in the lives of religious men and woman, but whether they recognize it and assume responsibility for making it smaller and smaller.” (p. 14) Attention is drawn to the following features of community and attitudes toward them as potential gauges of the width of the gap: vision, structures, **interaction, individuality**, personality, motivation, involvement, awareness and loneliness.

To speak of the history, theology and interpretation of the Redemptoristine charism must bring us to honest personal and communal examination of the “gap” as it exists in hearts and in relationships. Good teachers often tell students, “Effort counts.” May the effort we make in this regard close the gap between persons, between the communities of our Order, and contribute to the narrowing of all gaps in human understanding and compassion so that as women of the Church we may more closely follow its directive to be “a Viva Memoria of the Redeemer.”

*God, what love-mischief can ‘We’ do for the world today?”
from The Seed Cracked Open by Hafiz*

Questions for Reflection (Adapted from “Living in the Gap”, Dennis Billy)

1. How would Maria Celeste see our Order today? Would she be happy with it or saddened by it? What concrete changes would she seek? What would she do different today from the time of the Order’s founding? What would you do to implement her vision more effectively today at the individual, local and international levels? Does it relate in any way to the need for developing an authentic language of conversation? If so, how?
2. What are the unique challenges involved in living out Rule 1 – Union of Hearts and Mutual Charity? Which of these do you find most difficult? Are there any that you find easy? In what sense does communion beget communion? Why must the dialogue of communion begin from within and work itself outward? What concrete steps can you take to encourage the living of a spirituality of ‘union of hearts and mutual charity’ in your own community?
3. Besides poverty, chastity, obedience what other virtues are important for life in a religious community. Why are they important? What values do they underscore? How can they be encouraged? Are there any particular structures that can promote them? Are there any virtues vital for a living reality of our charism? What makes our community distinctive? Can you think of any specific structures your community might adopt that might highlight its distinctiveness?
4. Why is perseverance so important for a person’s call in life? How does it relate to the virtue of courage? Why is it so important for life in community? Has your community ever discussed the need for perseverance in the various aspects of its communal life? What concrete step can you take to emphasize its importance?



The greatest of these is Charity.... Love of neighbour- who is my neighbour?

**Sr. Mary Helena U. Aquino, OSsR,
Liguori, USA**

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love than this no man hath that a man lay down his life for his friends" ... (John 15:12) - as personified by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

How many of us would lay down our life for our neighbours? For a friend? For someone we love?

Consider that the precept (rule of Ethics –moral standard) of Charity towards our neighbour is Christ's precept by excellence and like unto the precept of loving God. Mark 12:31: –*"You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself"*, the second greatest commandment. Hence, you love God only as much as you love your neighbour. How can you say I love God whom I do not see and not love my neighbour whom I see? Who is my neighbour? The parable of the Good Samaritan in the Bible is a very good example of who our neighbour is. At present, our neighbour would be either those we come in contact with daily in our lives, on a smaller scale like our family members, our sisters in community, the people we work with, our workers like the cook, maintenance staff etc. and on a bigger scale, like for example, the people who are suffering around the world because of war, hunger, poverty, natural disasters, calamities etc... what have we done for them in our own little way?

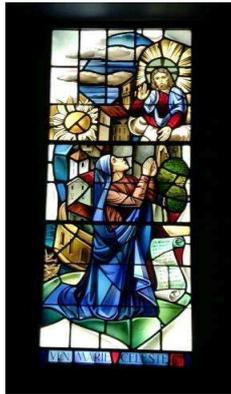
Hypocrites. That was the strongest word used by Jesus against the Pharisees and the Sadducees during his time, who if it is our time now would be those in the priestly and religious life. Jesus condemned them for what they did to the people while they themselves did not practice what they preached. You cannot say I love you to someone who is in need of food, clothing, shelter unless you try to provide for their needs first, according to your capacity to help. *"She hastens full of affection to help her neighbour in her needs be they Spiritual or Temporal"*.

According to our Constitution, Charity for us is a participation in the infinite love which from all eternity unites the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the love of Christ for His Father and for mankind, a love which impelled Him to give His life for His friends and even for His enemies. Jesus said: I lay down my life of my own free will. No one takes it away from me.

What is this love of neighbour that we should try to live everyday of our lives? This can be summed up in 1 Corinthians 13 – When we are patient with someone, that is love, when we are kind, that is love, when we are not jealous, does not put on airs, not snobbish, that is love, when we are never rude, not self-seeking, that is love, when we

are not prone to anger, neither do we brood over injuries, that is love. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to what Love can do, to its trust, its hope, it's power to endure, you yourself can attest that in your love for your wife, your husband, your children, and for us religious, for each member of our community.

Love never fails. If God really lives within us, then the love we have for Him should overflow with the love we have for our neighbours. In the end there are three things that last: FAITH, HOPE and LOVE, but the greatest of these is LOVE. "CHARITY SURPASSES ANY LAW OR RULE". AMEN.





Reflections on spousal love - in preparation for Solemn Profession

Sr. María Sidorova, OssR, Dublin

The vocation of enclosed nuns was always held with respect and esteem in the life of the Church. Our life entirely dedicated to God, is “a sign of the exclusive union of the Church as Bride with her Lord.”³⁴ In the silence of the cloister we give ourselves fully to Christ, our Bridegroom and thus witness to the reality of life yet to come.

The aim of this reflection is to show how our consecration and especially the life of constant prayer makes us spouses of the Word Incarnate. Prior to this, the reference to the Church and the Virgin Mary will be made in order to see a fuller picture of the vocation of being a spouse which is common to every baptised person.

With regard to our Order, there are many aspects to our spousal relationship with the Lord, such as leaving everything behind (cf. Mt 19: 27) in order to belong to God alone; through our life “hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3) we share in his redemptive mission; by spending time with Jesus “on the mountain” we hear the voice of the Father, and are transfigured with Christ for the praise of his glory (Cf. Eph 1:6). This reflection will mainly focus on the latter aspect of being a bride of Christ, namely being with him “on the mountain.” Fixing her eyes upon Jesus’ face (cf. 2 Cor 3:18), the nun herself is transformed and thus bears witness to Christ in the world. This dimension is very much at the heart of our Redemptoristine charism, and its relevance to our life as Redemptoristine nuns will be outlined.

A brief reference will be drawn to Moses who is the model of contemplative prayer. Finally, the inseparable connection between the mount of Tabor and the mount of Calvary will be made, since the nun, the bride of Christ, follows the Lamb wherever he goes (cf. Rev 14: 4).

The Church, cloistered nuns and the Virgin Mary

The marital love of God toward his people is at the heart of the Old Testament (cf. Hos 2:16-24; Jer 2:2; Is 54:4-8). The image of the Church as the Bride of Christ, who is the fulfilment of the Law, is as old as the Church itself (cf. Eph 5: 21-33; Col 3:1-4; Rev 19: 6-9). Consecrated women who are called to communicate *God’s tender love* towards humankind are also “special witnesses to the mystery of the Church, Virgin, Bride and Mother.”³⁵

Cloistered Redemptoristine nuns by the radical *conforming of their whole existence to Christ* that foreshadows “the eschatological perfection” to which everybody is called,³⁶

³⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II, (Sherbrooke: Médiaspaul, 1996), 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

“show forth more powerfully the mystery of the Church as ‘the Spotless Bride of the Spotless Lamb’”.³⁷ Their “withdrawal from the world” in order to lead a more intense life of prayer in solitude, is a very particular way of “living and expressing the paschal mystery of Christ, which is death ordained toward resurrection.”³⁸ However, it must not be thought, because we are separated from the rest of humankind, that we are cut off, as it were, from the world and the Church and are aloof from them.” On the contrary we are very much united with them in Christ, since we are all one in Christ (cf 1 Cor. 10:17; John 17:20-22).³⁹

Maria Celeste Crostarosa, (and with her every Redemptoristine) was and has been given a special mission. Jesus told her that he wants her to *enspouse* all the souls in the Church as well as those who are not in her yet. In doing so she will love them in Jesus and him in them, and take care of their spiritual good.⁴⁰

This mission, however, was firstly entrusted to the Mother of Jesus since the Son of God *enspoused* humanity in her.⁴¹ Therefore Mary is the example of perfect consecration *par excellence*. She reminds us of “the primacy of God’s initiative”, and she becomes for us “the model of acceptance of grace”.⁴² She teaches us the art of discovering God’s will and recognizing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as well as “how to be available with generosity, constancy and courage to carry on to the completion of the mission” God chooses to entrust to us. Mary’s disposition of *listening*, of *prayerfulness* and of *motherhood* sets a unique example for religious women, especially for contemplative nuns.⁴³ “Welcoming the Word in faith and adoring silence, they put themselves at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation,” and as Mary watched over the origins of the Church (cf. Acts 1:14), so now we hold the Church in our loving hearts and praying hands.⁴⁴ Therefore to foster a loving relationship to Mary is “the royal road” to spousal fidelity to one’s vocation.⁴⁵

On the mountain

Religious institutes entirely devoted to contemplation “imitate Christ in his prayer on the mountain.”⁴⁶ By associating with the prayer of Jesus “in a solitary place,”

³⁷ *Verbi Sponsa*, 4

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_13051999_verbi-sponsa_en.html (10 March 2014).

³⁸ *Venite Seorsum*, I.

<http://nebula.wsimg.com/3fc5877a0b2be10e1dc505a8e523a1c1?AccessKeyId=89E10F073C5092CD18DC&disposition=0&alloworigin=1> (10 March 2014).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, III.

⁴⁰ Maria Celeste Crostarosa, *Rozhovory duše s Ježíšom*, [*The Dialogues*], (Bratislava: Redemptoristi – Slovo medzi nami, 2009), 38.

⁴¹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Dublin: Veritas, 1994), 2675.

⁴² *Vita Consecrata*, 28.

⁴³ Elio Gambari, *Religious Life*, (Boston:St Paul Editions, 1986), 133.

⁴⁴ *Verbi Sponsa*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

contemplative religious share “in Christ’s relationship with the Father” in a unique way.⁴⁷

One of the most precious images of Jesus on the mountain is the one when he was transfigured on mount Tabor (Mt 17: 1-9). “The Church contemplates the transfigured face of Christ” in order to be strengthened in faith and so not be dismayed at “his disfigured face on the Cross.” Thus surrounded by his light, she shares in his mystery and stands as “the Bride before her Spouse” on both mounts.⁴⁸ Those who by choosing Redemptoristine life fix their gaze on Christ’s face, hear “the Father’s call to listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the centre of their lives.”⁴⁹

The formula of Profession of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer is based precisely on this gift of transfiguration: “Loving Lord and Father, you have called me to relive in myself the Mystery of Jesus, your well-beloved Son and to be a living memorial of it, and, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to *pour out on the world the light of your love, shining on the face of your Christ, the Saviour of the world*”.⁵⁰ In order to relive in oneself the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the Redemptoristine who is called to “contemplate and bear witness to the transfigured face of Christ,” is also called to a “transfigured” existence.⁵¹ For Redemptoristines therefore, this is a very important call since our specific role in the Church is “to be a clear and *radiant witness* of the love He (the Father) has for us in Christ; we are called to become “a living memorial – a *Viva Memoria* – of Christ.”⁵² Their ideal is to make Jesus’ chastity, poverty, obedience, and all his attitudes and choices our own.⁵³ In this lies the spousal dimension of being transfigured or transformed into Christ. It is precisely this becoming one with Christ which makes the Redemptoristine Christ’s bride. Or as St Paul puts it: “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2: 20).

Besides Jesus’ own example of prayer “on the mountain,” our attention is also drawn to the figure of Moses. His prayer is “characteristic of contemplative prayer by which God’s servant remains faithful to his mission.” For Moses often climbs the mountain to converse with God, “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” (Ex 33:11). Because of his intimate relationship with the faithful God, he “drew strength and determination for his intercession.”⁵⁴ The skin of his face shone because he talked to God (cf. Ex 34: 29), and so does the face of the Redemptoristine who converses with her Bridegroom. Beholding the glory of God she is changed into his likeness (cf. 2 Kor 3: 18) and she too intercedes for God’s people.

However, there is another mount the disciples (and every bride of Christ) are asked to climb - the mount of Calvary. We are invited to contemplate Jesus raised up on the cross, and to be “at one with the fruitful silence of the Word on the Cross.”⁵⁵ There his “virginal love” for the Father and for all humankind is fully expressed; his poverty

⁴⁷ *Verbi Sponsa*, 3

⁴⁸ *Vita Consecrata*, 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

⁵⁰ *Constitutions and Status*, Order of the Most Holy Redeemer, (Rome, 1985), 087.

⁵¹ *Vita Consecrata*, 35.

⁵² *Constitutions and Status*, 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2576.

⁵⁵ *Verbi Sponsa*, 3.

reaches “complete self-emptying”; his obedience leads him to “the giving of his life.”⁵⁶ To this “gift of Christ the Bridegroom”, the Redemptoristine responds by “offering herself with Jesus Christ to the Father and cooperating with him in the work of redemption.”⁵⁷ By giving herself as a gift she fulfils “*the nuptial meaning of the body,*” and thus she becomes not only one with God, but will also be one “with everyone who responds to the wedding invitation of the Lamb.”⁵⁸

The way enclosed nuns live out the spousal union of Christ with his Church is for me a profound mystery and a pure gift. Having been given this gift myself, I bow down my head and knees before Jesus who calls me to be his “transfigured bride” in order to radiate his love towards all people. As a Redemptoristine, preparing for my Solemn Profession, I find a great joy in knowing that my hidden life spent in silent contemplation of Christ’s face can and hopefully does and will bring abundant fruit in the life of the Church and of the world.



⁵⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, 23.

⁵⁷ *Verbi Sponsa*, 3.

⁵⁸ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained*, (Leominster: Gracewing, 2003), 260.