



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

## Simplicity

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In today's world, social networks continually invite us to get involved. Adolescents, through various selfies, share and seek self-recognition on the Internet, and adults increasingly tend to express their social position and abilities through all these means. A large number of advertisements stimulate consumption and encourage overvaluation of brands. The influence of the messages received and the amount of material that is owned makes all this become a standard to express the value of the person.

In this day and age, revisiting the meaning of "simplicity" is like looking at a beautiful flower among the vines. When the wind blows, weeds obscure our vision, and to ward off messages that disturb us, to look at the flowers in silence and let the simple beauty touch us again, we need to bend down and adopt a posture that perhaps we are not accustomed to.

According to the dictionary, the word "simplicity" can refer to objects and people. A simple object is not complicated and does not require special skills. On the other hand, simple people tend to be humble, sincere and frank; they respect others; They neither show off nor hide their abilities and treat others naturally and simply (1).

Simplicity as a characteristic of Mother Candida is something very clear, since everything in her - her gaze, her thought and her whole being - is focused on the greater glory of God, in her "I am for God alone". This inner conviction of hers filters out all the complicated and unnecessary decorations in her life.

According to the Letters of Mother Candida, the CFI and CND, we can say that her simplicity has the following characteristics: It is based on the P.F. of the SE (23); it is surrender in obedience; it fosters fraternal charity and is an important element for a good educational environment.

### 1. Simplicity in the letters of Mother Candida and in the Constitutions

#### 1.1 Based on the "Principle and Foundation" of the Spiritual Exercises

At this moment of celebrating the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation, it is particularly moving to remember the scene in which Mother Candida arrived for the first time at the Casa de San José, a corner of Salamanca, the birthplace of the Congregation. It was night, and a poor lamp lit the house. Mother kissed the ground with emotion, embraced the bare walls and with her soul aflame she exclaimed: **"Here my peace, here my rest forever"** (2).



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Mother Candida's simplicity is based on her deep trust in God and her unconditional faith in Him. Her loyalty and trust allows her to see God's mercy and goodness in all things and this makes her exclaim in everything, with a grateful heart: "Blessed be God." Simplicity in her is not negative, it neither denies material desires nor fears difficulties and problems, but rather shows in depth her spiritual experience of the "Principle and Foundation". The desire for the glory of God and the good of our neighbors arouses in her Ignatian indifference towards all creatures.

This simplicity requires a base of self-denial in life just as a musician needs a lot of practice to achieve a good performance. Natural simplicity is actually the result of long-term discipline and self-denial, and it takes commitment. We can see this in the CFI and CND:

*Each Sister should persuade herself that what is worst in the house should be hers, for greater abnegation and spiritual progress. ...Furthermore, in everything they should maintain simplicity, poverty and spiritual edification, which ought to be kept always in view of our Lord (3).*

*In conformity with our Constitutions, our poverty implies a common standard of living for the whole Congregation, marked by evangelical simplicity and austerity... Each Sister should responsibly assume this level of communitarian poverty, living it in an attitude of wholesome freedom and self-discipline (4).*

### **1.2 Surrender of themselves in obedience**

In the Constitutions, the word "simplicity" appears several times referring to "obedience" as an attitude towards "authority": CFI 163.

*It is finally recommended that they always be simple and open with those who hold the place of Christ our Lord, by conferring with them on what they may judge convenient for the greater glory of divine Goodness. They should persuade themselves that they will find in this, peace and consolation to go forward in the way of divine service; and that by letting their Superiors know them, they will help them succeed in entrusting to each one the mission they could, in our Lord, carry on with a spirit of love, and thus avoid placing them in difficulties that exceed their strength or labors beyond their capacity. In this way, the Superiors may better be able to organize and provide for what is convenient for the universal body of the Congregation (5).*

Here, simplicity is an open and transparent attitude in a relationship of trust. It does not seek its own benefit, does not conceal nor argue. If obedience is the chain of unity, simplicity is the oil applied to the chain to prevent it from rusting.



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Simplicity is also the fruit of self-giving. When our heart is free and centered on Jesus Christ, we can calmly open ourselves to different possibilities, express the motions experienced in prayer and act responsibly, abandoning ourselves to the superiors who represent God.

*The Constitutions demand that we live this obedience in the profound attitude of faith, availability, radical self-giving and also of co-responsibility, convinced that we are members of one body committed to its growth and to the common mission. These demands that shape the type of obedience proper to the Institute lead us to ... Contribute our opinion and initiative in decision making with simplicity and serenity, collaborating maturely in the dialogue that must precede the most important ones (6).*

### **1.3 It favors fraternity**

In interpersonal relationships, especially among the Sisters, simplicity is trust, openness and humble acceptance; it is capable of recognizing fragility naturally; it does not pretend nor is defensive, it does not depress, it is being honest with oneself and with others.

In her letters, we often see Mother Candida expressing her emotions simply, and letting the person share with her gratitude to God and her acceptance of God's will in the face of sadness and the difficulties of life:

*When I saw your penmanship in my hands, I could not read the letter out of happiness. So I closed it immediately and I went to the chapel right away to give thanks to Jesus, and His most Pure Mother, and to St. Joseph; and when I went out kneeling I touched.. (7).*

*You cannot imagine how much I have suffered with this foundation, nothing has been written, nor has anyone undergone what I have gone through here. Blessed be God for everything (8).*

*You cannot imagine how hard it is for me not to be able to be in my first house tomorrow. Yes, most Holy Virgin Mary, you know very well that deep in my heart and soul I regret so much not to be in that beautiful church, with my very dear little daughters whom I remember so much. I will be there in spirit, yes, I hope so. I feel very sad when I see the train pass by and I cannot go. Let's endure it and may it all be for the love of God (9).*

Fraternity in Christ does not seek external harmony, but rather to help each other to be witnesses of the Kingdom. Therefore, fraternal help for the good is necessary. And the atmosphere of true love and trust, simplicity and joy, contributes to a constructive and mutually supportive relationship (10). In Mother Candida's letters we can also see how she expresses herself by directly correcting a sister:

*... I was very much disappointed at its contents because I see that my decisions, which are pondered before the Lord, are trampled upon. I say this, because the fact that I*



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*command something, is reason enough for you to do the opposite; and this has happened not only once but many times. You tell me that you are illuminated by electric light. I would prefer you to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, because I see you in a dire need of this light (11).*

### **1.4 Important educational environment**

Finally, simplicity is the important educational atmosphere of a Christ-centered school. To create such an atmosphere, educators need not only spiritual cultivation, but also human depth and balance.

*Open to all social classes, in a climate of freedom and love, simplicity and joy, the schools must have the person of Christ as the center of their whole life (12).*

*Fidelity to our identity as educators also demands human depth and balance manifested in an atmosphere of simplicity and joy, professional responsibility and continuous updating in the face of constant demands in the field of education and evangelization (13).*

A simple educational environment respects each person and is open to everyone's experience of God, not to flatter or please but to stimulate and promote good. Mother Candida often advises the sisters to have a good relationship with the students and the parents in order to enrich themselves in the life of the spirit; however, a good relationship is a means and not an end. The simple attitude gives freedom to people and helps to open up with sincerity to God.

Mother Candida also invites us Sisters to bear in mind that human relationships have their limits and are not always perfect:

*Regarding what you told me about the giving of awards: You will have to present a simple program, as in the preceding years, and do not mind that the families are becoming more and more demanding because we can never please everybody. Just do what you can in order to give glory to God, as you say in your letter, and don't mind anything else (14).*

### **2. Living simplicity in today's world: a path of love**

The GC XVIII recognized with courage and frankness that our needs, demands, individualism, consumerism grow in us... and that we have difficulty in assuming the limits of life itself (15). We feel the need to find a way that will bring us to a simple and austere life (16).

This simple life is a dynamic force that springs from the inner source of our being, it comes from the joy of the Gospel and frees us from individualism and consumerism, not



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in a negative way but as a manifestation of a testimony of life, which is recreated anew in us and makes us more free and vigilant (17).

*We trust that we Hijas de Jesús will seek the means to diminish our needs and demands, in order to recreate a lifestyle that will make us freer and more available, simpler and happier in following Jesus (18).*

Each person, according to her life situation, needs to look for concrete means and help, and according to our spirituality these means must be in accordance with the PF of the SE. Ignatian indifference is a manifestation of a relationship of love. The person, under the experience of Trinitarian love received, responds to said love having it as a base criterion for all of her choices. This true love is revealed in our relationship with all creatures. Let's take some time to stop to appreciate the spirituality of the small and trivial things of life to meet Jesus in every little thing and in the presence of every person, obtaining deep satisfaction in it.

*Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer (19).*

The love relationship with God will naturally lead us to choose a simple life and reduce needs. We will thus experience a greater interior freedom to welcome the overflowing grace that God always pours into our lives.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us to heed an ancient teaching: the belief that less is more (20). Especially when faced with a variety of novel and convenient consumer products and the temptation of power and prestige, we need serenity to help us recover our attention to the Child in the manger and to believe once again in the "small" salvation.

*Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship (21).*

*Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also "macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones" (22).*

To live a simple life in today's world, perhaps the following questions can help us reflect individually or in a group:



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1. How do you understand the meaning of a simple life today in the present world?
2. When you hear the word "simplicity", can you think of someone close to you? How do you experience simplicity in this person? What do you feel about his/her simplicity? What attracts you?
3. With respect to the characteristics of "simplicity" listed above, what has moved and challenged you the most?
4. Based on your observation of today's dominant culture, what are the values opposed to simplicity and how do these values affect and influence you?
5. How do you understand and experience the expression "less is more"?
6. To live a simple life, what kind of efforts do you need to make?

### NOTES

(1) <https://definicion.de/sencillez/>

(2) María Luisa Matamala Vírseda, FI, 1997. "Juanitatxo: Nos cuenta su vida", p. 46

(3) CFI 150

(4) CND 86

(5) CFI 163

(6) CND 91

(7) MF I 3

(8) MF I 22

(9) MF I 31

(10) In order to keep our fraternal union alive, it is necessary that we open ourselves to the experience of God and strive to arrive at a true communication of the faith we share. Similarly, this union has to be fostered in an atmosphere of love and confidence, simplicity and joy which enhances spontaneous communication, mutual help, fraternal correction and, in general, the development of authentic interpersonal relationships (CND 114).

(11) MF I 103a

(12) CND 134

(13) CND 137

(14) MF I 190

(15) Cf. GC XVIII, 6

(16) Cf. GC XVIII, 16

(17) Cf. GC XVIII, 6

(18) Cf. GC XVIII, 22

(19) LS 223

(20) LS 222

(21) LS 230

(22) LS 231