

INFO SS.CC. SISTERS N°8 – JULY 20TH 2013

## "MARTA FROM BETHANY: THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH"



In the context of the "Year of Faith" which we are experiencing, and in line with the previous info letter that invited us to revitalize and recreate in everyday life the viewpoints and feelings of Jesus and Mary, I leave you with these words.

Surely we have all seen the signs of spiritual renewal that have developed throughout this year in the heart of the Church and especially in the heart of each one of us and our communities. We all know that faith is not a life experience already achieved, that it is a process, a journey, an adventure sustained and accompanied by the Lord, as Benedict XVI says *"Faith, indeed, grows when it is lived as an experience of love, is received and communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us effective, because it enlarges the heart in hope and allows for a fruitful witness: indeed, it opens the heart and mind of the listener to accept the invitation of the Lord to receive His Word to*

*believers are  
strengthened  
by believing*

*be his disciples. As St. Augustine says, believers are strengthened by believing "*

*In our experience of faith, many people, events and testimonies have enlightened and supported us, but in the journey of faith we can never have enough. I am going to share with you a simple reflection on the experience of faith in a biblical woman, a predecessor of ours in faith "Martha of Bethany" (John 11, 1-40). A woman whose faith grew in the encounter with the Master, in the encounter with the love of God revealed in Jesus. A love can conquer death and transform it into life. Let us approach her and with her we will learn to go to meet Jesus and proclaim our faith with joy and hope.*

In the process we are called to live in order to bring about the new face of the Congregation, we need to journey with eyes fixed on the Lord "who is the founder of our faith and who

*with Mary we will learn to go  
to meet Jesus*

will bring it to completion" (Hb.12:2). We need to recover the awareness that faith is primarily a personal encounter with Jesus, born in a moment of encounter, strengthened and consolidated only in the encounter. It is an inner strength that enables us to face life with joy and inner fulfilment. It is a call to be happy and to be creators of a world that is more humane and happy because we have believed. This journey of the Congregation, where we decided to "choose life" is a journey of faith, may the encounter with Jesus Christ through His Word, set the pace of our lives and be a light on the way, may Jesus be the captain of our boat.

Martha of Bethany, gives us a clear example of a believing woman who travels a journey of faith, a woman who has chosen life. Her confession of faith, is given in an Easter environment, the "Resurrection of Lazarus" in an atmosphere of struggle between life and death, in a family environment, in the family of Bethany.

The journey of faith opens to hope, Martha waits for Jesus, but he is not in a hurry, when he arrives, her brother is already dead, she expected Jesus to come quickly because Lazarus was his friend, but Jesus fails, however Martha continues to wait, continues to envisage her situation, because in her heart she senses that something will happen, she has not lost the ability to hope.

"When she heard that Jesus was coming, she ran to meet him, "this is wonderful, you first have to listen and when you have listened something is set in motion, it is listening to the Word that makes this woman get moving; "listen and get moving ", two attitudes that characterize the disciple. Martha becomes a disciple; she goes in search of Jesus and meets him on the way. In the Gospel, many things happen on the road, because the road is an open place, it indicates movement and "on the way the miracle happens". This is where there is the dialogue between Jesus and Martha, a theological dialogue, a dialogue of depth takes place.

Martha's faith is dynamic, evolutionary, it has a process and Jesus respects this dynamism. If we return to the gospel, all those who have met Jesus have experienced different processes: the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus ... but at the same time Jesus knows how to activate the vitality of each one. Jesus respects the time, but also encourages movement and does so through his Word, he knows what he has to say, to whom and at what moment.

**Jesus knows what he has to say, to whom and at what moment**

Let us look at what happens in this beautiful and profound encounter of Martha with Jesus and as disciples learn from him. In the beginning Jesus is not very explicit, Martha says to Jesus, "*Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died*", thereupon she said: "*But even now I know that whatever you ask God, he will grant it*" she takes the initiative in the dialogue and maintains hope, trust in Jesus, she puts the little faith she has in His hands. Jesus' response is a bit ambiguous "*your brother will rise again*", Martha not sure about this response of Jesus, says to him: "*I know that he will rise again on the last day*", she expects another answer, not the resurrection on the last day, she awaits the resurrection now.

Jesus knows that it is time for Martha to take another step in her journey of faith and replied "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.*" Jesus realizes that she still did not understand who He is, who is the Master and reveals himself. In the Gospel of John we find on several occasions that Jesus is self-revealing, "*I am the good shepherd, I am the light, I am the way ...*". Here he reveals himself as the resurrection and the life, "*Do you believe this?*" Jesus respects the process of her faith, her freedom. Martha, when faced with this question

**Marta believed before seeing, this is faith**

makes her greatest and solemn confession of faith "*Yes, Lord, I know that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.*"

It is in the encounter with Jesus, in dialogue and personal confrontation where Martha makes her confession of faith and makes it before seeing the miracle, the miracle is no longer needed. Martha believed before seeing, this is faith, "*Blessed are those who believe without seeing*" (Jn.20, 29). In this encounter, Jesus revealed himself to Martha and she in her confession of faith revealed who Jesus is for her, she condensed in a series of titles the person of Jesus, "*Lord,*" "*Christ,*" "*the Son of God* "," *he who is to come into the world* " four Christological titles, put into the mouth of this disciple. Martha appears as a true disciple of Jesus, as a woman who interprets the reality of what she is experiencing in the light of faith.

When the decisions of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Chapter refers to leadership in the reorganization process of the Congregation, it reminds us that this "*is a time to care especially about the life of faith, and to invite the sisters to **read reality and events through the eyes of a believer.***"

From our experience of faith and in the light of the journey of faith of Martha of Bethany, it would be good to ask: Am I woman of encounter, of dialogue and does it cost me to dialogue and be challenged by the Word, by others? Am I a woman of hope, or do I collapse in the face of difficulties, obstacles, personal limits ...? On my journey of faith do I always choose life? Do I hope in Jesus or am I impatient, do I have real hope or do I only want quick answers, quick fixes?

**Who supports and accompanies this faith that I have received?**

Are we realistic women, who do not daydream? Martha initially dreamed that Jesus would solve the problem, that he would save her brother from death. We must be realistic and know how to dream, but not to daydream. Do I truly believe or half believe? Who supports and accompanies this faith that I have received? To what degree of maturity is my faith? Do we know how to interpret events, do we know how to interpret our personal, community and congregational life or just live and that is enough? One thing is to live and that is enough and another is to live and interpret what has been experienced, there is a big difference.

Let us ask the Lord to increase our faith, to live with joy and hope this new way of Congregation, to sail out, casting the nets even though the circumstances are not always so clear, but the fears and fatigue occur. "*Have I not told you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God*" (Jn.11: 40), "*all things are possible to him who believes*"... "*Lord, I believe, but increase my faith*" (Mark 9:22 - 24). May our faith be the decisive force to welcome life and reality with renewed hope. "May Mary be our model of faith in Love" (Const.3).