



Spiritual Journey

General Chapter 2024



Society of the Sacred Heart

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Prayer

General Chapter 2024



Holy Spirit, as we prepare this chapter:
teach us to listen to one another with patience and humility,
breathe in us so that your breath may become boldness,
act in us so that your breath may become action,
rekindle in us the **COURAGE** of St Madeleine Sophie.

Life-giving Spirit, guardian of the divine life in us:
enlighten our journey towards the General Chapter of 2024,
nourish our hope, dispel our doubts,
dispose our hearts so that we may welcome the innovation you bring us,
give us the **CONFIDENCE** we need.

Creator Spirit:
live in us your new Pentecost.
Give us the capacity to dream and to trace your newness
in our congregation and in the world,
in our communities, in ourselves.
TRANSFORM US!

Part 1: RSCJ 2023-2024
On the way to the Source

Dear Sister,

The text you hold in your hands, "RSCJ on the Way to the Source," is a spiritual pathway intended to be an instrument of support and prayer to help you go deep during the months of preparation for Chapter 2024. This deepening happens in the context of a synodal Church and in the midst of a broken and blessed world.

It is presented in two parts:

The first part proposes an itinerary to follow during these eight months and in it you will find texts, proposals and suggestions for reflection, prayer and community dialogue that can guide you on this path of transformation by the Spirit that we are undertaking with courage and confidence.

It is addressed to you in three languages: that of Scripture (Gospels, Letters, Psalms...), that of the essential writings of the Society (Constitutions of 1815 and 1982, texts of Sophie, Philippine and some Mothers General, other documents of the Society...) and that which comes to us through the voice of our brothers and sisters. Using the four weeks of the Exercises of St. Ignatius as a framework, Ignatius will accompany you on this journey that opens before us as a unique opportunity: to enter more deeply into the roots of the spirituality that shapes us as RSCJ.

The second part proposes a spiritual retreat for an eight-day experience of prayer and deep encounter with the Lord. It is inspired by the symbol "*to receive a new name*," like the one written on the white stone in Rev.2:17.

The orientation, also Ignatian, makes different proposals for the "inner knowledge" of the Lord: approaching different Gospel characters and some texts of the Society, suggestions for personal prayer and celebrating in community what has been lived. Each province will also receive it as a recording to listen to and the written text will facilitate reflection and personal prayer. This will allow all of the provinces, in different ways, to pray together before the celebration of the Chapter.

This book is not meant to be read quickly and all at once, but to be prayed with and savored slowly. It is meant to guide you through a long process, so you are the one who can choose what you think helps you the most according to the moment in which you find yourself, and to do so with the freedom that the Spirit always gives.

During the time of personal prayer, it is important that you stop where the Word touches your heart. The sole purpose of each suggestion is to accompany you to the threshold of prayer, but once you have crossed that threshold, there is no need to read any further. What happens on the other side of this "threshold" is the Lord's business and that is enough.

It is also important that you prepare yourself, make yourself ready and expand the desire in your heart. We are sure that Mary will be close to us along our path to the Source.

"In all the circumstances of our life, wherever our mission leads us our sole purpose is to glorify the Heart of Jesus, to discover and make known His Love. These Constitutions point out the way. Trusting in the action of the Spirit whose law is written in our hearts, each one of us pledges herself to cherish these Constitutions, to deepen her knowledge of them, to observe them, and to make them live through a fidelity which is constantly renewed. We shall form but one heart and one mind, thus giving reality to the words: *Cor unum et anima una in Corde Jesu.*" (C.1982, 179-181)

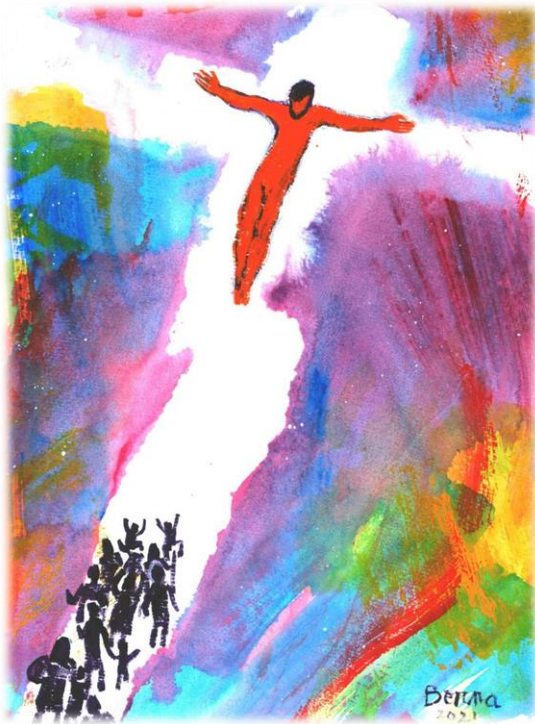
The text "*RSCJ 2023-24. On the Way to the Source*" is divided into eight chapters that broadly follow the four weeks of the Exercises of St. Ignatius. Each rscj has the possibility of going deeper with it during the eight months leading up to the celebration of the General Chapter in August 2024:

1. Born from the open side of Christ
2. Consecrated to the glory of His Heart
3. Founded on prayer and interior life.
4. Aware of our weaknesses
5. Joyful for having found a treasure
6. Committed to following Him for the life of the world.
7. Drawn by the Eucharist into the gift of Christ.
8. Gathered together to form One Body

The six sections of each chapter offer different approaches to deepen (*puiser* would say M. Sophia) our spirituality:

- I listen to the Word
- I get in touch with my heart
- I listen to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine.
- I welcome other voices from our tradition
- I widen my gaze
- I open myself to hope
- We share in community

1. BORN OF THE OPEN SIDE OF CHRIST



*"Man is raised
to praise, reverence,
and serve God our Lord." (Spiritual
Exercises 23)*

*"One of the soldiers
pierced his side with a spear
and at once blood and water came
out." (Jn 19:34)*

*"God's mercy and faithfulness
shine forth in a world wounded by sin.
He has sent His beloved Son
who became one of us and gave us
His life, to set us free, to make us a
new creation and to gather together
all things in Himself for the glory of
His Father." (C.2)*

*"The pierced Heart of Jesus
opens our being to the depths of God
and to the anguish of humankind.
Jesus draws us into His movement of adoration
of the Father and love for all, especially those who are poor." (C.8)*

*"Jesus gave life to the Society on the cross when, from his open Heart came forth
his blood, the ultimate proof of his love for us. How happy is our life and what a
priceless advantage to have come from his Heart."
(Sophie Barat, Memories of the first novitiate in Poitiers. June 1807)*

The heart refers to the totality of the person, to his or her original and intimate center, to the place where choices and behaviors are generated; it expresses the deepest part of us and synthesizes, at the same time, the affective, the intellectual, and the will. It is the *self* in its principle of unification, with all its wealth of intelligence, freedom and tenderness.

That the heart is open means that there is communication from the inside out, that it allows itself to be seen and made known. And also that it is possible to enter, to hide, to find asylum and refuge in it, something that is only possible at the cost of an opening, of a wound.

I listen to the Word

"Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart." (Mt 11:28)

"God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor 1:9)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will...so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you..." (Eph 1:3,4,5,18)

I get in touch with my heart

- ✓ I reread Ephesians 1: the secret of happiness lies in coinciding with God's plan for each of us and in God's call to be "a hymn to God's glorious generosity." (Eph 1:6)
- ✓ I transform this text into a grateful dialogue with the Father by putting it in the person of you: "Blessed are you, God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, who through Christ has blessed me..."
- ✓ I reread my own story, led by the Lord in the light of this text: "The Lord sustained him in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste; he shielded him, cared for him, guarded him as the applied of his eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, The Lord alone guided him; no foreign god was with him." (Dt 32:9-12)
- ✓ Mary of Bethany found at the feet of Jesus "the only thing necessary", her "principle and foundation." I ask myself what is for me "the only thing necessary," that which I was looking for when I made the decision to follow Jesus and which, over the years, continues to attract me. How do I express it now, how do I continue to desire it, what dispersions and distractions of "Martha" am I willing to change?
- ✓ I welcome in my heart the verbs of C.2: *shine forth, send, set free, make new, gather....* I recall my personal experience of these actions of God in my own life. I open a space in me to thank Him, to praise Him, to ask His forgiveness.... I offer myself to God so that God can prolong, beyond my littleness, these same actions in others.
- ✓ I evoke moments in my life in which I have felt "in my place," places in which I have breathed the profound peace of encountering the best of myself, coinciding with God's dream for my life, with my "beginning and foundation," with the most authentic

thing in me, the most germinal and original, that which makes me a unique and irreplaceable woman. I thank the Lord for this experience.

- ✓ In the course of my life I will certainly have met some RSCJ that I can affirm were happy, and that lived well rooted and vitally supported on a solid rock. I can affirm that they got the direction of their lives right and were at peace with themselves and radiated serenity, fullness, joy ... They lived this text of C. 1815: "All their happiness consists in a tender and intimate union with the Heart of Jesus." (341) I pronounce their names inwardly, I bless them, I thank the Lord for their lives.

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine

"Realize the need to become inner souls who, like sunflowers, are always oriented towards the divine Sun of Justice to receive its holy illuminations, its beneficial rays (...) Come on, daughters, launch yourselves into the race, do not delay any longer. I count on you to repair this unfortunate breach, to regenerate the Society. You are the reservoir from which we will draw souls strongly saturated with inner life. Follow with docility the lessons you have received here with so much zeal and repeat with the prophet: "Lord, I begin now." (Sophie Barat's Lecture on the Inner Spirit. Jette, August 1844)

"My health has recovered and, at only seventy-three, I think I can have at least ten more years of work. At other times, I think it is more perfect to await the events that must decide my fate. You see, Reverend Mother, if you authorize me to go in case they want me, which is still very doubtful because I am only a burden, without any occupation. Besides, they are suspicious of me and there is no doubt that they will be happy if I leave. I already realized, from the first days, that they would want me elsewhere." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophie Barat. Letter 576, February 28, 1842)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

"Many of us have made of "being open" a glorious label related to the brain rather than to the heart.... But having "the open side" is something more costly, because the entrance is free and can be uncomfortable, it can allow the other, the different one, to enter and stay, occupy a place, demand a change, beg for friendship, enter with different ideas, with different culture, with his weakness, his worries, his suffering.... And, if he enters, perhaps he will force us to go out to look for more diners. To have a heart like His can mean a heart with the right of entry: for the stranger, for the weak, for the sick, for the politically persecuted, for the wounded in war, for the little one, for the brother who thinks differently. And an open heart, like God's, also lets out blood and water, tenderness, friendship, total gift..." (Concepción Camacho. Superior General 1970-1982, Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 1980)

"We are convinced that today we need to formulate our experience that in the Heart of Christ we find the source of our union with God and of our communion with our brothers and sisters. The glory of the Heart of Jesus defines the purpose of the Society. To this end we open ourselves to the Spirit who leads us to "union and conformity with the interior dispositions of the Heart of Jesus" and, at the same time, leads us to find our response by contemplating him in the circumstances of our daily life. As we discern the action of the Spirit in us, personally and communally, we will find ways to discover and manifest God's love wherever we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. This communication has its source in a profound union with God." (The Fate of the Society is in our Hands)

"Today we are called again to create something new, not because our demographics are changing, which they are, but because the world needs our charism and our mission more than ever: to discover and make known the love of God in the midst of this blessed and broken world." (Barbara Dawson, 2021 Special Chapter Opening Lecture)

"As we launch into a new moment in the history of the Society, let us pause for a moment to remember and pray in gratitude for the courageous and faithful women of the Society who have paved the way for us. (...) Sisters who have invited us and sometimes pushed us to enter new lands or cross new frontiers. For our people, sisters and brothers, who have encouraged us to go deeper, to take risks, to be faithful, who have prayed with us, lived with us and shared our passion for mission." (Barbara Dawson, Closing Conference of General Chapter 2016)

I widen my gaze

"JPIC is a focus of passion, hope and energy for so many in the Society... We are rooted in and draw strength from the well of a very long tradition of working for justice and peace. Our spirituality impels us toward transformation through our contemplation of the pierced Heart of Jesus. This tradition binds us to one another and to others in our common efforts to act out of compassion in order to relieve suffering and effect change in our wounded world." (Being Artisans of Hope)

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"The Lord appeared to him from far away. 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit.'" (Jer 31:3-5)

"By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, Sarah herself, though barren, received power to conceive, even when she was too old, because she considered him faithful who had promised." (Heb 11:8,11)

- With courage and confidence

"We have walked a long way together, always with the desire to share the love of the Heart of Jesus, our hope in the midst of the uncertainty of the world and the Society." (Introduction, Special Chapter 2021 Document)

"We walk together as RSCJ, we walk together with our mission partners, whatever path we choose..." (IPC. Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

I share my gratitude for the gift of God that I have received in the Society.

What is my personal experience of being "born" from the open side of Christ?

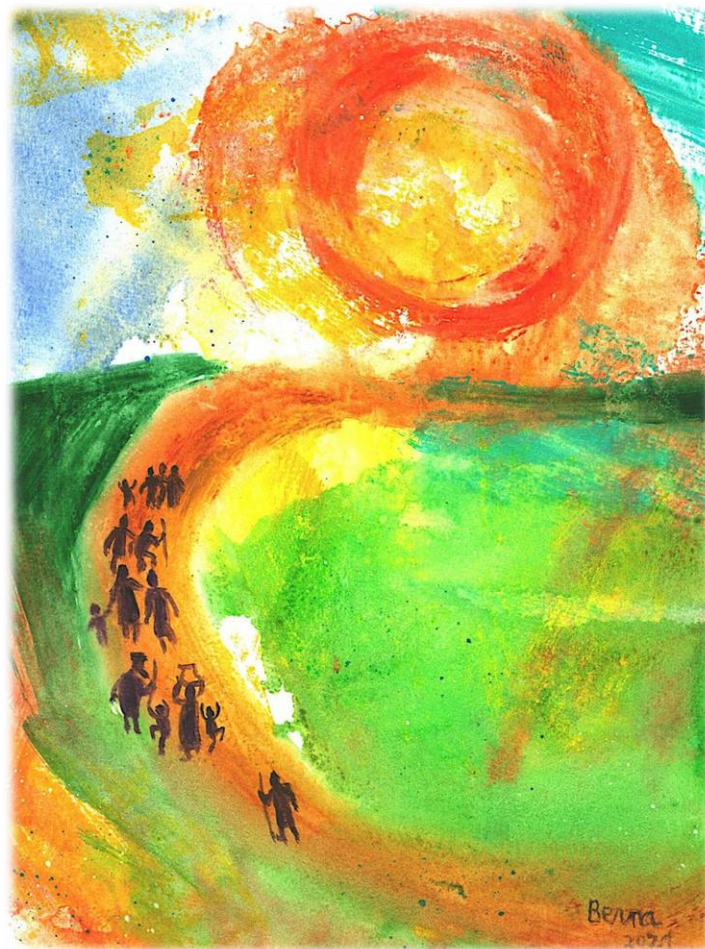
What do I believe God is transforming in me throughout this process of the Society?

2. CONSECRATED TO THE GLORY OF HIS HEART

*"Not wanting or looking for
anything else
but in everything and for everything
greater praise and glory
of God our Lord."
(Spiritual Exercises 189)*

*"Our whole being,
our thoughts, actions, words, movements,
even our breathing,
everything in us should be a praise to the Lord,
everything must be consecrated to his Heart." (Madeleine Sophie Barat)*

(Margaret Williams, Sophie Barat (2 Vols.) II, 477)



Both the Constitutions of 1815 and those of 1982 express this sole purpose: to *glorify the Heart of Jesus*.

The aim of this Society is, therefore, to glorify the Sacred Heart of Jesus, by labouring for the salvation and perfection of its members, through the imitation of the virtues of which this Divine Heart is the center and model, and by consecrating them, as far as it is possible for women, to the sanctification of others as the work dearest to the Heart of Jesus. The Society proposes also honour with particular devotion the Most Holy Heart of Mary, so perfectly conformed in everything to the adorable Heart of Jesus her divine Son.

By our charism we are consecrated to glorifying the Heart of Jesus: we answer His call to discover and reveal His love letting ourselves be transformed by His Spirit so as to live united and conformed to Him, and through our love and service to radiate the very love of His Heart.

(C.1982, 4)

(C.1815, 4)

Hence it follows that the spirit of this Society is essentially based upon prayer and interior life, for we cannot glorify the adorable Heart of Jesus worthily save inasmuch as we apply ourselves to study its interior dispositions in order to unite and conform ourselves to them.

(C.1815, 5 / C.1982, 17)

Prayer, the contemplative outlook on the world, union with Christ in daily living make us grow in the interior life, so that in all circumstances we seek to glorify the Heart of Jesus.

(C.1982, 23)

I listen to the Word

The term *glory* appears frequently in biblical texts:

"Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. (Ex 24:15-18)

"Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord,' and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But, he said, you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.'

And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'" (Ex 33:18-23)

*"Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.
Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds!'" (Ps 66:1)*

"Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge." (Jn 8:50)

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." (Jn 15:8)

"So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed." (Jn 17:5)

"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one." (Jn 17:22)

"He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2:8-11)

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through God's Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:14-19)

I get in touch with my heart

The Hebrew term *kabod* (glory) comes from a root used to express that which has weight and density (the liver is called *kabed* because it is the heaviest organ of the body). The *glory* of a person is for a Hebrew something interior: it is density, weight, consistency. In Luke's account of the announcement to the shepherds, what they hear in the hymn of the angels is that which will be the background music of the whole life of Jesus: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."* (Lk 2:14)

His whole existence will be focused (*emptied in the language of Is 53:12; consecrated in that of Jer 1:5*) on the glory of the Father and on obtaining for us that peace which aligns with what John calls *life in abundance*. (Jn 10:10) The whole life of Jesus has no other meaning and no other quest than the glory of his Father (his Name, his Kingdom, his will...) and this polarizes him in such a way that nothing can come between him and that which is his only desire and his dominant passion.

Madeleine Sophie's "dominant passion" was to "glorify the Heart of Jesus" and her life was directed solely towards Him. Her way of giving Him glory was to contemplate the "weight" of His love, to live in union and conformity with His feelings and interests, His choices and preferences, and to adhere closely to Him and His Kingdom.

✓ In this light, I reread the texts of the 1815 Constitutions:

"The members of this little Society, consecrating themselves wholly and unreservedly to the greater glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus..." (343)

"...their sole ambition is to glorify the Sacred Heart of Jesus." (224)

"Moreover it is upon them principally that will rest the whole hope of the Society, which has no other aim than to glorify the Sacred Heart of Jesus." (110)

"Always under all circumstances it may be said that they work for the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus." (242)

"It is thus that, continually occupied in the care of their own perfection and the sanctification of souls from a desire to glorify the Sacred heart of Jesus, they will live their vocation...." (243)

And those of the Constitutions 1982:

"...in all circumstances we seek to glorify the Heart of Jesus." (23)

"...we ask and promise with joy to give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him until death and to glorify the Heart of Jesus" (42)

"As members of the same Body, through apostolic prayer, mutual support and work undertaken by all, each religious, each community, has a role and shares the responsibility of our mission in the Church, for the glory of the Heart of Jesus." (16)

✓ In the light of these texts that express the grace of my vocation, I try to make this language my own, translate it into my experience and ask myself what is my *weight*, my deepest search, the orientation of my life, the inclination of my heart. And what is my concrete way of "discovering and making known the love of the Heart of Jesus".

✓ I turn the text on simplicity in C. 1815,73 into a prayer:

"Lord, grant me that simplicity which pleases your Heart so much, that simplicity which banishes all pretense and dissimulation, which keeps at a distance all the

silly cunning of self-love, which chooses always the most straightforward and obvious line of conduct, which deals with my neighbor without pretense, without restraint, without affectation and without guile, but with modest ease and with sincere and cordial affection. Simplicity that seeks only what may be most pleasing to you, without thought for myself or my own interests."

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine Duchesne

"My life is sustained by Jesus, my God and Savior. I have understood this marvelous truth and I have dedicated to Him, voluntarily, all that I am. Therefore, if I am His, I must be in Him, in life or in death, after having given Him all my actions, so that I can say with the great apostle: 'It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' Your mother invites you to tend with all your strength towards this divine life." (Sophie Barat to Augusta de Sartorius, July 27, 1864)

"Since what interests Him most is our present state, it is just as we wished it: covered with thorns and difficulties, but softened by the balm of grace and lightened by Providence, so good, which does not abandon us and is perceived at every moment. (...) I am persuaded that God had His purposes in bringing us here. Already the Sacred Heart radiates in several churches, because I have revived my talents of painting and flowers and several altars are adorned thanks to our hands." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophie Barat, Letter 119, November 9, 1818)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

"At the center of our charism is the call to reveal and enflesh the open heart of Jesus, who welcomes and includes everyone, and to live the pierced heart of Jesus, which opens our being to the depths of God and to the anguish of humankind. (C.8) ...Sometimes the opening of my heart happens through piercing. May I let my heart be pierced by the experience of others, by the suffering of the world in which they live or by the challenges the Society faces in trying to live our mission of God's love today. ...Let us also take time to welcome into our hearts the future that is emerging around us in the world... Let us ask to acquire more and more a heart rooted in love, open to life as it moves toward the future that is being born." (Kathy Conan, Superior General 2000-2008, Rome, June 2016)

I widen my gaze

"Our JPIC journey is an artisanal work in progress and the art of weaving is a particularly suitable metaphor for this stage of our shared history. Weaving involves two threads, one horizontal and the other vertical. While we are called to collaborate across lines and frontiers, we also know our work is guided and inspired by the Spirit. Our broken, suffering world is bound together by fragile threads that, together with others, we can strengthen. We hope that all who pursue justice and peace for humankind and creation will see themselves as artisans of

hope. Our joint efforts and collective work contribute to an ongoing process of weaving a new social fabric. As artisans of hope, we derive courage and confidence from our educational mission and Sacred Heart spirituality in a world that calls out for the just use of power, structural and systemic transformation, an ethic of caring, and openness to welcoming people on the move." (Being Artisans of Hope)

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones. But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me..." (Is 49:13-16)

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. We know, indeed, that the whole creation is groaning in travail to this day." (Rom 8:22-25)

- With courage and confidence

"In order to have a new life, we must accept the pangs of giving birth. We are now entering into a time when all of us will need to let go of some things in order to have new life." (Closing Ceremony, Special Chapter 2021)

"In the midst of this situation of a wounded world alongside changing daily situations, we feel the challenge to continue believing that the Kingdom of God can be in our midst." (IPC. Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

What is my experience of living with this *glory* of God dwelling within me? Of living with the weight, the density, the consistency of his love...?

What obstacles prevent this current of Love from passing through me and then to others?

Special Chapter 2021 invites us to "recognize the refrains" that the Spirit is insistently singing in the Society. We can share which ones are ours.

3. FOUNDED ON PRAYER AND INTERIOR LIFE

"The more our soul is alone and apart, she becomes more apt to approach and reach her Creator and Lord; and the more she thus draws nearer, the more she is disposed to receive graces and gifts from his divine and supreme goodness." (Spiritual Exercises 20)

"The spirit of this Society is essentially based on prayer and the interior life, since we cannot glorify the adorable Heart of Jesus worthily, save inasmuch as we apply ourselves to study its interior dispositions in order to unite and conform ourselves to them." (C.1815, 5)



I listen to the Word

"He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" (Lk 11:1)

"But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Mt 6:6)

"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed." (Mk 1:35)

"Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God." (Lk 6:12)

"All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers." (Acts 1:14)

I get in touch with my heart

The action of drawing water (*puiser*) was familiar to Sophie who would go to fetch it daily from the well of her house. For her, God will always be a Spring of living water, a torrent overflowing with love and life and she often repeats in her letters the expression "*puiser* of His Heart."

In the Index of the Constitutions are the texts on *puiser*, an image that can illuminate my experience of prayer.

- ✓ I follow Sophie's recommendation to "take a liking" to prayer and begin by studying it in the Constitutions:

In C.1815 67; 247; 333 the terms *oration* and *prière* appear interchangeably.

It is called:

foundation and support
the most sacred obligation
the sweetest occupation
holy exercise

These verbs direct their action:

leads us to the Heart of Jesus
unfold to us his adorable perfections, his immense charity
purify our hearts
unites us closely to the Heart of Jesus by conformity to his sentiments, affections and will

The rscj must:

contemplate, study and know in depth the inner dispositions of the Heart of Jesus
consider it essential
to take a liking to it
to have the habit and the taste for prayer
to make it their delights
to take care of the time dedicated to it

Paragraphs 18-25 of the C.1982 use these terms:

demand for love
unique call
personal encounter
transforming us through His *power*

Requests:

silence
poverty
love
free of charge
my wish

These are the verbs that refer to it:

visit
be
stay
see
feel
live
receive
grow
love
search
save

- ✓ I recall my personal prayer journey: attractions, lights, darkness, rhythms, learnings, crises, new beginnings, accompaniment....
- ✓ General Chapter 2016 invites us to:
"To create silence: To deepen our interior life, our capacity for contemplation and for listening to the heartbeat of God in ourselves and in our world; to discern in silence and welcome the action of the Spirit that transforms us, energizes us, and calls us to live our prophetic and educational mission."
- ✓ I imagine that I am sitting next to Madeleine Sophie, sharing with her my small steps to "deepen my interior life."

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine:

"What is the inner spirit? It is the complete sacrifice of ourselves by the mortification of our senses, the immolation of our passions, the constantly renewed remembrance of the presence of Him for whom we act. The interior spirit is the intimate union of our soul with God, the chaste fear of displeasing Him, the absolute and immediate dependence on the grace of God, on the secret touches of the Holy Spirit. It is a fine and delicate touch of the soul to recognize the action of God and to surrender to it. It is the total renunciation of self and of one's own interests. (...) Interior persons are usually the most joyful and lovable. As you are about to enter the Exercises and meditate on the first fundamental truth, the interior spirit is nothing more than this truth understood in all its height, depth and breadth. The interior spirit makes the soul breathe, live and move only in God."
(Conference of Sophie Barat on the Interior Spirit, Jette, August 1844)

"Sea sickness is a wretched malady. Besides feeling as if one has thrown up four or five times in a row, the head is also affected as much as the stomach. One is totally incapable of anything, even short consecutive thought and the smallest aspiration can hardly draw more from the heart than some small feeling. I could only manage: Ita Pater or "I have left all for You, my God." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophie Barat, Letter 93, May 16, 1818)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

A simple consent to whatever God wills in the innermost depths of the soul. A simple consent: an act that the soul abandons, as soon as it is begun, to the current of grace so that it may carry it wherever it wishes. A very simple act, the simplest that can be done, but placed in the current of grace and enlivened by it, it expresses the deepest tendencies. In each of the acts that grace inspires, all its hidden richness is expressed. In each of these acts, the soul, in a very simple way, feels the contact of this life and it will be of no use for it to want to have a more precise consciousness. It does not have to go in search of a more intense act, a more vivid feeling of the life that is in it. I would add nothing. It is enough that, in secret, one enters into contact with this life and then will open themselves to a very pure and very simple joy." (Sabine de Valon Superior General 1958-1967, Hand-written notes. Monique Luirard, Sabine de Valon)

"Contemplation is not a luxury for those who have leisure time and who want to get away from reality. It is a contemplation which lays our whole being open to being seized by God, that is to say, by the love of Christ...One needs time to be seized thus by the reality of God's love, but it is this contemplation which vitalizes our love of neighbor. We have noted in our travels as a team that the most prophetic people are those who go apart for deep periods of solitude and contemplation. These are the people who change the world." (Concepción Camacho, Superior General 1970-1982, Meeting of Provincials. Vienna, July 1973)

I widen my gaze

"The World: Our Starting Point. There seemed no other possible starting-point for our reflection than this world in which we, Religious of the Sacred Heart, are immersed, which daily startles and fascinates and infuriates us, whose systems stun us by their complexity and reach. Here, rather than in documents, we chose to begin, situate, and root our search together. Why? Because of the conviction that the world, for all its brokenness, is God's great self-revelation, and because we are called every day to share in its re-shaping into a place where justice is done, where the cry of the poor does not go unheard, where 'swords are beaten into ploughshares, spears into sickles, where nation does not lift sword against nation, where there is no more training for war.' (cf. Mic. 4,3) It may seem visionary, this biblical hope, but it is not unrealistic." (ICE International Commission on Education 1988)

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"Each one helps the other, saying to one another, "Take courage!" The artisan encourages the goldsmith, and the one who smooths with the hammer encourages

the one who strikes the anvil...But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off." (Is 41:7-9)

"In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light." (Col 1:3, 11-12)

- With courage and confidence

"My hope and my prayer is that God will give us the courage and the wisdom we need to enter into this moment of discernment, that we have the freedom to let go of anything that will block the Spirit, that we will humbly acknowledge our need of each other..." (Opening Conference Special Chapter, 2021)

"This moment in time impels us outwards, demanding that we work creatively with others to keep our mission – the Sacred Heart charism – alive. It is imperative that we widen our perspective, valuing the mutual enrichment of all our interactions. (...)venturing into new territories, exploring physical spaces, challenging our own mental models and assumptions makes our mission ever more effective in responding to the insistent clamoring of our people and of the earth." (IPC Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

What three words would I choose to talk about my prayer?

When I pray, where are my brothers and sisters?

Special Chapter 2021 invites us to live "united with Mary, whose Heart was both joy-filled and pierced, courageous and questioning." What is our relationship with Mary at this moment?

4. AWARE OF OUR WEAKNESSES

*"May our Lady
reach me with the grace of your Son and Lord...
so that I may feel the inner knowledge of my sins
and the disorder of my operations." (Spiritual Exercises 63)*



In 1805 Sophie wrote to Philippine: "Continue, dear daughter, to take care of yourself and to grow at all times in the love of Jesus Christ. May this love consume all that is not Him; your Spouse asks for your whole heart, without reserve. He continually addresses these words to you: *"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away...Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards—for our vineyards are in blossom."* (Song of Songs 2:10,15)

A text from the Constitutions of 1815 describes this work of "catching the little foxes": simplicity which "banishes all pretense and dissimulation, keeps at a distance all silly cunning of self-love, chooses always the most straightforward and obvious line of conduct, leads us to deal with our neighbor without pretension or constraint, without affectation and without guile, but with modest ease and sincere and cordial affection; finally, that simplicity which, with regard to God, leads the soul to seek in all things only what is most pleasing to Him, in conformity with the Heart of Jesus, without thought of self or self interest." (73)

Sophie spoke realistically about human relationships: *"We don't live as angels but as human beings and sometimes we forget that. You know and admire people but when they make real mistakes, they let you down. When this happens to me, to be at peace I try to put myself in their place and not judge by appearances. After all, what would I gain by knowing something for which I have no remedy? I hope. Everyone has her own point of view, and I respect those who are different from mine."* (Madeleine Sophie to A. de Rozeville, 31-5-1828)

She was well acquainted with the "stumbling blocks" of human behavior.

I listen to the Word

The "foxes", disguised as pretexts and resistance, are present in the reactions of these biblical characters:

"Moses said, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent. Oh my Lord, please send someone else'." (Ex 4:10)

"Jeremiah said: 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy'." (Jer 1:6)

"Peter said: 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!'" (Lk 5:8)

The beloved of the Song also has excuses for not opening for the one who knocks at her door: *"I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen! my beloved is knocking. 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.' I had put off my garment; how could I put it on again? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them?" (Song of Songs 5:2-3)*

The Samaritan woman asks useless questions to the foreigner who asks her for water: *"How is it that you, a Jew, dare to ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? (...) Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that 'living water'? Are you greater than our ancestor, Jacob? (...) Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, and yet you say that..." (Jn 4:9, 11, 12, 20)*

The paralyzed man who had been by the pool for 38 years said: *"I have no one to put me in the pool..." (Jn 5:7)*

I get in touch with my heart

- ✓ I can identify with the bride in the Song of Songs and the trivial motives that prevent her from meeting the one who is knocking at her door; or with the Samaritan woman behind her superficial answers; or with Martha, who excuses her busyness so as not to sit down to listen to Jesus? Or with someone who hides behind his incapacity, like Moses or Peter. Or with those who use their age as an excuse: "I'm too young," "I'm too old," "I've been trying for 38 years."
- ✓ I dare to descend to that place in my heart where I generate pretexts, excuses, little lies, habits that I consider "unrenounceable" and untouchable. They are old resistances, defenses, barriers or reasonings that I use to protect myself, to prevent the One at the door from asking too much of me. All those things that, in moments of absolute sincerity, I recognize as obstacles to surrendering myself completely to Him, but which I do not feel generous enough to renounce...
I expose myself, just as I am, before the One who can heal me....

The Constitutions of 1815 are very realistic in speaking of the difficulties of coexistence:

"They will fulfill toward each other with holy joy every duty of tender and sincere charity, gently bearing with the faults of their sisters..." (342)

"Hence it is from this Divine Heart that they must draw this love and...learn to love their sisters, to bear their faults, their weaknesses and inopportunities..." (74)

"She must not be surprised at the defects and imperfections she will meet within the souls of these..." (85)

The same sincerity of language in 1982:

"Knowing our weakness and our involvement in the sin of the world, we participate often in the sacrament of reconciliation. We joyfully welcome God's mercy which renews our hearts..." (27)

"The Society receives the novice with her gifts and her limitations..." (82)

"Limited and weak as we are, we want to celebrate the love of the One who says: 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.'" (Lk 6:20) (60)

"There are times when we feel more keenly our own weakness and the sacrifices demanded by this way of life." (68)

"In prayer we will discover that the fidelity of God dwells at the very core of our weakness." (115)

- ✓ I give thanks to the Lord who so often "brought me into the wilderness and spoke tenderly to me" (Hos 2:14). I reaffirm my faith in the mercy of the Lord who opens before me anew the possibility of beginning a new covenant with Him. I open myself to this future of total reconciliation, of true restoration and an absolutely new beginning.
- ✓ I make Paul's attitude my own: *"I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 3:13-14)
- ✓ I entrust myself to *"the Spirit dwelling within us and transforming us through His power to remove whatever hinders His action"* (C.21)

This experience of forgiveness received helps us to live more humbly, "more humanly: In the radical style of Jesus of Nazareth, we wish to be in closer relationship as sisters, with one another and with others.; we wish to be simpler, more human and closer to people and their experience, in order to show forth the joyful and compassionate face of God and to be at the service of Life, wherever we are sent." (General Chapter 2016)

- ✓ *Radicality* invites us to go back to the roots of a tree, to what nourishes its vitality from within and allows it to bear fruit. How do I take care of those inner attitudes of understanding and tenderness that make me more human and fraternal?

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine Duchesne

"I am not talking to you about new sacrifices: you could think about it and get tired with it all. No, I am referring to the continual renunciation of yourself, to acquiring

the spirit of humility and meekness, to the spirit of prayer. This is for you "the cleft in the rock." (Madeleine Sophie to Philippine, March 27, 1805)

"It is necessary that meekness and humility be our virtues; they must be engraved in us, circulating in our veins. We will never be completely united to the Heart of Jesus to the extent that He wills, if we do not carry in our own hearts the love, the attraction and the practice of humility. How I long to carry it engraved in me as by a stylus of fire!" (Adèle Cahier. Vie de Sophie Barat II, 423)

"Father Varin spoke to us about the need to live our fidelity to Jesus Christ in an apostolic way. Suddenly he turned and, looking at Julie Billiart and me, said, 'Can we expect anything good from this?' But we felt no discouragement because we came to the conclusion that, if the Lord wants to work with nothing, it is because he wants to do everything in His name." (Margaret Williams, Life of Sophie Barat, 127)

"When the Lord makes His presence felt, there is no time to take care of oneself. He makes me feel what I am before him, what a little thing." (Adèle Cahier. Vie de Sophie Barat II, 500)

"If God removes the means to make ourselves useful, that is what we must wish. Sometimes I think God ruins our first attempts, our first work, in order for us to build up the so longed for instruction of [the Indigenous]. That must be merited through humiliation and other mishaps." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophie Barat. Letter 241, July 25, 1824)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

"At times we feel uneasy about the diversity of our response to the needs of today's world. Can we respond to everything? What is our particular response? Are we really where we are needed? In our visits to provinces we hear these questions and many others. Each one's apostolic service is part of the common mission of the province, and it is important that each one be "sent." In this way it is our mission that unites us, erases boundaries and is stronger than our differences." (Patricia Garcia de Quevedo, Superior General 1994-2000, Feast of the Sacred Heart 1997)

"We are living through a time when the world is chaotic and we recognize our own powerlessness as well as our own need for transformation. Maybe we have actually arrived at a time when we understand our need of each other, our need of people and experiences beyond our comfort zone. And most of all, perhaps this is a time when we recognize our need to see ourselves humbly as we are and connect more deeply with our Center and our strength, the pierced Heart of Jesus..." (Barbara Dawson, Feast of the Sacred Heart 2023)

I widen my gaze

"To acknowledge our complicity in systems that hurt, diminish, and disregard others and our earth is a sign of our capacity to respond to God's call in a new way – that of strength in weakness. Such awareness of our personal, communal, congregational, institutional complicity in unjust systems humbles us. It invites us to be more open to the transforming work of the Spirit in us and in the world. We are called to listen and be reconciled, to confront our own sins of racism, classism and sexism, and from this profound awareness of our weakness and complicity, to take action with others to advocate for structural and systemic change."
(Being Artisans of Hope)

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival." (Zeph 3:14-17)

"And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'" (Rev 21:2-5)

- With courage and confidence

"...a force of conversion and transformation that made us available not only to listen and welcome one another but also and above all to distinguish the 'refrains' that the Spirit regularly sang with insistence for the Society...We drew strength from the lives of our sisters who have gone before us." (Opening Conference, Special Chapter 2021)

"We are called to transform and be transformed – ourselves, our communities, our apostolates, our land – by the power of the Spirit: "The Spirit dwelling within us gradually transforms us..." (Const. 21). This is a call to interior transformation that spreads outwards in interlocking circles of care, compassion, communion, to impact our world." (IPC. Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

In what structures of sin in the world do I recognize myself as complicit?

What are my experiences of reconciliation? What are my resistances to it, my choices to be open to it?

Special Chapter 2021 invites us to reread Special Chapter 1967. After spending some time reading it, we share our reactions.

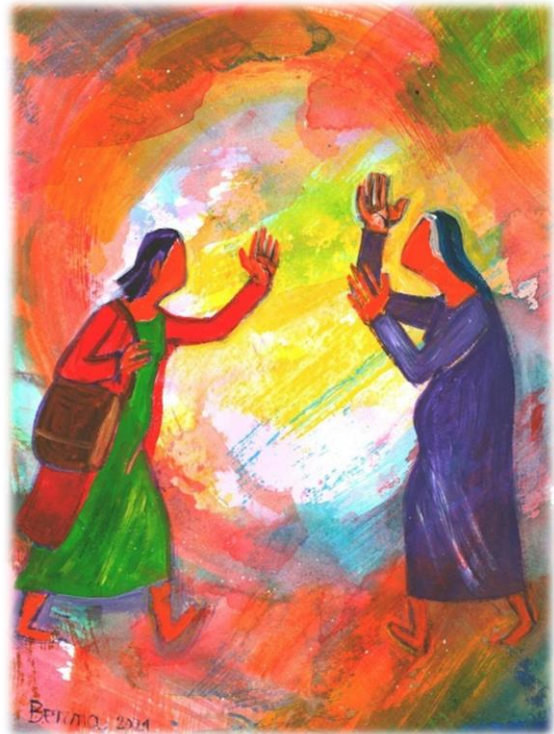
5. HAPPY TO HAVE FOUND A TREASURE

*"Not knowing much
and soul-satisfying,
but the feeling and taste of things
internally." (Spiritual Exercises 2)*

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure
hidden in a field, which someone found
and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all
that he has and buys that field." (Mt 13:44)*

*"In His goodness and generosity, He has
enlightened her by revealing the wonderful
treasures of grace hidden in the Heart of
His Son." (C.1815, 1)*

*"With the joy of finding our treasure,
we welcome this gift in faith." (C. 1982,61)*



It could be said that the group of the first RSCJ who approved the first Constitutions were under the influence of the joyful experience of having found a treasure.

The 2nd General Congregation of the Society (November 1 - December 17, 1815) was composed of Madeleine Sophie Barat (Superior General since 1806), Philippine Duchesne, Joséphine Bigeu, Henriette Grosier, Emilie Charbonnel, Felicitas Desmarquets, Geneviève Deshayes, Susanne Geoffroy, Emilie Giraud, Henriette Girard and Eugénie de Gramont. It was an assembly of young women, dynamically led by a 36-year-old superior. The sufferings of the past had made them experienced women, full of creativity and hope. The Constitutions received the approval of the Church on December 22, 1826.

The beginning of the Abridged Plan inspired that of the Constitutions of 1982, which maintain the same Trinitarian movement: God the Father, by sending his Beloved Son to gather all in Him, made us discover the treasures of love enclosed in his Heart and it is in this mission, which is continued through the Church, that the mission of the Society is inserted:

<p>"God, whose providence arranges all things wisely for the good of His Church, has always given her help adapted to her needs. It is, however, especially in this latter age that, in His goodness and generosity, He has enlightened her by revealing the wonderful treasures of grace hidden in the Heart of His Son. Thus it was His will to ensure that this Divine Heart should receive the worship of love and adoration which is its due; He willed also through this devotion to rekindle the torch of faith and the sacred fire of love which irreligion was striving to extinguish in the hearts of all.</p> <p>(C.1815, 1)</p>	<p>God's mercy and faithfulness shine forth in a world wounded by sin. He has sent His beloved Son who became one of us, and gave up His life, to set us free, to make us a new creation and to gather together all things in Himself for the glory of His Father. This mission is carried on through the Church, the People of God, until the Kingdom in all its fullness has come. The Society of the Sacred Heart shares in this mission by making known the revelation of God's love, whose source and symbol is for us the Heart of Christ.</p> <p>(C.1982, 2.3)</p>
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The language of the Abbreviated Plan is intense (providence, wisely, wonderful treasures, receive the love and adoration which is its due, to rekindle...) and communicates the certainty that everything is a gift of the Father because what is proper to God is to communicate, spread, illuminate, reveal, manifest, open what is closed, give Himself, surrender Himself, empty Himself... From there, Sophie draws her confidence and from there is born her desire to welcome these immense treasures of grace enclosed in the Heart of Jesus.

I listen to the Word

"Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor." (Pro 3:13-16)

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." (Mt 13:45-46)

"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Cor 4:7)

"They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life." (1 Tim 6:18-19)

I get in touch with my heart

As a Society, we are living a significant moment that places before us, as before the character in the parable of the treasure, the urgency of a choice: "to sell" (to let go, to renounce, to let go...) in order to "buy" the treasure. This is why we need to make choices: "This attitude helps us to respond better in our mission to the calls of God in reality and to make choices more consistent with the Gospel." (C. 32)

- ✓ I can reflect on these statements:

The joy of discovering the treasure necessarily leads to a choice.

In the choosing, my will and my decision come into play as a priority.

This search process requires time, effort, and discernment.

Choosing something precious means giving up something else.

Reaching a decisive choice may give me a feeling of victory, but it is the joy of finding and possessing the treasure that trumps all else.

- ✓ The Abbreviated Plan reveals a God who gives, discovers, and makes known his treasures. I wonder what my "treasures" are... Do I give them away or hide them?
- ✓ The verbs *rekindle* and *extinguish* express two opposite dynamics. I search in my own life for what *revives* me and what *weakens* me.
- ✓ I take time to contemplate my own history and that of the Society "wisely disposed" for the good. I thank the Lord for having received at all times "help proportionate to my needs". I recall some of those moments of "need" and name the help I received.
- ✓ Joy is very present in the Constitutions: I read these texts and, if I miss the presence of this joy in me, I ask myself why.

"As members of an international Society, we open our hearts to the needs of other countries...We are convinced that the love of Jesus can be made known through us and can transform selfishness into love and concern. (114)

"The fruit of this spirit of poverty, which is so essential to the Society, will be an attraction for the simplicity, joy and freedom of heart to which God wants to lead us." (60)

"...joy of being called and sent to love as Jesus has loved us." (40)

"We ask and promise, with joy, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him until death." (42)

"When helplessness, deprivation, or insecurity in life bring us to greater poverty, we shall have the joy of following Jesus more closely in His poverty." (56)

"The atmosphere of joy and generosity help our communities to become humble but real signs of that all-inclusive love..." (64).

"We are convinced that the love of Jesus can be made known through us and can transform selfishness into love and concern. This conviction is for us a source of joy." (114)

"[Old age] may be the most contemplative period of our life, keeping its prophetic and apostolic power through the truth and depth of our relationships and the joy with which we bear witness to the fidelity of God's love." (116)

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine

"As you know, He Himself is the Founder of this little Society to which He has given His spirit and of which He wants to be the model. Hidden in Mary's womb, he was already forming his Church and was establishing the Society of her Heart as a means of salvation. What a journey he made through the world! A hidden life, poor and abject; sufferings, states of humiliation inconceivable for a God. This is our Model, my dear daughters, our divine Founder. Long before the existence of this little Society, Our Lord made known to His servants His desires for it. He bequeathed to them His spirit and manifested that it should unite the interior spirit of St. Teresa, the humility and gentleness of St. Ambrose and the zeal of St. Ignatius.

When our Constitutions were written, this revelation was not known, or at least not taken into account, and yet you see how the purpose of God is formally expressed in them. What do you read in the first part: "This little Society is essentially founded on the interior spirit". In the second part: "The Spouses of the Sacred Heart must strive to imprint, each day more deeply in their hearts, the love of humiliation. They must see themselves as the last of all, and be content in the lowest employments. Finally, the works of zeal and the means employed by the Society to procure the glory of the Sacred Heart are then expounded together with the virtues they demand: living faith, profound contempt for the world, simplicity, obedience." (Conference of Sophie Barat on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 10, 1846)

"I was longing to show you my joy and gratitude to our Lord, when I received your letter. So now I must freely give rein to my dearest wish since you do not refuse me the hope of fulfilling my intention one day, my thoughts and my prayers are directed towards those countries where at last I may give service to our Lord and be rich in Him alone." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophia Barat, Letter 9. March 1806)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

"This joy of which I speak to you is the daughter of love that runs, flies and rejoices. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who produces it by his presence and maintains it when nothing is denied it. It runs like a vibrant note through all our Constitutions.

There we are asked to obey with joy; to rejoice if poverty sometimes lets us feel its effects; to follow the Bridegroom of virgins to whom all the fibers of our heart belong, bearing joy imprinted on our foreheads. And if, in following this humiliated and crucified Bridegroom, humiliation and the Cross also become our inheritance, the Rule invites us to welcome them with joy. What could disturb a heart that truly seeks only its God and has no other interests than his glory...? The generous soul is also the happiest, and when it has given everything, its joy reaches its height." (Marie de Loë. Superior General 1865-1874. Circular Letter January 18, 1925)

"The text of our Rule on charity is animated by a spirit so pure, so radiant, so penetrating, that one would say it was inspired by a very intimate conversation with the divine Heart "flagrans amore nostri", by a breath of that bonfire of love communicated to the heart of our Blessed Mother to show her how that immense charity could be reflected and reproduced by our poor human heart, aided by the help of grace. Let us pause only before this exclamation which reveals the impotent effort to communicate what she herself had understood: 'Who can understand the extent and strength, the purity and holiness of this love that Jesus Christ commands us!' Indeed, who can understand it?" (Janet Stuart. Superior General 1911 - 1914. Circular letter of January 3, 1912)

Propter amorem. "Because of love." For we love Him whose face and comeliness we have never seen. We have left all things for Him whose voice we have never heard. We follow Him along roads whose routes we know not. Without any human assurance, we have given ourselves in the risk ordained by faith. But this faith in the invisible love of Him who is all for us, is more secure than any human assurance. Without seeing Him, without hearing Him, without touching Him, we know who He is; we believe in His Heart; we trust what He is doing. Our soul lives its faith in a total abandonment which has no doubt, no fear, no desire. PROPTER AMOREM: because of Him whom she sees, whom she loves, in whom she believes, whom she has chosen above all things, in faith." (Marie Thérèse de Lescure, Superior General 1946 - 1958. Circular letter June 25, 1954)

I widen my gaze

"What is this new life that energizes us, that we want to proclaim to the entire world? We do have a sense that something new is coming to birth...in her opening conference, Patricia said that we would "recognize the Spirit who cries out and who pours out her wisdom on us in the act of giving birth." I realized that we came here to discover anew our educational mission, and what we finally discovered anew was the transforming power of God's love. In the discussion on community the discernment of six weeks reached a height and a depth that left me in awe. We seemed to experience a kind of exchange of hearts, which made possible the experience of having one heart: Cor Unum et Anima Una in Corde Jesu. It was the seal of the Spirit on our Chapter." (Clare Pratt, Superior General 2000-2008 Closing of the 2000 General Chapter)

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." (Is 35:1-4)

"In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1Pe, 1:6-9)

- With courage and confidence

"Despite the challenges of this moment in history we see the signs that the Word of God incarnated among us is working to overcome the darkness." (Opening Conference, Special Chapter 2021)

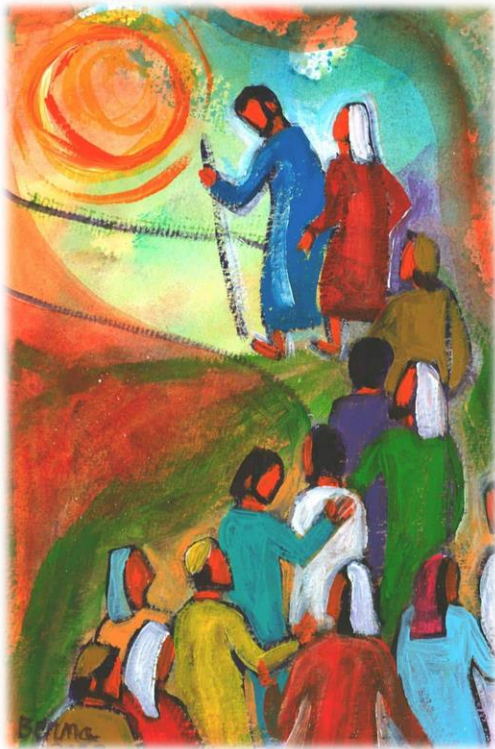
"Let us rejoice in the knowledge that we are all called to explore our personal responsibility to the advancement of our mission through these Priorities. This participation fills us with energy and hope wherever we are living and serving life. We are filled with courage and confidence drawn from the Heart of Jesus to walk this journey because we know we do not walk it alone; we walk together and we walk with God who goes before us always." (IPC Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

What are my experiences of joy and to what or whom do I grant the power to take them away?

What "treasures" of my life am I determined not to lose?

6. COMMITTED TO FOLLOWING HIM FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD



*"Demand inside knowledge of the Lord,
who for my sake has become a man,
so that more will love and follow him.
(Spiritual Exercises 104)*

*"O Jesus, my light, my love, my life:
let me know you alone,
to love you alone,
that I may live only from you, by you,
in you and for you..."
(Madeleine Sophie,
End of her Exercises in 1839)*

Madeleine Sophie felt a special attraction for her patron saint: *"St. Magdalene, the first adorer of the Heart of Jesus, must be the model of our love, of that tender and generous love which refuses nothing and is always ready to give itself completely; and also of zeal for the salvation of our neighbor, because only this can procure the glory of God."* (Conference on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene 1827)

"Who among us would not have wanted to have the joy, no doubt heartbreaking, of witnessing the sacrifice of the cross, of being on Calvary like Magdalene, of receiving the precious blood of Our Lord? And do we not have this joy every day at Holy Mass?" (Christmas Conf. 1835)

She would surely have liked this description of the woman who followed Jesus and became his disciple:

*"Of others it is said that they left everything to join Jesus: Mary Magdalene had nothing to leave, she could only gain everything. She did not follow him like others, she only knew that he was the only place in the world where she could live and where she could abandon herself to life. She followed him as swallows follow the summer. Mary Magdalene found herself again in the company of Jesus, and he must have been for her the place where, for the first time, she could simply Be."
(E. Drewermann, L'Evangile des femmes)*

The preferred language of the Constitutions to speak of the following of Jesus is that of *union and conformity*, two words that mark our spirituality:

Constitutions 1815:

"The Heart of Jesus should be to them as an open book in which they study all that concerns each particular virtue...so that afterwards when they are called upon to perform acts of these different virtues, they need only cast one look upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus in order to conform and unite themselves to His interior dispositions." (71)

"...let them be thoroughly penetrated with the thought that their whole perfection corresponds to the union which they should have with the Heart of Jesus, by conformity of their sentiments, affections, and will." (80)

Constitutions 1982:

"Called like Mary to follow Christ in a life conformed to His..." (41)

"For us, life, community, apostolic service, all spring from our union and conformity with the Heart of Jesus. This grace of vocation is a way of conversion and apostolic fruitfulness." (8)

"To live ever more united to Christ in our relationships, our tasks and our ministry..." (22)

"Our union and conformity with the Heart of Jesus widens our capacity to love and to be loved." (62)

"The novice...will deepen her insight into her vocation to union and conformity with the Heart of Jesus." (84)

"...that spirit of union and charity which should characterize our Society." (180)

"The Spirit dwelling within us...unites and conforms us to Jesus. (21)

The expression *"union and conformity"* condenses the plan of God that runs through all of Scripture. The word *union* evokes following, intimate relationship, closeness; *conformity* goes beyond imitation and expresses similarity, affinity, coincidence, identification. The consecrated expression of the Constitutions, in inviting us to contemplate the Heart of Jesus as *center and model*, synthesizes the two essential and complementary aspects of the spirituality of the Society. To see the Heart of Jesus as *model* is to find in Him a movement of growing in conformity to His sentiments and dispositions. To see it as *center* is to discover its interiority within a mystery of covenant in which reciprocal exchange creates the most intimate union.

"Union with the Heart of Jesus makes real the spirituality of the Society. This union certainly passes through conformity to the dispositions of the Heart of Jesus. The spiritual fruit of all true conformity is, however, the union of hearts." (Dominique Sadoux RSCJ - Pierre Gervais SJ, The Religious Life, p.109)

The wisdom of Madeleine Sophie, tucked into the Constitutions of 1815, underlines the price of this union:

"...let them hold this principle as certain, that if their happiness consists in a tender and intimate union with the Heart of Jesus, their Divine Spouse, there can never exist for them union of heart if there be not union of will; without the latter, all would be delusion and falsehood; now obedience only can effect this union."
(C.1815, 341)

This is another way of expressing the text of the Exercises: "Whoever wishes to come with me must work with me, so that by following me in sorrow, they may also follow me in glory."
(95)

St. Ignatius proposes a triangle with three words at each of its angles: with me-work-content, a kind of "spiritual geometry" that communicates the secret of a life of following Christ. And he warns against the temptation to keep only two of them: - with me/content (temptation not to pay the price of following); with me-works (temptation of a voluntaristic following with the emphasis on doing); contentment/works (temptation to seek the satisfaction of efficiency and take pride in one's efforts).

I listen to the Word

The Hebrew verb *dabaq* (to be attached, to cling, to join...) expresses the attitude that the Lord expects from his people:

"Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him." (Deut 30:19)

"My soul clings to you, and your right hand holds me fast." (Ps 63:8)

"For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the Lord, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory." (Jer 13:11)

Ruth decided to remain united with Naomi: "Where you go, I will go; where you dwell, I will dwell; your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried; let only death separate us."
(Ruth 1:16-17)

Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Mt 16:24-25)

I get in touch with my heart

- ✓ I expose myself to the strong affective component of these texts, to that irresistible attraction that pushes someone not to separate herself from the person or place in which she has found life. This is how a tree takes root by streams of water (Ps 1:3)

and how the branches partake of the sap of the vine. (Jn 15:4-7) As if they know that they can only be what they are when they unite, when they take root and remain in that which gives them a name and the possibility of existence. No one dictates it to them from outside; it is their own desire to be and to live that pushes them from within, that makes them adhere blindly to that which gives them coherence and meaning.

- ✓ I let myself be attracted by the experience of these characters, I repeat to Jesus the words of Ruth, those of the believer of Ps 73:28: *"For me, to cleave to you is my good, to find my refuge in you"*. I make my own this confession, the most solemn confession of faith in the Old Testament: "the good", all that is desirable and attractive in the world, consists in the closeness of God and in the relationship of communion with him based on the fidelity of his love.
- ✓ I widen my interior to welcome this other text that communicates the same experience:

"Abide in me and I in you. The one who abides in me and I in them, bears much fruit. Abide in my love..." (Jn 15,4.5.9)

The attitude of "generosity", so important for Sophie, appears in the Constitutions under the sign of "totality":

"Totally consecrated..., aspiring unceasingly..., essentially founded..., progressing every day..., constantly..., unceasingly..., always willing..., with all your heart..., in all your actions..., as far as possible..., continuous vigilance..., always aspiring..., always and in all circumstances..."

- ✓ I make an exercise of "offering my totality" by going through my body: heart, eyes, mouth, ears, hands, feet.... And I ask for the desire to place all my resources and gifts before the Lord, offering Him all that I am and all that I have for the service of the Kingdom.
I repeat Constitutions 41 in the form of a prayer: "Lord, I give you all my abilities to relate to people and things, so that you may transform them with the power of your Spirit at the service of the mission. With simplicity of heart, looking only to You, without self-seeking or self-interest, I wish to seek only what You want."
- ✓ I hear another call from General Chapter 2016: *"To go out, to "set sail" as a Society and go with others to new geographic and existential peripheries to accompany the life that is emerging there, to defend justice, peace, and the integrity of creation in response to all of those who are searching for meaning in their lives, those who have been wounded, displaced, and excluded because of poverty, violence, and environmental degradation."*

I can ask myself if I am really in contact with some of these *existential peripheries* and those who live in them, if I try to approach them *barefoot*? I ask for the grace

not to forget that, beyond my intentions and initiatives, it is up to them to receive me...

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine

"If Jesus loved you first, with a love so generous that it led him to give himself totally for you, respond to him with your love and, seeing the graces he has given you, give him a lively testimony of gratitude (...) We must have a burning desire to unite ourselves to him, to receive the fullness of his Spirit, to leave the old man behind so that we can truly say: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.'" (Sophie Barat, Remembrance of the Novitiate at Poitiers)

"If our sisters imagine we are surrounded by Indians, they are mistaken. I have only seen some old women who make their First Communion at 50 or 60 years when the time for all passion is past. But on the contrary, we do new work and so does Octavia and Eugénie: we dig the garden, carry manure, take water to the cow, clean the little cow-shed—the only one in the country where all animals wander wherever they will; and we do this with as much joy as we would were we teaching since God wills our lives to be thus..." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophie Barat, Letter 125, February 15, 1819)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

"The fourth age is the age of the greatest, the most beautiful love. It has passed through the trials of time; it has been tested. The years, life, the apostolate, prayer, arid or in consolation, solitude – all that we have lived has deepened the covenant signed on the day of our profession, and today the need 'to remain with' is felt in the ground of our being.

'To remain with' in order to stand before him. To be present to the Presence, and in his Presence, to integrate our history, this history which has been that of our journey towards him. It is the time to gaze upon it, to assume it without giving it either approval or condemnation, simply holding it in our hands and offering it to him. It is our work, but it belongs to him.

'To remain with', not to distance ourselves from the world, but to go with him to the whole world by our prayer and our offering in solidarity with the whole Society. 'Whoever remains in me, bears fruit in plenty.' (Jn 15:5) It is at this age that his Kingdom is built more than ever in the silence of our offering.

'To remain with', so as to celebrate with. The fourth age can be transformed into a great celebration, into an ongoing hymn of thanksgiving. By 'remaining with' we celebrate our faith, the route that we have travelled all those years. Perhaps it was not always easy, but even if we only groped our way tentatively, the road led us to discover, to recognize and to proclaim that Jesus, the Crucified one, is the Son of God, 'to the Jews an obstacle... to the pagans madness, but to those who have

been called... a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1:23-24)" (Helen McLaughlin, Superior General 1982-1994. Letter on the Feast of the Sacred Heart 1991).

"...fidelity to Christ must be our constant care, referring all things to Him, the supreme and decisive criterion in our choices. This fidelity to Christ will make us seek with evangelical daring to live our unity and pluriformity in a strongly effective and dynamic way. Saint Madeleine Sophie who suffered so much to keep the Society one, will be with us at this time, as we try to move, by different ways and at a different pace, towards a common goal." (General Chapter 1970)

I widen my gaze

"The union of the Society was a central value for Sophie and for us too, as we shared our charism and our spirituality. On various levels we became convinced that we were 'one heart and one soul': in the provinces, in the reality of our countries, and within ourselves. There are global situations that affect us all, and we acknowledge them with respect and concern. The spirit of those days let us see that, beyond language differences, there is a real desire to listen to one another. During these last years in the Society there has been much emphasis on cultural diversity and on differences. We can now see the importance of recognizing and valuing the considerable amount we have in common. Internationality brings us hope and allows us to keep on dreaming. We live in a time with more possibilities of sharing among ourselves. Our vulnerability makes us need one another and opens us to interchange; no longer can any province stand alone. (Life Unfolding. Offering the Gift Received. International Meeting on Initial Formation. Guadalajara 2012)

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God." (Am 9:14-15)

"What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain." (Phil 1:18-21)

- With courage and confidence

"My prayer now is that we can enter into the new phase on the journey towards the Chapter of 2024, trusting in God's desire for us that the Society carry on its mission with passion and vitality, willing to let go of what might hinder us and choosing to be women of hope." (Closing Conference, Special Chapter 2021)

"...sharing knowledge, experience, resources, strengthened by the awareness that we are One Body, we work together for purposeful transformation...acknowledging and celebrating the value of each one's contribution to our mission, focusses all our efforts into one powerful movement forward..." (IPC, Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

Day by day, how do I take care of my experience of "first love" for the Lord?

What are the different prices to pay in order to remain faithful in your following?

Of the three images of General Chapter 2016 (a family, a loaf of bread, a boat...), which one is my favorite?

7. INCORPORATED INTO THE GIFT OF CHRIST THROUGH THE EUCHARIST

*Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O Good Jesus, hear me.
Within your wounds hide me.
Permit me not to be separated from you.
From the wicked foe, defend me.
At the hour of my death, call me
and bid me come to you
That with your saints I may praise you
For ever and ever. Amen.*



*"Through the Eucharist we are drawn
into the gift of Jesus
to his Father
for the life of the world
and in His Body we are gathered into one." (C.5)*

*"By the Eucharist, Christ renews and deepens this covenant,
sign of the Covenant of God with His Church.
Through our daily life this becomes a reality
until Christ comes again." (C.43)*

The Eucharist gives us access to the mystery of the open side of Jesus and the reality of this mystery is central to our lives. It celebrates and actualizes the paschal mystery of Jesus with and for our brothers and sisters, at the heart of their hopes and sufferings. Each RSCJ is drawn to participate in this gift of Jesus to His Father for the life of the world.

I listen to the Word

*"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.*

*Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken. (Is 25:6-8)*

"In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full." (Mk 8:1-8)

I get in touch with my heart

I approach the story of the Eucharist. (Lk 22:14-23)

✓ *"How I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you..."*

I ask the Spirit to reveal to me this desire of Jesus to make his life shared bread. I ask him to align my own desires with his.

✓ *"Took a loaf of bread."*

I contemplate the life of Jesus "taken" by the Father, by the people.... I get in touch with my experience of being in God's hands, of belonging to Him. I spend some time thanking Him that my life is in His hands. I ask Him for the grace to become bread that is available to others.

✓ *"He gave thanks."*

I accept the call to live as a blessing and not as a murmuring or as a complaint. I take time to be aware of my body, discovering in it the possibilities of being a "blessing" for others.

✓ *"He broke it."*

God, as Creator, constantly "prunes" the beings he has created to allow them to become new beings: "If a branch bears fruit, he prunes it so that it may bear more fruit..." (Jn 15:5) I look at my life as that pruned branch. I try to reconcile myself with what is broken, dark or painful in my life. I open myself to the possibility that, precisely through that wound, light may enter my heart.

✓ "He gave it..."

"This is my life that is given for you..." I let my heart overflow with gratitude and joy for the gift of the Eucharist, for the work of a reconciled humanity living in harmony. I speak to Jesus of my desire to enter into his Eucharistic "project" and to live "in memory of him."

✓ I reread the document of General Chapter 1994 *Eucharistic Dimension of our Spirituality* in order to enter into its movement:

"The compassionate gaze of Jesus directs our eyes and our hearts towards as world where many are like "sheep without a shepherd" and brings to birth in us the desire to live our lives as women of compassion and communion to nourish life, to help life grow, and to defend life.... Hope impels us to try to make of our world a great banquet, an open table, where both bread and word are shared; where Christ wipes away the tears of so much oppression, injustice, violence, and division.

All of our reality, personal, communal, apostolic, finds integration there and becomes eucharistic. Madeleine Sophie's vision of adoration invites us to enter into the thoughts of God's Heart...'which remain from age to age to save their lives from death and to give them life in time of famine.'" (Ps 32:11-19) Living and celebrating the Eucharist through the light and shadow of daily life becomes one single movement.

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine

"The primordial idea of our little Society was to meet with some young women and establish a small community that, day and night, would adore the Heart of Jesus Christ, consumed with his Eucharistic love; but I said to myself: When we are twenty-four religious, it would be very little... If we had young students whom we would form in this spirit of adoration and reparation, how different it would be then! And I saw hundreds, thousands of adorers in front of an ideal, universal monstrance, elevated above the Church... We will educate a multitude of adorers from all nations, to the ends of the earth..." (Pauline Perdrau, Les Loysirs de l'Abbaye)

"O blessed night! For a second time I thought my prayer was granted...All night long I was in the New World and I was traveling in good company. First, I had gathered up as a precious jewel all the Blood of Jesus in the Garden, the Pretoria, and Calvary. I took possession of Him in the Blessed Sacrament and grasping Him tightly to my heart I carried my treasure everywhere to pour it out with no fear of exhausting it...the merits of Jesus Christ were about to be applied in a new manner. In spite of my being on my knees, the twelve hours of the night I passed very quickly with no fatigue; the night before I thought I could not hold out for an hour." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophia Barat. Letter 10, April 4, 1806)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

"From the Tabernacle Jesus is our light who, as the sun illumines and transfigures everything with its rays, so the Heart of Jesus will always be the sun of our souls, He is light and enlightens us with His inspirations, He impels the lukewarm souls towards fervor, the fervent ones to perfection, to holiness; to all He inspires His love which He gives us without measure. His gaze penetrates to the depths of our soul and penetrates us like a ray of light so effective that it enlightens us about our duties.

The Heart of Jesus is also our strength. From His Tabernacle, He communicates courage to the martyrs, knowledge to the confessors, piety to the virgins. We possess in Him all the treasures, the answer to all our doubts, the strength for all our sacrifices, the generosity for all our undertakings. If we place everything painful, humiliating and hard that happens to us in his Heart, we will find in him abysses of strength and generosity....

Finally, the Heart of Jesus is our consolation. If we do not feel rejuvenated at the Tabernacle, it is because our love is small. Let us go to the Tabernacle in our temptations, after our faults, in our sorrows. And when we are at his feet, let us open our hearts to him and speak of all that we love or suffer. If we open our hearts to Jesus, He will open His heart to us, we will be one with Him. That must be the ambition of our lives, the ideal of our hearts" (Manuela Vicente, Superior General 1928-1946. Circular Letter May 4, 1935).

"...I...was invited to a lecture by a well-known Taiwanese Protestant theologian, Choan-Seng (C.S.) Song...The title of Dr. Song's talk was 'In the beginning there were Stories, not Texts.' For me, that was an 'Aha!' moment and I thought, 'Let us share our stories!' Let us get in touch with our own 'Eucharistic histories,' share our own Eucharistic stories. Rather than beginning from theory or whatever theology we happen to embrace, let us begin from our experience: significant moments, doubts, difficulties, shifts in our understanding and sacramental practice, 'where we are now.' I think that if we did that kind of sharing, the 'silence would be broken' and we would have much more respect for each one's journey, more facility in asking the questions that linger in our hearts about Eucharist, about the Church, about the future of religious life." (Clare Pratt, Superior General 2000-2008. Feast of the Sacred Heart 2006)

I widen my gaze

"...our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. 'Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.'

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at

will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (Rom 8:22)." (Laudato Si 1-2).

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights." (Hab 3:17-19)

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself." (Phil 3:20-21)

- With courage and confidence

"The time has come to reimagine ourselves in response to the needs of the world in the 21st century and beyond." (Special Chapter 2021 Opening Conference)

"To be prophetic in our living of our mission: opening a space for international and intercultural encounters, and shared action is witness to our belief that unity in diversity can be lived." (IPC. Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

"As far as we can, we participate in [the Eucharist] actively every day." (C.29)

How do I position myself, sincerely, before this text of our Constitutions? What are my resistances?

"The Eucharistic presence in our communities is a constant reminder that Christ is the center of our life." (C.37)

What importance do I give to the Eucharistic presence? Is it also my Center?

8. UNITED TO FORM ONE BODY



*"Look at the craft of consoling,
that Christ our Lord brings, and comparing
how some friends often comfort others."*

(Spiritual Exercises 224)

*"Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my
memory, my understanding, and my entire
will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast
given all to me. To Thee, O lord, I return it.*

*All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according
to Thy will. Give me Thy love and thy grace,
for this is sufficient for me."*

(Spiritual Exercises 234)

A powerful force of attraction toward unity runs throughout Scripture, from the evening when the Lord descended into the garden in search of the first human couple. His final promise is that,

gathered before the Risen One, Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End, we will contemplate his face and wear his name on our foreheads. (cf. Rev 22:4,13)

The biblical images speaking of unity are suggestive: women dancing in the Exodus by the Red Sea (Ex 15:20); a multitude transformed into a people that drinks water from the rock and is fed with manna... (Ex 17:6; 16:8); a flock that advances confidently, guided by its Shepherd (Ps 23); Jerusalem, the compact city, that attracts its scattered children (Ps 122); a community that sings and celebrates: "How pleasant, how delightful that sisters and brothers are united!" (Ps 133:1)

In the New Testament, the group of disciples huddles around their Master (Mk 3:16-19); gathered around his table, they eat his bread and drink his wine (Mk 14:22); on the evening of the first day of the week, the Risen One again takes center stage and fills them with joy (Jn 20:16).

But a leaven of disintegration also threatens this path of unity: at Babel languages are confused and humanity is scattered. The inhabitants of Jerusalem hear Jesus' complaint: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you have refused." (Mt 23:37) At the Last Supper with his own, He announces to them: they will strike the Shepherd and His flock will be scattered, but when He is set on his feet again, He will go before them to Galilee. It is the dream that He had expressed before His hour came: *"That they may all be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you."* (Jn 17:11)

After Pentecost, the Spirit guides this process towards unity and St. Paul announces to the Corinthians: *"For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."* (1 Cor 12:13)

M. Sophie embraced this passion for unity and chose as the motto for the little Society that was beginning to walk in the Church: *"Cor unum et anima una in Corde Jesu."*

The language of the Constitutions of 1815 reflects this dream: the term *union* appears 57 times, *unit* 6 times, *body* 16 times.

"The fate of the Society is in their hands (...) that union too, which stamps upon each member the character of disciple and spouse of Jesus Christ, and puts upon the whole body the seal of God's work." (355)

"On this union, therefore, which is the work of grace, rests all the hopes of this little Society; by this union of minds and hearts it will maintain and strengthen itself, and spread more and more for the greater glory of God..." (323)

This explains that Sophie's greatest suffering was the seeds of division that threatened the Society at two moments of serious crisis (1815 and 1839) and the victory of unity, her greatest joy. *"By the close of 1815 Sophie Barat possessed the means to draw the members of the Society of the Sacred Heart together in unity...In reality it was a new phase in the evolution of a group of women whose lives had touched over fifteen years, whose stories affected one another and whose memories held the record of the years. Each brought to the newly named and newly defined congregation their own history of why they had joined in the first place as well as the motivation for staying within it now."* (Phil Kilroy, *Sophie Barat. A Life.* 101)

This call received as a Society to become one Body has marked our entire history and is present in the 1982 Constitutions.

As an international community: *"We are called to become one body in Christ; each member needs the other in order to give and receive support and dynamism."* (156)

I listen to the Word

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt 28:16-20)

"Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common." (Acts 4:32)

"And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (Eph 1:22-23)

"He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph 1:9-10)

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling..." (Eph 4:1-4)

"...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body." (Col 3:12-15)

I get in touch with my heart

I let the invitation to unity attract my desire.

- ✓ I ask for light to recognize what seeds of division may be hidden in my heart. I reread the vows from a new perspective: "This commitment by the vows binding each religious to Christ, unites us all in love as members of the Society so as to constitute but one body." (C.44)
- ✓ I receive the new identity opened by the Constitutions: I am "a member of the same Body" (16), "aware of the needs of the whole Body and ready to serve wherever we are sent" (40), "always keeping in view the good of the whole Body" (161).

General Chapter 2016 invites us to *Be and act as one Body*: "Revitalize our union in diversity and act as a dynamic, interconnected Body, linked with other bodies, in the world and as Church, in order to share, collaborate and be in solidarity among ourselves and with others. These calls challenge us to discern and respond at all stages and in all dimensions of our life and mission. Encouraged by the fidelity of God and supported by the love of our sisters, we commit ourselves anew to take on their implications in the concrete reality of our lives."

- ✓ I listen to the resonances that this call can have in the attitudes of my daily life: *sharing, collaboration, solidarity, discernment, commitment, assumption.*

I am listening to Madeleine Sophie and Philippine

"Be deeply grateful. St. Paul teaches us: "He loved me and gave himself for me" He does not only say: "he gave himself" but "he gave himself." In the world, one gives oneself to a friend to render him a service, to help him in his needs; but one does not "give oneself," one does not renounce for this friend one's health, fortune or life. However, this is what we, spouses of the Heart of Jesus, must do for our God, who poured out for us even the last drop of his blood. Let us give ourselves to Jesus Christ and we will have peace through the serenity of our passions. Then we can say to our sisters: "Come and see, it is no longer I who live. I who before was proud, touchy, of unequal character, selfish, impatient, dissipated..., I have given myself to Jesus Christ and He has transformed me." (Conference of Sophie Barat, April 4, 1855)

"I thank you most sincerely for having been relieved of the burden of my office (of superior) which I have carried so badly and which would have given me so much unpleasantness in my final hour. I desire and fear it. But God, so good, will also give me the means of expiation, because I see very clearly that the crosses will follow me in some other way, when I suddenly pass from a very active life to complete inaction (...) There is no hope (of going) with the [Indigenous]; besides that things are not ready, when I have expressed what I desire and miss about this, I have realized that I was not considered fit for that work and even if I had only age against me, it would be enough. I ask God for the inner spirit. I still have a long way to go." (Philippine Duchesne to Sophie Barat. Letter 559, September 30, 1840)

I welcome other voices from our tradition

"I would like to ask both groups to 'consider at this time the many needs of the Society and forget their own interests.' (St. Madeleine Sophie, December 6, 1836) Even if there are divergent points of view, differences of mentality, customs and even formation, we must penetrate beyond this external 'shell' and seek only what is essential in our religious life. Accepting to be personally responsible and fully co-responsible for the unity without which we cannot meet the Savior and work effectively for His Kingdom, let us listen with a new heart to the prayer of Christ: 'Father, may they also be one in us, so that the world may know that you have sent me.' (Jn. 17:21)" (Maria Josefa Bultó, Superior General 1967-1982. June 29, 1969. Text selected by the Province of Argentina/Uruguay).

"If we truly want to discern together in building up the Body, living our Cor Unum, we must strengthen our ability to engage in conversations with one another about issues and situations where we do not necessarily agree. (...) We are called to deepen our love, in the Heart of Christ, for one another, for our world and its inhabitants. We are called to participate in doing all that we can. No one is too old or too young not to be a co-creator of our future. Let us remember that 'each one of us has a fundamental responsibility, a fundamental responsibility which she

cannot abdicate and which no one can assume in her place: that of living in the sincerity of her heart and life, wherever she is, the charism of St. Madeleine Sophie.' (C.140)" (Barbara Dawson, Superior General 2016. Feast of St. Madeleine Sophie, May 25, 2018)

I widen my gaze

*"How shall we reveal the face of our Society in so few words...
Wherever we are,
we are summoned as Religious of the Sacred Heart to be a people
with the whole of God's people,
with all people...*

*Worldwide it is the same,
the passion to proclaim the Gospel
urging us to probe,
and refocus our understanding
of this work of education,
that it confront the world of our time,
and the society in which we live,
wherever we are.*

*Our vocation asks that our work be one of liberation, creation
justice, peace, love,
compassion for and with a world
of sisters and brothers...
To call forth life,
to build communion,
to make peace possible....*

*Convinced that Christ lives in our sisters and brothers
and in a special way in the poor,
we are willing to risk
a new step forward
in salvation history,
side by side with others,
embracing the Cross,
Sure of the Resurrection."*

(IEC International Education Commission, 1988)

I open myself to hope

- Sustained by the Word

"I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely'; and he became their savior in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." (Is 63:7-9)

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:35-39)

- With courage and confidence

"As 'One Body', we are already in the boat and we will move forward with something new, with new ways of being in relationship with one another, discovering new ways of living our mission as educators, with the same passion and humility of Sophie." (Closing Conference Special Chapter 2021)

"The four Priorities highlight the major components of our service in the Church. Education: Any process through which learnings are exchanged; experiences are shared; skills, knowledge and attitudes are developed, imparted, acquired." (IPC. Apostolic Priorities)

We share in community

In the Constitutions of 1815, the expression "chosen...as instruments of His mercy" (175) appears.

We share how this call resonates in each one of them.

If our diversity is truly a unique gift, we can recognize together and with good humor some "diversities" present in our community.

Special Chapter 2021 speaks of "a reality not yet fully unfolded". What would be for us some "already unfolded" realities?



Part 2: Retreat Orientation

Retreat Orientation

*"To the angel of the Church of Pergamum write:
To the victor I will give of the hidden manna,
I will give them a white pebble and write on it
a new name known only to the one who receives it".
(Rev 2,17)*

The aim of this retreat, in continuity with the document RSCJ ON THE WAY TO THE SOURCE, is to prepare ourselves to receive this *new name*, to deepen our life experience as RSCJ and to strengthen the momentum of our mission-oriented spirituality.

The name we bear is part of this life experience, as it was for the believers in the Bible:

"You shall be called by a new name, spoken from the mouth of the Lord." (Is 62:2)

"Take courage, O Jerusalem! The One who gave you a name will comfort you." (Bar 4, 30)

"As a girdle is girded about a person's waist, so have I girded myself about the whole house of Israel to be my people, my name, my honour and my glory." (Jer 13:11)

"You are in our midst, O Lord, and we are called by your name. Do not forsake us." (Jer 14:9)

Your name is a perfume that is poured out..." (Song of Solomon 1:3)

Throughout the eight days of this retreat we will be welcoming these new names:

1. Thirsting to return to our Source and Centre
2. Healed by God's mercy
3. Called to follow a meek and humble-hearted Master
4. Dazzled by the wisdom of the Gospel
5. Drawn by the surrender of Jesus' life
6. Bearing the marks of the Crucified
7. Renewed by Jesus' Resurrection
8. Sent to manifest the love of Jesus' Heart

DAY ONE

Thirsting to return to our Source and Centre.

We open ourselves to receive



We can all remember moments in our lives when we have felt "centred", when we have breathed the deep peace of having found the best of ourselves, of having coincided with God's dream for our lives, with what is most authentic, seminal and original in us and which constitutes us as RSCJ.

We have also had the experience of finding RSCJ who are happy, another way of saying that they are centred, well-rooted and grounded, vitally supported on a solid rock, that they have found the right direction for their lives, are at peace with

themselves and radiate reconciliation, harmony and meaning.

In recent years, we have invested time and effort in the Society in the necessary work of reorganization, but what happened to us could have been similar to what happened in a story to the traveler who went to China and fell passionately in love with a woman. When he returned home, he devoted himself to learning Chinese so that he could communicate with her, and he put so much interest in it that he became a great Sinologist who travelled the world giving lectures on Chinese culture. Alas, he had forgotten the first love that had started it all.

We are in a new moment, with an intense desire to return to the roots of our RSCJ vocation, to find in our spirituality the strength and impulse to open ourselves to "what is springing up" and to receive the *new name* that the Lord wants to give us.

We draw near

The **Samaritan** in the parable (Lk 10, 25-37) and **Mary of Bethany** (Lk 10, 38-42) are characters whom we see rooted in their Centre, in their Principle and Foundation (Spiritual Exercises 23). When we read the two scenes of the Gospel together, we understand better what this virtue that the Constitutions call "simplicity" consists of: we see them centred and coherent with their desire and their search, and for this reason they are right in what is

essential and in tune with the best of themselves. That is why Jesus proposes them as a model: *"Mary has chosen the better part", "Go and do likewise."*

Their attitude contrasts with that of the other characters who accompany them in the story: the skeptical scribe asks *"What shall I do?"*, but does not wish to compromise his life; the priest and the Levite are so preoccupied with worship that they do not stop before the wounded man on the road; Mary of Bethany appears agitated and restless. They are all distracted and focused on their own projects, occupations or plans: in them we see reflected our quest for efficiency and recognition, our compulsive activism, our scatteredness.

We contemplate Jesus

Throughout the Gospel, we see him always in contact with his inner self: he got up early in the morning to pray. (Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 22:39) These encounters with the Father focused Jesus on his condition as Son, which was the main crossbeam that supported the whole of his life, the secret spring that made it fruitful, the rock that gave it consistency. And then, every circumstance, situation or relationship in the midst of his ordinary life became for Jesus an occasion for contact, for remembrance, supplication, for praise or thanksgiving.

Jesus responded to his Father with a whole, single, undivided heart, *"seeking and desiring nothing but his God"*. Jesus left behind any pretense of doing his own will, any foresight, strategy or self-seeking. Jesus was beyond all worry or concern and could say with the psalmist *"One thing I ask of the Lord, this alone I seek: to dwell in God's house all the days of my life..."* (Ps 27:4)

We receive a new name

- ✓ So we suggest that you read Luke 10, 25-42 and try to identify with each of the characters: the Samaritan and his simple gestures, detached from himself, entirely attentive and effective in serving the wounded he meets on his way; Martha, distracted by many things; Mary silent, attentive to the only thing that is necessary.

We look at the Samaritan and Mary:

- They have their eyes and ears open to realize that, at the roadside, someone needed help, or that Jesus was coming to Bethany in need of friendship and a listening ear.
- The Samaritan and Mary both react with flexibility and availability by giving up their own plans (to go to Jerusalem, or to receive Jesus in a certain way...) and they put the wounded person or the guest at the centre.
- They are attentive to the present: the priest, the Levite and Martha are preoccupied with what comes next (getting to the Temple, preparing a good meal...), while the Samaritan and Mary are fully involved in the *now*, attentive to those who come into their lives unexpectedly and require attention in the present, not in the future.

- They dare to behave in an alternative way: according to the law, touching a corpse meant falling into ritual impurity and the wounded man in the gutter could be dead. On the other hand, a rabbinical precept forbade women to become disciples of a teacher (therefore, "to sit at the feet..." is tantamount to becoming a disciple). But both the Samaritan and Mary take a "counter-cultural" stance, they dare to go beyond what was considered legal and succeed with their alternative stance.
- They set aside their own interests: the Samaritan does not gain anything from his behaviour toward the wounded man, not even a word of thanks. As for Mary, she had to accept her sister's reproaches. Both of them had entered another plane: that of a gratuitousness beyond all calculation.

We remember Madeleine Sophie

In a letter to Philippine, Sophie said, "If a soul of prayer is forced by obedience to be distracted for a moment from the thought of God, who is nevertheless always present in the depths of its heart, it returns to Him as soon as it is free, with the same force that a stone thrown into the air returns to the earth which is its centre."

We hear these texts of the Constitutions as words which she herself addresses to us: "Keep God at the centre of your lives," (25) "Centre her life on the Heart of Jesus" (103). Live that "simplicity which leads the soul to seek in all things only what is most pleasing to God, in conformity with the Heart of Jesus..." (C.1815, 348)

We entrust our "return journey" to that Centre that unifies us, to that Source that quenches our thirst.

- ✓ And now we write on our heart the *new name* received today.

We celebrate what we have experienced

At the end of the day we can gather in the chapel, place the lit censer, a bowl of water and a towel in the centre. We read: "*Humanity was created to praise, worship and serve God...*"; "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...*" (Mk 10:45) "*God has destined us to be for the praise of God's glory.*" (Or we read Ephesians Chapter 1 in full)

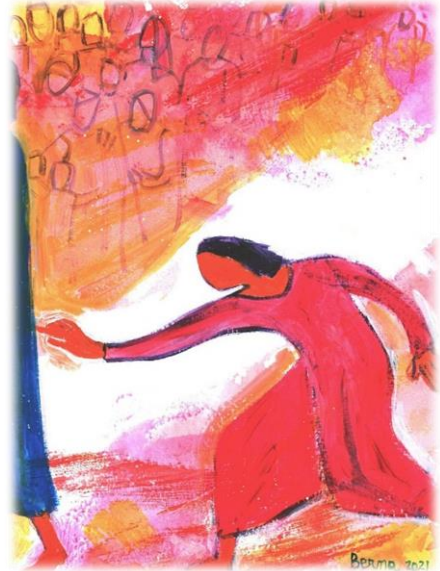
After a time of silence, each one can take a grain of incense and place it in the censer. At the end, we pass the towel to each other, as a symbol that we want to make this praise concrete in an attitude of service.

THE SECOND DAY

We are healed by God's mercy

We open ourselves to receive

Many times in our lives, we have experienced moments of fragility, we have been touched by our limits and infidelities, and we have recognized our need for forgiveness. By returning to the arms of the Father and immersing ourselves in God's mercy, we have felt healed and renewed. Remembering all the tenderness we have received transforms us from within and widens our hearts so that they may come closer to the dimensions of God's heart. Knowing that we are *forgiven sinners* makes us more indulgent and understanding of the failings of others, more welcoming and generous.



We draw near

...to the woman suffering from a hemorrhage of blood (Mk 5:25-34). In this story, we can see reflected our own experience of healing and of being renewed by the healing action of Jesus.

And so we listen to Mk 5, 24-34:

"Jesus went with [Jairus]. Many people followed him and pressed up against him. A woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, who had endured many painful medical treatments and had spent all she had to no avail, and was getting worse, heard about Jesus, and she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. For she said to herself, 'Even if I can only touch his clothes, I shall be healed. Immediately the source of her bleeding dried up, and she felt that she was healed of the disease. Jesus immediately realized the power that had gone out of him, and he turned in the midst of the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' His disciples said to him, 'You see the people crushing you, and you ask who touched you? But Jesus looked around to see if he could not discover the one who had done it. Then the woman, frightened and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. And Jesus said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.'"

Let us enter into the scene:

- The woman suffers from a permanent flow of blood and this makes her impure and sterile. She is ruined and no longer trusts doctors. She approaches Jesus from behind without daring to say anything, and when she touches the hem of his cloak, she is healed. Although they are surrounded by a crowd of people who are unaware of what is happening, both Jesus and she share a *knowledge* that secretly links them: she knows that she is healed and he knows that a healing energy has gone out from him. That is why he asks her: *"Who touched me?"*, seeking an encounter beyond the healing. She then tells him *"the whole truth"* and hears from Jesus: *"Courage, daughter, your faith has saved you..."*

Jesus has discovered in her a trusting faith and announces to her that she has entered the realm of salvation, wholeness and fullness of life.

We contemplate Jesus

In his first teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus read the text from Isaiah: *"He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted..."* (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18) He did not come only to restore sight to the blind, to make the lame walk and to bring the captives out of prison, Jesus knew that there is blindness that is beyond the eyes and the inner prisons that are more binding than a dungeon. That is why, when that woman came up behind him to touch him, he did not content himself with restoring her to health, but by addressing her, Jesus freed her from fear and invited her to speak openly, as if, in the midst of the crowd, there were only the two of them. Beyond freeing her from her barrenness and shame, Jesus wanted to give her back a deeper healing: the healing of knowing that she was listened to and welcomed, and to give her the assurance that no one could ever take away the deep peace Jesus granted her.

When Jesus said: *"Take my yoke upon you, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Mt 11:29), Jesus was inviting us to come to him without fear of our darkness and disorder, of the ties that shame us or the burdens that trouble our hearts. Jesus possessed that capacity to welcome and to hide, to offer ground, shelter and refuge, like that hole in the rock that the Lord had offered to Moses on the mountain. (Ex 33:22)

We receive a new name

- ✓ We identify with this woman and ask ourselves: Where is life slipping away from us, what is preventing us from living fully what we are called to be? We stand before Jesus and allow his forgiveness to heal us and renew us. We give thanks and celebrate that Jesus wants to bring us into the sphere of his salvation.

- ✓ We recognize that we are poor, fragile and with many failures, but we trust that Jesus' undeserved tenderness rebuilds and heals us. We let this possibility of reconciled life fill us with gratitude and we become a "new song."
We accept the call to become channels of love, which *"forgive all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things."* (1 Cor 13:7)
- ✓ Mary at Cana becomes aware of the bride and groom's lack of wine and turns to her Son to take care of the situation: *"They have no wine..."*
Imagine Mary telling Jesus what each of us lacks, what would she say to him, what would her "intercessory pleas" be?
- ✓ Let us draw near to Mary with our needs and our poverty. And let us ask Mary, together with the millions of men and women in the world who pray the Hail Mary: *"Pray for us sinners..."*

We remember Madeleine Sophie

Those who came into contact with Sophie through her visits or her letters could see how her physical frailty, her fragility, her continual experience of weakness, pain, powerlessness and vulnerability, became for her the path that led her to find her deepest identity. She felt that she was a poor instrument devoid of natural means and strength and Sophie realized that this "worked in her favour" and prevented her from following her own inclinations. *"The Lord did not want this work to be done by human hands, but entirely by his own"*, Sophie repeated.

And she said, *"The Heart of Jesus will make up for all that you lack. For this, you have to divest yourself of your own need for action. Jesus will give you His Spirit and Jesus will work on you as He did on the disciples. One abyss calls another abyss: absolute nothingness attracts the sovereign Good. The Holy Trinity animates nothingness by the Spirit. He gives us the Heart of Jesus to be our life, our Saviour, our merciful love"*. Sophie repeats this in one of her best known prayers: *"Heart of Jesus, I come to you because you are my only refuge, my only and certain hope. You are the remedy for all my miseries, the supplement for all that I lack..."*.

Together with Sophie we take up her conviction that Someone makes up for what we lack.

- ✓ And we write on our heart the *new name* we have received today.

We celebrate what we have experienced

- ✓ Perhaps we might place a piece of modelling clay or plasticine in the centre of the room. Each one takes a piece and holds it in her hands while listening to these texts:

"The word that was spoken to Jeremiah from the Lord, 'Arise and go down to the potter's shop, and there I will cause you to hear my words. I went down to the potter's shop, and behold, the potter was working on the potter's wheel. The pot that he was making was spoiled like clay in the potter's hands, and he began again, turning it into a different piece, as seemed best to the potter. Then the word of the Lord was addressed to me in these terms: "Can I not do to you, O house of Israel, as this potter did? Behold, as clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel" (Jer 18:1-6).

"The same God who said, 'Let light shine in the midst of darkness', has shone light into our hearts, to radiate the knowledge of the glory of God which is in the face of Christ. But we carry this treasure in earthen vessels so that it may appear that such an extraordinary power is God's and not ours." (2 Cor 4,6-7)

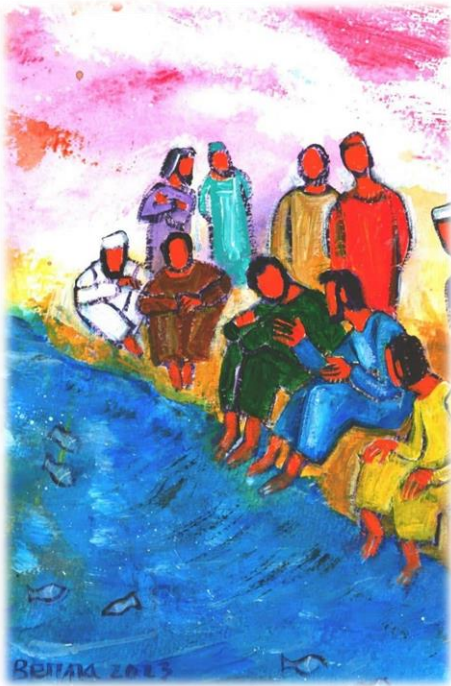
At the end, each one expresses what the texts have suggested to them.

Or, alternatively:

- ✓ Place a map of the world in the centre and some dry branches on top of it. Alternate the reading of Bar 2,15-3,8 (you may wish to choose some passages beforehand) with situations of sin in the world that each one evokes.
After a time of silence, remember the peace and reconciliation efforts also present in the world and light the candles on the map.

THE THIRD DAY

We are disciples of a meek and humble-hearted Master



We open ourselves to receive

Forgiveness received can make us new women, restored and remade so that "we no longer live for ourselves, but for the One who loved us." (Eucharistic Prayer IV)

The experience of mercy leads to gratitude and prompts the attitude expressed by Saint Paul: "*Forgetting what I have left behind, I press on, to see if I may catch up with him by whom I have been caught up.*" (Phil 3:13-14) This is the posture of the athletes on a track who, touching the ground with the tips of their fingers, their whole body in tension, are preparing to launch themselves into the race.

We recall the "parable of the call of the temporal king" proposed by St. Ignatius at the beginning of the Second Week of the Exercises, together with the "oblations of greater esteem and moment" (Spiritual Exercises 97). Updating Ignatius' vocabulary, we hear:

- *to conquer the whole world*, as: to humanize, to reconcile, to bring the Gospel... The encounter with Jesus makes us disciples sent to build His Kingdom.
- When Ignatius talks about *following me*, we hear: to walk with Jesus, to listen to His Word, to be docile to His Spirit, to have something in common with Him, to be placed with Him?
- *work, jobs, sorrow, watching, enemies...*: We hear: it is the realistic reminder of the price of following that made Paul say:
"We always carry in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested." (2 Cor 4,8-12)
- *with me*: therein lies the secret and the strength for following and the promise that believers received:
"I myself will go with you and give you rest..." (Ex 33:14).
"Do not be afraid, for I am with you to deliver you." (Jer 1:8)
"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me." (Ps 23,4)
"I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt 28:20)

- *to have something in common*: this is the call to conformity with Jesus, to *affinity* with him: "*Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.*" (Jn 13:8)
- *content*: "*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and for joy, goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*" (Mt 13:44) The joy of "*with me*" (Jesus as treasure found) is the condition for the possibility of "*selling everything*" (being ready to go through "trials" for Jesus).

Accepting the call to follow Jesus puts us in a situation of *discipleship* and, as RSCJ, to live in union and conformity with Jesus, seeking *similarity, closeness, involvement* and *participation* in his feelings, preferences and options.

We draw near

...to Nicodemus. In the Gospel there are different ways of becoming a disciple: some, like Peter, Andrew, the sons of Zebedee or Levi, follow Jesus immediately; Mary Magdalene and the other women who went with him (Lk 8,1-3), do it by *attraction* rather than by *calling*. Nicodemus, on the other hand, took a long time to be attracted to Jesus, went through stages of resistance and only at the end did he decide to follow Jesus. By involving ourselves in Nicodemus' process, his journey, we can reconcile ourselves to our own slowness to surrender.

Nicodemus appears in only three scenes in John's Gospel: in the first (Jn 3:1-21), he went to see Jesus *by night*; he then defends him, albeit timidly, before the Pharisees (Jn 7:47-53); and he reappears on Calvary, definitively attracted by the Crucified One, carrying perfumes to embalm him. (Jn 19:38-42)

In the *first meeting*, Nicodemus goes to see Jesus at night so that no one will discover his interest in Jesus, which could harm his status as a Pharisee: Nicodemus is still in the sphere of darkness. He addresses Jesus by calling him "*Rabbi*", he places himself on the level of learning, of knowing and progressing in knowledge; but Jesus throws him off balance with his answer: it is not a question of *learning* anything but of *being born*. The kingdom of God is a communication of life, a new beginning.

Nicodemus resists: "*How can anyone be born again when they are old*"? *Being old* expresses the maximum physical and psychological distance from the time of rebirth. Nicodemus speaks of repeating the past but Jesus proposes an absolute newness. It is about "*being begotten from above...*": everything that is truly important in life cannot be conquered, only received. Jesus does not ask Nicodemus to "*convert*", but to consent to God's action in him and refers him to the wind of the Spirit and its action.

In a *second moment* (Jn 7:47-53) Nicodemus goes a step further and timidly defends Jesus before the Sanhedrin: "*Does our law judge a man without having heard him first and without knowing what he is doing?*" (Jn 7,51). Nicodemus does not dare to openly take Jesus' side, nor to confront the other Pharisees.

The *third* and definitive passage of Nicodemus takes place on Calvary, after Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for the body of Jesus. (Jn 19,38-39) Nicodemus arrives at the place of crucifixion *"carrying a hundred pounds of perfume"*, an exorbitant amount (equal to 32 kilos, a hundred times more than the nard perfume of Mary of Bethany). The one who had gone *"to see Jesus by night"* is now in the middle of the day in his heart. The Crucified One has definitely attracted him: *"When I am lifted up on high, I will draw all to myself."* (Jn 12,32)

We contemplate Jesus

Jesus knew the texts that spoke of God's attraction: *"I have borne you on eagles' wings and drawn you to myself."* (Ex 19:4) *"I drew you with bands of love, with cords of affection."* (Hos 11:4) This attraction was the sign of a love that never withdrew (Jer 31:3) and in the Song of Songs appears as a desire on the lips of the bride: *"Draw me..."* (Song of Songs 1:6)

Jesus was aware that it was the Father who exercised this attraction to lead to him: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them"* (Jn 6:44) and that is why Jesus said: *"When I am lifted up on earth, I will draw all things to myself."* (Jn 12:32) The Gospels speak of his power of attraction: crowds flocked to Jesus, they went to meet him (Mk 1:45; 2:13), they travelled long distances to reach him (Mt 4:25), and they did not hesitate to follow him to deserted places, they ran ahead of Jesus when he tried to retire to rest. (Mk 6:1-3) They thronged to the door of the house where Jesus was, or they threw themselves on him to touch him (Mk 3:10); they came to him carrying their sick on stretchers, they begged Jesus to let them touch at least the fringe of his cloak *"and all who touched him were saved."* Not "healed" but "saved." (Mk 6,56)

Jesus' attraction went beyond the realm of health and people came to Jesus not only to be healed, but to hear a word that no one else could speak to them (Lk 5:15) because the authority with which he taught was like no other: *"No one has ever spoken like this man"* (Jn 7:46), they said. No one had ever before offered them rest for their weariness and burdens (Mt 11:28) and water for their thirst. (Jn 7:37) Therefore, when they pushed to get close to him and hold him, they were anticipating what the two walkers on the road to Emmaus would one day beg Jesus: *"Stay with us."* (Lk 24:29)

We receive a new name

- ✓ The figure of Nicodemus and the time it took him to "surrender" to Jesus encourages us. It helps us to accept the slowness of our own process of following Jesus and to trust that we still have time to allow the Lord's attraction to be stronger than our hesitation and resistance.
- ✓ We can recognize in ourselves some excuses similar to those of Nicodemus who, citing his age, was reluctant to be "born again." But we also hear, like Nicodemus,

that the Spirit does not allow us to remain stagnant and only asks us to allow ourselves to be led by the action of the Spirit.

We remember Madeleine Sophie

Sophie was well aware of the importance of being led by the Spirit:

"We need a means which gives breath to the soul, which nourishes it and raises it above itself, and the means above all means is the Spirit which fertilizes and gives life to everything (...) This Spirit becomes like the breath of the soul..." (Conference 1841)

✓ And so again, we write on our heart the *new name* we have received today.

We celebrate what we have experienced

It is not we who love the Lord or walk toward Him: it is He who loves us and draws us. (cf. Jn 15,16)

We place a reed flute in the centre of the room (or some other musical instrument that evokes the idea of something inert but from which music can be made to spring), and we listen to the text that follows and then echo what has most moved us:

Lord, convince us that **what is most important is:**

Not that we seek you, but that you seek us in all our ways. (Gen 3,9)

Not that we may call you by your name, but that you have our name written on the palms of your hands. (Is 49,16)

Not that we may cry out to you when we have no words, but that you may cry out to us with your cry. (Rom 8:26)

Not that we have plans for you, but that you invite us to walk with you into the future. (Mk 1, 17)

Not that we may understand you, but that you understand us even to our last secret. (1 Cor 13,12)

Not that we may speak of you with wisdom, but that you live and express yourself in us in your own way. (2 Cor 4 10)

Not that we may love you with all our heart and all our strength, but that you love us with all your heart and all your strength and your fire burns within our bones. (Jer 20,9)

For how could we seek you, call you, love you... if you do not seek, call and love us first? Grateful silence is our last word and our best way of finding you. (B. González Buelta)

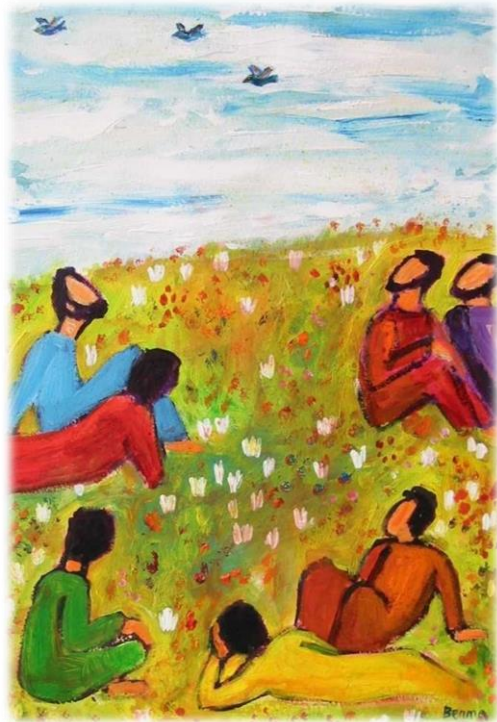
THE FOURTH DAY

Dazzled by the wisdom of the Gospel

We open ourselves to receive

In the courtyard of Caiaphas' palace, a servant girl noticed that Peter was a disciple of Jesus because he had a "Galilean accent." Frequent reading of the Gospel can give us that *Galilean accent* which familiarizes us with the wisdom of Jesus, with his way of thinking and feeling. The Constitutions remind us of this: "Through his words, his attitudes, his relationship with people, nature and things, we discover his Heart totally given to the Father and to all people." (19)

Opening ourselves to this wisdom means leaving behind old "mental models", knowledge and customs of a logic far removed from the proposals of the Gospel, which invite us to enter into another way of thinking and reacting. The wisdom of the Gospel draws us to breathe in a different air and reveals to us that the reality we took for granted hides an unimaginable treasure, a powerful dynamism of transformation.



We draw near

...to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It was Mary with whom Jesus spent his childhood and was marked forever by the "mother tongue" with a "Galilean accent" that she taught him. He learned to use the same adverbs that appear in the Magnificat: those who think they are *far away* (publicans, sinners, ignorant people...), are those who, for Jesus, are *near*; those who in the eyes of all were *outside* (of the law, of the Covenant, of the Kingdom...), for Jesus they are *inside*; those who seemed to be *less* (the poor, the sinners, the ignorant...), for Jesus they are *inside*; those who seemed to be *less* (the poor, the children, and the weak...), for Jesus were the *most*, the *greatest* and the *important* ones; those who thought they were *above* (Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, priests...), turned out to be *below* those who occupied the lowest places on the social and religious ladder.

The Gospel Parables. In that of *the labourers of the vineyard* we hear an essential attitude on the path of discipleship: trusting in the *gratuitousness of God's love* and not in our own merits.

In Jesus' time, a parable very similar to that of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-14) circulated in rabbinical circles, but in that version, when those who had worked since dawn complained because the last ones received the same wage, the master said to them "These people have done more work in one hour than you have done all day."

Jesus is inspired by this story but gives it a surprising ending: instead of putting the emphasis on the work done (the effort, the merits...), Jesus shifts the emphasis to the master's generosity, to his good heart and tries to place his listeners before the horizon of an unpredictable and superabundant goodness: *"If I want to **give** to this last one..., do what he wants with what is mine... because **I am good**."*

Jesus' parable tries to get us out of our narrow and petty mentality and invites us to breathe a different air and to believe that God loves us without our deserving it, because God is good, beyond our qualities or responses. With God we do not live a "contractual relationship" but one of "absolute gratuitousness."

Let's imagine what "the next day" in the parable might be like: the day labourers, who had been treated so lavishly the day before, arrive an hour early to give the owner an hour's work for free: they have been infected by the owner's unpredictable generosity.

We contemplate Jesus

Those who were close to Jesus were witnesses to his absolute trust in the One he called Father. Jesus was familiar with the traditional symbols of his people to establish it: God was rock, refuge, defence, bulwark, fortress, wings... He inhabited the psalms and he made their expressions of trust his own: Jesus knew that neither the sun nor the moon could harm him because his Guardian did not sleep (Ps 121:4), God was on his side (Ps 124:1), he controlled his fate (Ps 15:5), and God was his support (Ps 18:19). When the nets of death closed in on Jesus, God would hear his cry for help (Ps 18,6), He would enlarge his anguished heart (Ps 25,17), God would change his mourning into dancing and clothe him with feasting (Ps 30,12). That is why Jesus allowed himself to be led by God, even through the dark glens of humble obedience. (Ps 23,6)

Jesus spoke of a God on our side, a God-with-us who desires our growth and vitality and asks only for our trusting surrender. We are not the fruit of chance, nor are we abandoned in the midst of the universe: we dwell in the centre of God's womb, and God's will for each one of us is to give us life and life in abundance.

We do not need to earn God's love because God sees us as a prodigious work of God's own hands, whose forgiveness is always awaiting us, just as a father and mother wait impatiently for their child who has gone away and run to meet them when they come home.

The parables of growth (Mk 4: the sower, the seed that grows by itself and the mustard seed; the leaven (Lk 13:20); the weeds (Matt 13:24-30), reveal *his great confidence*. The disciples must have wondered with bewilderment: why was the advance of the Kingdom so slow, why did the Word not break through, why were they still such a small and insignificant

group? The parables are a response to their anxieties, their worries and discouragements. In them, Jesus shows himself invested with the prophetic conviction that the Word is irresistible (Jer 23,29; Is 55,10), that, beyond the failures (the birds that eat the seed, the stones that do not allow it to grow, the thorns or thistles that choke it), when it finds good soil it produces a harvest so splendid that it exceeds all expectations. It is true that it grows mixed with weeds, but the owner of the field does not worry and, unlike those who want to uproot it, he remains calm, sure that the seed sown is good and the wheat will eventually fill his granary at the right time.

And even if the beginnings are insignificant, are not a grain of mustard or a pinch of yeast also insignificant? (Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:20-21) We must trust in their strength and anticipate their outcome: a great tree in which the birds will take shelter, a full loaf of bread which, when it comes out of the oven, will satisfy the hunger of many.

The disciple is not promised safety from failures and defeats, but it is precisely there that they can display the *great confidence* that Jesus spread wherever He went. To free them from the anxiety to measure and control, Jesus tells the parable of "the seed that grows by itself" (Mk 4:26-29): the protagonist "sows" the seed and, in the end, "*puts in the sickle*" when the time comes for the harvest. But he knows that there is a period of time in which it is not up to him to do anything, but that it is the earth that "*of itself*" makes the seed germinate and grow and bear fruit. And all this happens "*without him knowing how,*" while he "*sleeps and rises,*" without trying to direct the rhythms that are beyond his control.

We receive a new name

- ✓ We ask to learn when it is our turn to be active and diligent in the tasks of the Kingdom and when to be patient and passive; when it is time for effort and activity and when it is time to withdraw and make room for others; when we have to watch and intervene, and when all we can do is "go to sleep;" when it is time to analyze and detect causes and when to accommodate weaknesses and ignorance. It is not easy for us to recognize our limitations, to accept that we do not know everything and that there are many *whys* and *hows* that escape us. That is why, *after* doing our best from the heart, the "wise" thing to do is to remain calm and trust that the process that God himself has set in motion will make the seed continue to grow during the night, while we "sleep."

We look at Jesus asleep in the boat: perhaps that day he had prayed with the words of Psalm 127: "*God gives everything to those God loves while they sleep...*" and that is why Jesus slept so peacefully - that which we need to learn so much today... - in the midst of the storm.

- ✓ We visualize our life as a sown land, we name the birds that eat some seeds, the stones or brambles that hinder their growth. We ask Jesus to pass on to us his great trust and we thank Jesus for what has borne fruit in the good soil of our hearts in recent times.

- ✓ In the light of the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven (Mt 13:31-33), we try to reconcile ourselves with our feelings of inadequacy and limitations and with a certain pessimism that takes hold of us as we realize our diminishment. We ask for the grace to trust more in that strength of growth that is hidden in littleness.
- ✓ We can feel like an inert and insipid dough, we can name and thank the handful of yeast that God has hidden in this dough that we are to make it ferment and grow and become bread for others.
- ✓ Let us rekindle our faith that even the seeds sown in the Society over so many years possess a powerful dynamism of growth that germinates and grows beyond our control. We become aware of our temptations to anxiety and our resistance to "not knowing"... We ask for the difficult wisdom to get right the alternation between working and resting, between resisting and surrendering.

We remember Madeleine Sophie

Sophie also knew she needed confidence in the midst of difficulties. She said to Elise de Bouchaud in 1853: "I am obliged to remain like a ship buffeted by the winds that can neither go forward nor backward; thus I let myself be swayed by the will of God" (To Elise de Bouchaud 16-2-1853).

- ✓ We write on our heart the *new name* received today.

We celebrate what we have experienced

...when we place a few handfuls of soil on a cloth in the centre of the room and a small basket with seeds.

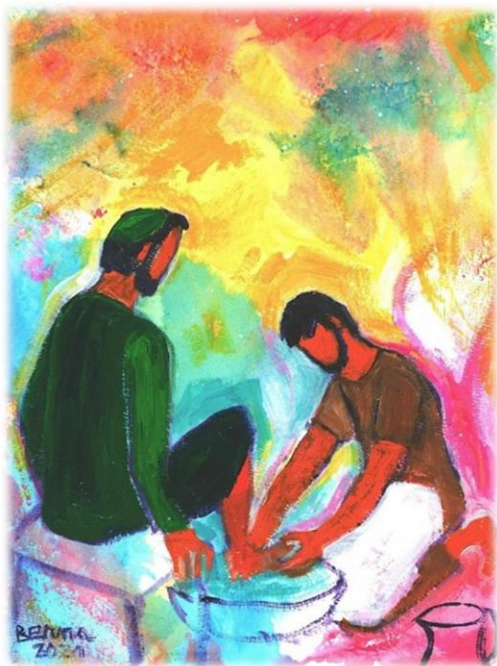
Let us read aloud the parable of the sower (Mk 4:13-30) and let us share with each other which stones or brambles threaten to choke in each one the seed sown in her soil. And also, let us give thanks for some of the fruits that our soil bears under the action of the Spirit.

THE FIFTH DAY

Drawn by the surrender of Jesus' life

We open ourselves to receive

We are all moved and filled with admiration by the extreme gestures or behaviour of people who dare to give themselves beyond what is reasonable, beyond what is "logical", beyond what is humanly demandable: they risk their lives for others, they stand by those who are



in high-risk situations, they do not take themselves into account and, without calculating or measuring, they give what they are and what they have, risking their own existence until they lose it. These are behaviours that, in the eyes of many, seem senseless, as this Sufi poem expresses:

*"They told me:
You have gone mad because of the One you
love.
I answered them:
The taste of life is only for the insane."*

Those we call "saints" have been men and women who have allowed themselves to be carried away by that logic born of love, which leaves behind calculations and measurements and enters into following. At certain times, we too have felt the

impulse to behave in this way, to break boundaries and move for the inexplicable reasons of love. And even if we have not settled there, we know from experience what it is all about.

We draw near

...to the woman who anointed Jesus on the head. (Mk 14,3-11) The scene takes place in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. The character of the woman is strategically placed between two pieces of information about the plot to kill Jesus: *It was two days before the Passover. The chief priests and the learned men were trying to seize him by a strategy and put him to death. But they said that it must not be during the feast, lest the people should riot. (...) Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray him to them. When they heard this, they were glad and promised to give him money. And Judas began to look for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them.* (Mk 14,1-2.10-11)

Those from whom one might expect the most fidelity (the religious leaders and one of Jesus' disciples) are plotting his downfall, while an anonymous woman is going to envelop him in a festive perfume. At the centre of the plot, next to a Jesus beset by the bonds of

death, she is clearly positioned in Jesus' favour, her anonymity allows us to identify with her, and her gesture is in keeping with what is expected of a true disciple:

- In the midst of the blindness of those around Jesus, she was able to recognize the *kairos*, the decisive moment that is approaching. She did not come to ask for anything, but to offer her perfume freely and to anoint him as King and Messiah. Her gesture of wastefulness has put her on the path towards that loss which, according to Jesus, leads to gain (Mk 8,35). Unlike the rich young man (Mk 10:21), she seems to have concentrated all her possessions on the precious perfume and gives it to the "poor man" par excellence, the one who has only a few hours of life left.

As a disciple of the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve (Mk 10:45), she takes the path of service and with her gesture of pouring out the perfume anticipates that of Jesus at his last supper: "This is my blood poured out for many" (Mk 14:24) and fulfils the commandment to love all things (Mk 12:29). Like the poor widow who had given "all that she had" (Mk 12:44), she does, according to Jesus, "what she could."

We contemplate Jesus

Jesus defends the woman who anoints him because he knew well what waste and excess are, and his signs bore that mark, from the exaggerated abundance of wine at Cana (Jn 2:6), to the copious catch of fish that almost sank the boat (Lk 5:6), to the banquet in the desert for those who had followed him. (Jn 9:17) Everything related to Jesus had to do with overflowing, the breaking of containers, the surpassing of all that was merely adequate.

Jesus proposed behaviour that went beyond common sense and sanity: to give your cloak to the one who takes away your tunic; to turn the left cheek after receiving a slap on the right; to walk two thousand paces with the one who forced you to walk a thousand. (Mt 5:38-45) These were not precepts to be followed to the letter: they were signs and nods that invited us to leave behind the memory of grievances and complaints and to enter the open sea of boundless love.

We contemplate Jesus in the upper room washing the feet of his disciples and then laying down his life as bread broken and blood shed. Everything in him exceeded measure and calculation: *"Having loved his own who were in the world, Jesus loved them to the end."* (Jn 13:1) This was Jesus' way of preparing himself to receive *"the name above every name."* (Phil 2:9)

Some were attracted by this disproportionate way of living: the women who anointed him used flasks and perfumes of great value (Mk 14:3), the poor widow gave all she had (Mk 13:44) and Nicodemus came to Calvary laden with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes. (Jn 19:39)

They had tasted what it was like to give oneself wholly and without return.

We receive a new name

- ✓ We become aware of our tendency to place ourselves where we feel important, recognized, inclined to give orders, corrections or advice; where we are heard and respected and from where we can look down on others.
- ✓ We then approach the place of humble service which was that of Jesus. From there the angle of view changes because from below we can feel the mud, the dust, the bad smell, the dirt...all that we do not realize when we prefer places of power or false superiority. At ground level and in contact with the feet of others, there is a change of plane that reveals the elemental nature of each person, their nakedness, the limitations of their physicality.
- ✓ Updating the text of the washing of the feet, we can say that, with his tight-fitting apron and a basin of water, Jesus would be today just one more member of any collective of subcontracted workers, of those invisible men and women who inhabit the underbelly of the world: like cyclists who deliver food; waitresses and maids; men and women who handle brushes, brooms, hoovers, detergents or rubbish bags; those who bend over in greenhouses, work night shifts, sew and iron in clandestine workshops, carry loads, push wheelbarrows, climb scaffolding, go down coltan mines, pick cotton at 50°. These are the "existential peripheries" of which Chapter 2016 speaks.

We stand beside Jesus there, receiving a new name. We ask the Father and Mary to "place us with her Son" *precisely there*.

- ✓ Many of the problems of our community life can only be solved by a certain "logic of excess" in the daily details of service, in patience, in the renunciation of one's own tastes, plans, complaints or reproaches. No significant human situation is lived in mere calculation or fulfilment, nor only in the realm of "what is my turn." Only the Gospel can give us the facility to "exceed" in the concrete manifestations of love. We ask for humble generosity to enter into this *logic of excess*.

We remember Madeleine Sophie

"In my accompaniments, in my conferences, I have never recommended anything to you more insistently than this: give yourselves entirely. Today more than ever I am trying harder to ask you to do so. If you give yourselves in this way, you will be happy, and peace and union will reign among you." (Conference 1855)

- ✓ And so we write on our heart the *new name* we received today.

We celebrate what we have experienced

The room is prepared by placing a large loaf of bread and a glass of wine on a low table with a tablecloth. This text is read aloud:

"I received from the Lord what I have handed down to you: that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, broke it with thanksgiving and said, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper, Jesus took the cup and said, 'This cup is the new covenant, sealed with my blood. Do this every time you drink it in remembrance of me.'" (1 Cor 11:23-26)

In silence, the bread is passed around and each one takes a piece and holds it in her hand. We maintain this gesture of keeping it and holding on to it, becoming aware of our temptations to hold on to and protect what is ours.

When it comes naturally from within us, we slowly open our hands until we are in the posture of offering, of being available and open.

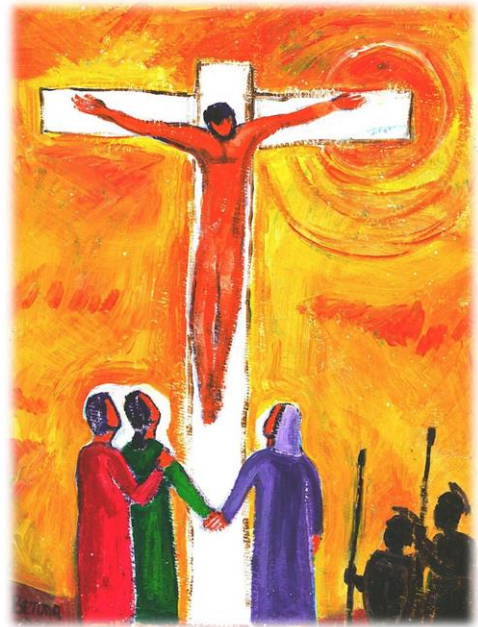
We then break our piece of bread and share it with those next to us.

THE SIXTH DAY

Bearerers of the marks of Jesus

We open ourselves to receive

Some characters in the Hebrew Scriptures are said to have been "sealed" or marked in their bodily reality because of their encounter with God: Jacob *"walked with a limp because he was wounded in the hollow of his thigh"* in his night struggle at Jabbok (Gen 32:31); Moses *"did not know that his face was radiant after he had spoken with the Lord"* (Ex 35:29); Jeremiah felt his word *"like a burning fire enclosed in his bones."* (Jer 20:9) In the Song of Songs the bridegroom says to his beloved: *"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm..."* (Song 8:6) and God recognizes Godself as "marked" by his people: *"Behold, I have you written on the palms of my hands..."* (Is 49:16) The apostle Paul asked: *"From now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus..."* (Gal 6,17)



Approaching the Paschal Mystery invites us to be *bearers of the marks of Jesus*, those traits that appear in the *new way* of which the Constitutions speak: "strength in weakness, freedom in service and life through death." (41)

The true disciple stays with the Master in difficult moments. As we approach the passion of Jesus, we may not be able to do more than this: to stay with him ("broken with the broken Christ"...as St. Ignatius invites us to ask), to look at Jesus, to remain at his side in silence and poverty of heart.

We draw near

...to the cross. Those who stood by the cross of Jesus were marked by it:

"Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. Jesus, seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved so much..." (Jn 19:25-26)

A mark present in them is that of *abiding*, according to the words of Jesus: *"You are the ones who have remained with me in my trials."* (Lk 22:28) Jesus had said this at supper: *"When a woman is about to give birth, she is sad because her hour has come; but when the child is born, she remembers no more the trouble because of the joy that a new creature has been born into the world"...* (Jn 16, 21)

Only a woman who has given birth or someone very close to her can know experientially what it feels like when the pains cease and the joy of having brought a new life into the world begins. At the wedding feast at Cana, Mary experienced a new birth in which she "gave birth" to her Son for public life. When Jesus resisted on the grounds that "*his hour had not come*," she tells the servants to do as he tells them: she knew in her own body the signs that "*the hour*" had come. On Calvary she is at the side of her Son who suffers the tearing of his own body to bring life at the cost of his death.

We contemplate Jesus

At the beginning of the last supper, Jesus "*knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father*" (Jn 13:1): to pass through that *narrow door* was not going to be without effort or struggle. In the Garden scene Jesus struggles, "*entering in agony*" (Lk 22:42): his passage from this world to the Father is not a flight, nor a resigned disappearance; Jesus does not walk serenely towards his death, but goes through the night of Gethsemane in dread and anguish, in the midst of loneliness and abandonment.

No one supported Jesus in his pain during the journey he had to make into the depths of his being and he had nothing left to lean on except his absolute certainty of being in the Father's hands. So Jesus turns to God as Son, certain that the bond cannot be broken and, while rejecting the imminence of death and fighting for his survival, Jesus abandons himself to God's care. By saying to God "your will be done," Jesus expresses his letting go, his abandonment of all reasons both to die and to live. He had said it before, in moments of joy, and Jesus says it again now in anguish.

"*It is accomplished.*" (Jn 19:30) It is the announcement of the end of a race, of surrender after a battle, of giving in, letting go, abandoning resistance, surrendering unconditionally, as the psalm exhorts: "*Surrender and acknowledge that I am God.*" (Ps 46:11)

Jesus is now "*the surrendered one*" and his gesture of *bowing his head* (Jn 19:30) evokes his attitude of absolute consent to the Father, the coherent end of his risky wager of trusting above all else. Jesus, who had made his whole life a gift, now gives up his last breath with the abandonment of a child falling asleep in his mother's arms.

"*And though he was a Son, yet because of what he suffered he learned obedience.*" (Heb 5:8)

Jesus had lost his life, pouring out or emptying as a container, and so he also had become a spring, a source of new life.

We receive a new name

- ✓ We remember people who, in the course of our lives, we have recognized as "*bearers of the marks of Jesus*" and we notice some of these traits. If we were to

ask those who see us in daily life if they recognize in us any "mark" of Jesus and his Gospel, what do we think they would answer?

- ✓ The bride in the Song of Songs said: *"The apple tree among the wild trees is my beloved among the young men; in its shade I would like to sit..."* (Ct 2,3) We too sit in the shade of the tree of the cross and rest there all that is in our lives of burden and suffering. We welcome the rest of knowing that the Lord knows it, unites it to his own cross and shares with us his strength and encouragement to carry ours.
- ✓ *"Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit."* (Jn 19:30) This gesture evokes his attitude of absolute consent to the Father, the coherent end of his risky wager of trusting above all else. Jesus who had made his whole life a gift, now gives up his last breath with the abandonment of a child falling asleep in his mother's arms. We can inwardly make the gesture of "bowing our heads" with all that there is in it of obsessions to know the "whys" and master the "hows" and we join Jesus in that "yes" of the one who, above all, knows himself to be safe and under the protection of the Father.

We remember Madeleine Sophie

"Jesus gave His life to the Society on the cross, when from His open heart came forth, with His blood, the last proof of His love for us. What a joy for us, and what a priceless gift to have come forth from His Heart!" (Conference 1845)

- ✓ Let us write on our heart the *new name* we have received today.

We celebrate what we have experienced

Sitting around a large cross placed on the ground, we remember the truth of the words Jesus spoke:

- *There is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for those you love.*" (Jn 15,13)
- *The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.*" (Jn 10,11)
- *The Son of Man has come to serve and to give his life as a ransom for all.*" (Mk. 10,45)
- *Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat which has fallen to the ground dies, it remains alone; if it dies, it bears much fruit. The one who loves their life will lose it; the one who loses it will keep it for life without end.*" (Jn 12,24-25)
- *Now I am troubled, shall I ask the Father to save me from this hour? But for this I have come, for this hour! Father, show forth your glory!"* (Jn 10,11)

- *The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will.*" (Jn 10:17-18)

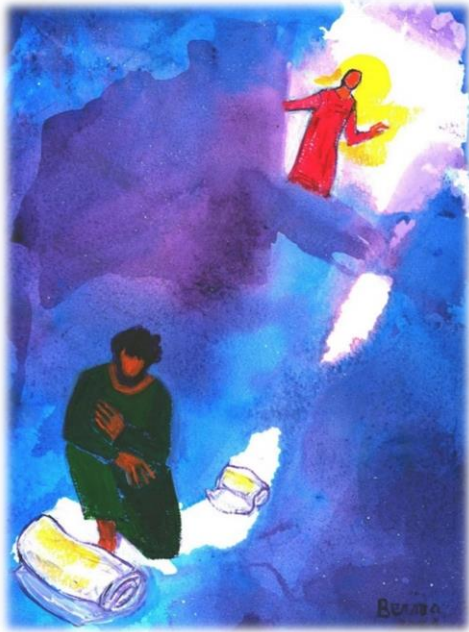
We let flow in us the gratitude and the feelings to which the liturgy of Holy Thursday invites us: "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have attained salvation and freedom."

We recall places where a lot of human pain is endured: a hospital, a country at war, a prison, a refugee camp.... From there we read, slowly, the narrative of the passion of Jesus according to Mark. (13,32-15,47)

THE SEVENTH DAY

We are renewed by his Resurrection

We open ourselves to receive



The Gospel of John, in the scene of the burial of Jesus, says: "In the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in it a new tomb in which no one had ever been buried. Since it was the eve of the Jewish feast and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there." (Jn 19:41-42)

It is precisely in this garden that the Risen One meets Mary Magdalene. According to Genesis, "The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, eastward, and placed there a man whom he had fashioned to keep it and cultivate it" (Gen 2,8.15). Easter is the first day of the new creation, the beginning of the new light and the new time. We enter into the final reality, even though it is still dark and the night is not yet over.

We draw near

...to Mary Magdalene. We see Mary Magdalene on the morning of the first day of the week, entering the upper room and excitedly announcing: "*I have seen the Lord!*" She spoke of "seeing" because she had lived for a long time in darkness and chaos, but with Jesus she had come to the light. She followed Jesus, contemplated his signs, admired his authority, listened to his words, and was moved by the tenderness with which he touched wounds and healed ailments.

At first, Mary was not able to go further and her eyes, still dim, only allowed her to see what many others saw in Jesus: a prophet, a sage, a healer, a good and compassionate man, only a small part of the splendor that radiated from his presence. Mary stumbled after Jesus because she knew that where he was, she lived, just as a plant needs sun and rain to exist. Mary stood beside Jesus at the foot of the cross, in the midst of pain, contradiction and failure, and saw the extent of his trust in the Father who gathered Jesus up at the end of the night.

At dawn on Easter Day, Mary met Jesus in the garden: Jesus spoke Mary's name and confided to her the good news of his resurrection. And from then on, Mary lived only to announce to his brothers what her eyes had seen and to pronounce the name of the one who, by loving to the end, had definitively conquered death.

We contemplate Jesus

Jesus said to his own: *"You will all stumble, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am set on my feet (raised up), I will precede you into Galilee.'" (Mk 14:27-28)* Jesus announces this to his disciples as an inevitable journey and promises them that he *will go before* them, but first he will be mortally wounded. His path will lead to life and they will recover, in a new way, the relational bond that unites them. The same people who will stumble and be scattered will walk together again, regrouped and "*preceded*" by Jesus on his journey toward Galilee.

In a culture where walking distances is the norm, the issue of *precedence* is important when travelling in a group. It is the position of the leader, of the one who has taken the initiative, who leads the way, who also assumes the place of greatest risk and who is responsible for defending those behind. When they were going up to Jerusalem, *"Jesus went ahead of his disciples who followed him in amazement. All those who followed him were afraid."* (Mk 10:32) The scene gives us a glimpse of the enormous distance that separates the one who goes ahead from those who follow him.

In the accounts of the Resurrection, the same relational game reappears: Jesus waits for Mary Magdalene in the garden and through the women he sends this announcement to his disciples: *"Go and tell his disciples and Peter that he will go before them to Galilee; there they will see him as he told them."* (Mt 28:7) According to the scene of the fishing on the lake, the disciples have arrived alone but, at dawn, John recognizes that it is Jesus who is waiting on the shore and that he has fulfilled his promise: Jesus has arrived before them and is waiting for them in Galilee. (Jn 21)

We receive a new name

- ✓ We name the "empty tombs" that we sometimes haunt, the lifeless places where we waste our life. We hear our name spoken by the Living One: Jesus alone knows it and has the power to connect us to the deep current of vitality and freedom that lies hidden deep within us. In calling Jesus Master, we recognize the bonds of discipleship that unite us to Him and we choose this way of putting ourselves in the position of "having something in common with him". We ask Jesus for the gift of entering into that "affinity" that Madeleine Sophie calls "union and conformity" in order to live in passionate coherence with Jesus' preference for the little ones and the least.
- ✓ *"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, while it was still dark..." (Jn 20,1)*
We become aware of what is "still dark" in our lives, of the dark aspects that make us recognize ourselves in the fear of the disciples, in the discouragement of those on the road to Emmaus, in the unbelief of Thomas... We silently open ourselves to welcome the One who can flood our darkness with his marvelous light.

- ✓ "Go and tell my brothers: I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God." (Jn 20,17)
We receive this proclamation as addressed personally to each of us. It offers us the joy of knowing that the Father is a "shared possession" between the Risen Lord and each one of us. We recognize ourselves as "sisters" of Jesus, belonging to this new family in which we exchange meaningful words and life-giving relationships.
- ✓ It is time to turn everyday scenes into sisterly encounters. We search our language for words spoken with love, expressions that have generated life and hope in us. We evoke the memory of sisterly details exchanged among us, words of encouragement, time spent listening to and caring for each other, friendship with people with whom we share this mission, the joy of the simplest people, times spent celebrating life. In all this, we discover signs of the Resurrection.
- ✓ We look for the words of encouragement that the Spirit of God has for us today: I am creating something new, I will give you a new name, be courageous and confident, come with me, let go, go out, dare, breathe, trust, love....
We open ourselves to those refrains that urge us to witness the joy of the Risen One.
We become aware of how much we need to hear *words of encouragement* that put the emphasis on the positive and not so much on what is lacking; more on "what goes well" and less on remembering the failures to be corrected.
- ✓ The garden transfigures our wounds and makes them luminous like those of the Risen One. At the empty tomb we learn that there are birth pangs and that the grain of wheat, when it falls to the ground and dies, bears much fruit. "You are more than those wounds that inhabit you," we hear there. "Suffering and death do not have the last word over you."
If we keep these words in the memory of our hearts, we can pass through the night with the confidence of one who awaits the coming of the Compassionate One, the One who will wipe away the tears from all faces.

We remember Madeleine Sophie

- ✓ In April 1865 Sophie was 85 years old and had only a month to live. She died on the 25th of May of that same year. In a letter to a nephew of hers, she told him that Paris was having a splendid spring and that she hoped there would not be a late frost, because that would spoil all the flowers. At the beginning of May, she enjoyed the fine weather and spent some mornings in the garden. Sitting under the cedar, her favourite tree, she would wait for the little girls to come out during recess to be with her.

She was waiting for the meeting with the One she loved so much and who was soon to call her by name.

- ✓ Let us write on our heart the *new name* we received today.

We celebrate what we have experienced

...by the lake. A "celebration by the lake" can be held around the 21st chapter of St. John. The room can be in semi-darkness, with bread and wine on a table, the paschal candle lit and as many (extinguished) candles as there are participants.

Let us listen to some of the texts:

a) *At sea and at night:*

"Jesus appeared again to the disciples by the lake of Tiberias. He appeared to them as follows: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the Zebedee's, and other disciples were together (the names of those taking part may be added), and Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'Let us go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing."

We share the experiences of darkness, "night" and sterile work. We also evoke situations of the "dark night" of our world. Let us share those:

b) *On the shore, there was a presence:*

"Jesus was already on the beach in the morning, but the disciples did not recognize that it was Jesus. He said to them, 'Do you have anything to eat, lads?' They answered, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' They cast it and could not drag it because of the abundance of fish. The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic, for he had nothing else on, and jumped into the water."

We share now our moments of "abundance" that we have experienced in the Exercises in the retreat, how and when we have recognized Jesus during these days and what response we want to give him. Situations of light and hope in the world made possible by the Risen Lord are also shared now. The candles in the paschal candle are lit and the room is illuminated.

c) *There is a shared meal:*

"When they came ashore, they saw some coals prepared, and there were fish and bread on them. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have caught.' And Peter came dragging ashore the net full of large fish: one hundred and fifty-three. Though there were so many of them, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them,

'Come and have lunch.' None of the disciples dared ask him who he was, for they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took bread and gave it to them, and the fish. This was the third appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples."

We share the bread and wine on the table in a festive atmosphere and end by praying this prayer together:

When we paddle in the dark
in the middle of the night
and our nets are empty,
you are present,
although our eyes do not know how to recognize you.

Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you!

In the early morning, when light overcomes darkness,
on the first day of the week,
you are on the shore
and your word illuminates our shadows.

Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you!

Lord of Life in abundance,
Lord of full nets:
like John,
we want to be able to recognize your presence;
like Peter,
we want to jump out of the boat to meet you.

Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you!

You give us bread and fish to eat
you have prepared for us
and in that shared meal,
we learn to hand over unreservedly
what we have freely received from you.

Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you!

You claim from us
the confession of our love,
and then send us to sustain, to support,
to defend the lives of our brothers and sisters.
We don't have more than a little bread
and the poverty of our love,
but that's what we can offer you
and with that we are ready to follow you.

Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you!

With all those who believe without having seen,
with those who seek without faltering,
with all the small and humble of heart,
we believe and proclaim
that in you, death has been conquered,
that you are alive and you precede us on the way.

Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you!

THE EIGHTH DAY

We are sent to manifest the love of Jesus' Heart

Let's imagine that, at the end of this retreat, we receive this letter from Madeleine Sophie:

My daughters, the time has come for you to set out again. You have travelled a long journey to return to the One who is your Source and to find in him your Root and your Centre.

You have pitched your tent at the door of the wisdom of his Gospel, you have again made the decision to listen to his call to follow Jesus wherever he goes and your heart has been enlarged with the desire to be his and to become disciples of the One who is meek and humble of heart.

You have become friends of solitude and silence and you have experienced anew that your life is founded on prayer and the interior life. You have sincerely asked yourselves *what the Lord is calling you to be and to do*. You have entered into the Word in order to welcome it, to whisper it and to let it transform your heart.

In your eyes there shines a secret joy and a different light, as if everything now seems new to you. You have learned to live more in touch with your heart and to recognize its movements, but now you must set out to return to your ordinary life, to meet again with your sisters in community and to mingle with those who walk the paths of the world, to be, in the midst of them, *artisans of hope*.

Have courage and confidence because you do not walk alone: I walk with you and so do Philippine and a long line of women who have lived before you as RSCJ and have found in the Heart of Jesus light, life, strength, shelter, food, fire, fresh water. Like them, you are called to grow, to live and die in Him, with Him and for Him.

Each of you can repeat before the Lord the words of Jacob: "I am too small for such mercy and faithfulness as you have shown me". Now is the time to respond to the love of the One who has blessed you, healed you with his forgiveness, called you to follow him, invited you to share with him in the labours of the kingdom, drawn you to the gift of his Eucharist, sealed you with the marks of his Cross, renewed you with the joy of the Risen One.



May the memory of so much good received move you to respond to Jesus with passion and generosity, knowing that, however great your desire may be, His is infinitely greater and Jesus' devotion to each one of you has only just begun. Jesus is always greater than your heart, and it is proper to His love to pour Himself out and draw you to Himself so that you may become one Body in Christ Jesus.

Surrender to Jesus all that you are and possess, place in His hands all that you have received from Him: let go of the ballast and get rid of whatever prevents you from walking in freedom, because if you belong to Another, you no longer have to worry about yourselves.

Look at the world with a gaze of hope because in each of its creatures you can find your God. Wherever you go, God has gone before you, preparing your way. May you become accustomed to seek God, above all, in the places below, where the smallest and humblest dwell, for it is there that God's Heart is inclined.

God's love is better than wine, therefore you will know Him better by trying to taste and savour Him than by thinking of Him. You may climb Mount Horeb or Tabor to seek Him, but you will have to learn to hear His Word amidst the clamour of the people, for it is among the children of humanity that He prefers to speak it.

Do not be afraid to know that you are small and fragile, because the Lord surrounds you with His mercy and, as a "little Society," you belong entirely to the God who places in your hands a little white stone on which is written the *new name* God wants to give you.

We celebrate what we have experienced

Put as many white pebbles as there are people in the group in a clay dish or on a handkerchief on the floor. Read these texts about the "*new name*":

"You shall be called by a *new name*, spoken from the mouth of the Lord." (Is 62:2)

"Take courage, O Jerusalem! The One who gave you a *name* will comfort you." (Bar 4, 30)

"As a girdle is girded about a person's waist, so I have girded myself about the whole house of Israel to be my people, my *name*, my honour and my glory." (Jer 13:11)

"You are in our midst, O Lord, and we are called by your *name*. Do not forsake us." (Jer 14:9)

Your *name* is a perfume that is poured out..." (Song of Solomon 1:3)

"To the angel of the Church of Pergamum write:

To the victor I will give of the hidden manna,

I will give them a white pebble and write on it

a new name which only the one who receives it knows." (Rev 2,17)

And now each one can take a pebble and share *"the new name"* she has received along this journey, this retreat.

You might end with Psalm 136: *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for God's love endures forever..."* and perhaps we want to name the things for which we are grateful.

At the end of the celebration, we share this prayer inspired by the letter to the Colossians (2,6;3,17):

"We ask you, Father,
that, since we have received
your Son Jesus Christ as Lord,
let us walk together with him,
rooted and grounded in him,
confirmed in the faith we were taught,
filled with gratitude.
And that everything we do,
whether in word or deed,
let us do it in Jesus' name,
giving thanks to God,
Our Father,
through him.
Amen."



General Chapter 2024

