



Un Carisma vivo, un Camino compartido  
150 años de las Hijas de Jesús

March 2021

## Abnegation, mystical experience of gratuity and service

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We are celebrating the 150 years of the foundation of the Congregation of the Hijas de Jesús. For us sisters and lay, Family of Mother Cándida, this is a call to read, with a new vision, the living presence of the Spirit of God who continues to write our history in every time and circumstance. Besides, it is an invitation to let ourselves be provoked by what the life of our foundress in mission reveals to us in this historical moment we are living in, allowing us to imagine and construct another future of a wide horizon for a new and necessary world.

It is the time to recognize the “theography” of God in the life of Mother Cándida, the signs that he has left and which today we can go back to read again.

In revisiting the biography of Mother Cándida we find in her a deep experience of God. It is possible to perceive a mystical itinerary (1) in all the stages of her life, that is to say, Mother Cándida has expressed a profound and genuine relationship with God which left in her a fundamental mark, a constant attitude of abnegation, an attitude which has its root in the fundamental option to follow Jesus, and attitude that must be lived by all of us Christians.

The term abnegation presented in the dictionary of Ignatian spirituality brings us to Gospel texts that, from the following of Jesus, can help us in the understanding and authentic living out of it. This dictionary says that the Gospel of Mark, the primary source of the rest of the gospels, has the preoccupation to teach us that Jesus is not the glorious and triumphalist Messiah, but one who embraces the cross out of love.

In the narrative of the evangelist Mark, the central idea of the Passion of Jesus clearly dominates a large part of the Gospel. In *Mk 8, 34* we encounter the expression, “Anyone who wishes to come after me *must deny himself*, take up his cross, and follow me”.

Mother Cándida lived in attentive and loving listening to this invitation of Jesus who brought her to design a project (program?) of life in the history of her time, and which



## Un Carisma vivo, un Camino compartido 150 años de las Hijas de Jesús

is continually read and lived by us, Hijas de Jesus and lay who share the very same project of life of Jesus.

Self-denial is a decisive step in the following; it is not a previous condition but a consequence, within a pre-existing relationship of free personal decision. Abnegation, like the Cross, is not the end, but a dimension that is painful and accepted in the following. From this horizon of abnegation results a loving surrender of oneself in a freely accepted mission and recognized as the concrete will of God for one's own life. (DEI TOMO I Sal Terrae 2007 p.72).

Mother Cándida, from the first months in the life of the Congregation that she founded at the age of 26, already had intuited with clarity the profound sense of abnegation for whoever follows the gospel of Jesus.

We perceive it in the Formula she wrote as “plan of life” for her Congregation. The first paragraph ends with the proposal for apostolic life wherein we read the evangelical criterion of abnegation: *“must be ready to go to fulfill their offices in the towns that may need our schools most, and where we can promote the glory of God and the welfare of our neighbors, more than our well-being or temporal benefit.”*

Abnegation does not have to annul the person from her/his proper responsibility, but that it must free her/him, with the gifts of God, for a service that is loving and in solidarity within the community, for self-giving to the mission received. We have to be conscious of this living it as a constitutive and intrinsic characteristic in the following of Jesus, it makes us free for a true and authentic self-giving to a project of life to which we feel called.

It is from the creative and daring fidelity of Mother Cándida to the Gospel of Jesus that we want to understand the profound living of abnegation lived by her. Reviewing the passage of God in Mother Cándida, we discover “abnegation as a path of de-centeredness” (2), in which God truly has occupied the center of her person so that it were possible for her to reach the fullness of her humanity.

A careful study done on the biography of Mother Cándida from the perspective of her spirituality expresses with clarity that her most intimate relationship was centered on God. For her God was the totalizing being of all her existence, a personal and not abstract being, with which she maintained simple and very close personal relationships.

The response of Mother Cándida to this Totalizing God of her existence was the surrender of her whole person to Him. Her fundamental option is her youthful and definitive decision to be “only for God”, when she determined



## Un Carisma vivo, un Camino compartido 150 años de las Hijas de Jesús

to choose God as the only love of her life. That this fundamental option was a reality in her daily existence, she herself ratified it when, a little before her death, she said, “Forty-one years of religious life, and I cannot remember a single moment not lived for God”. What a brave statement of a total surrender to God. (ESPIRITUALIDAD DE LA MADRE FUNDADORA, Relaciones Trascendentes, p.95)

With another.

Thus, abnegation as a path to self-decenteredness, that is to say, to let God occupy the whole human existence, continues to be a great challenge for us today. The author Javier Melloni sj, in his reflection, teaches us what is the abnegation of oneself which makes it possible for us to identify ourselves with the other. The more one forgets herself/himself, the more is the participation in the life of others and above all, it is precisely this that expands and makes our being more universal.

Abnegation understood in this manner as a path of de-centeredness, we can comprehend the foundational inspiration of Mother Cándida which is made concrete and alive in the history of her time, and which becomes universal in the measure of her openness, welcome and attentive listening to the Gospel and to the needs of her time.

The attitude of abnegation from the relationship with God lived by Mother Cándida, is for us an invitation to make an itinerary of encounter with God that brings us in consequence to getting out of ourselves and leading us to an encounter with others, and with the sufferings of our world; it will truly transform us into persons in mission, like Jesus, who seek more the good of others than their proper or individual interests. “The isolation and the closedness in ourselves and in our interests can never be a path to return to give hope and realize a renewal” (3).

If we understand abnegation not as a discipline nor a virtue but a path of de-centeredness of oneself from the bursting forth of God in our history, such experience will naturally bring us to an exodus in the direction of God, of the other, and of the needs of our time. I believe that this bursting forth of God happened in the life of Mother Cándida and this made her go out to an encounter with others and design a project of universal life of which we form part today. All life in a dynamic is possible solely from going out to an encounter.

Mother **goes out** to an encounter with others, with the needs and sufferings of her time, in an attitude of abnegation that was always constant in her life. Many were the difficulties which she had in impelling the inspiration to found a religious congregation with the name Hijas de Jesús, dedicated to the education of children and youth. In this work, when the moment of the cross came, she knew how to embrace it to resemble Jesus. In the culture of well-being and of distraction, the image of the cross becomes



## Un Carisma vivo, un Camino compartido 150 años de las Hijas de Jesús

countercultural. No doubt, in the accomplishment of her apostolic work, innumerable setbacks of all types were present.

In the life of Mother Cándida, it is difficult to look for a specific moment which could express her attitude of abnegation because all her existence was in a dynamic of going out of herself. This exodus in the itinerary of her faith moved her to the encounter of the needs and sufferings of her time. We can emphasize the foundational act as a sacred and historical value, as legacy, as charismatic source, as expression of following and discipleship, which today still continues coming, marking generations.

The historical fact of the foundation of an Institute is the moment wherein a new being is born within the Church. Like in all birth, life is experienced for the first time; in this case, for the first time a concrete form of living the Gospel is tried: some persons begin to configure their Christian existence according to this vital current to which the action of the Spirit has carried them (LASO, Inés. *Evocación del acto fundacional del Instituto; Un camino entre dos fechas*, p.25).

Celebrating a Jubilee Year at the service of the Church and society as a concrete form of living the Gospel, is a responsibility and a demand to make it present in a world in crisis. The impact with which we live with the pandemic brings us to recognize ourselves as a global village affected by something unexpected.

For us, sisters and lay who share the same mission of Jesus, to live the actualized memory of our charism as subjects of a new time supposes reinventing, recreating, interpreting, and unlearning.

We must not be afraid to let God occupy our existence, placing ourselves in a movement of *Going out: to go out* from the mystique of gratuity and of service is the condition to collaborate in a project of life for all.

### NOTAS

- 1) The word mystique comes from the greek word mystikos and makes reference to all that which is related to the mystery. DEI Tomo II G-Z Sal Terrae 2007 p. 1256.
- 2) MELLONI, Javier. Presentación Revista Manresa, Espiritualidad Ignaciana. Abnegación alternativa para nuestro tiempo p.426.
- 3) Carta encíclica de Santo Padre Francisco, *Fratelli tutti*, on fraternity and social friendships, art 30; Ediciones Loyola, São Paulo, 2020.