

SYNTHESIS OF THE RESPONSES TO THE BIBLICAL FORMS

2007-2008 Journey towards the seminar on the Ministry of Pastoral Care



Dear Sisters, may the grace and peace of Christ Good Shepherd be with each of you. First of all we want to thank God for the journey that we are making in preparation to the Seminar on our Ministry of Pastoral Care. It has been so nice to see, through your participation to the Biblical Forms sent in 2007-2008, how God really leads us. The fact that diverse sisters and communities had dedicated time to put themselves in listening to the Word itself puts to our Congregation, in this moment of History, has already rendered this seminar full of life.

In fact from the experience of life of those who freely willed to share their own prayer of the Word, emerges the living of our Ministry of Pastoral Care, those which we have already interiorized, that which God awaits from us and that which we still have to strengthen to be always more faithful to the Lord in our Pastoral Vocation.

While we write this ulterior synthesis, taking into consideration the synthesis coming from all the nations where we are present, we think of you in the midst of God's people, all dedicated to take care of the life of faith of the adults, of the youth, of the families, of the children, of the sick, of the poor, of bread and of the sense of life, in the communities, in the parishes, in the dioceses, in the cities, in the districts, in the slums, in the farthest Islands, in whatever place the Good Shepherd has called us to render present his loving care towards all.

Precisely from this reality emerges the first point proposed by the Pauline Itinerary which we have followed in prayer: why do we take care of God's people? What sustains us in easy moments and in the difficult moments of our mission? What makes us remain faithful to sow with hope, precisely before a world full of injustice, where the sense of life seems missing?

In order to cover again that which St. Paul, with his letters, has provoked in us throughout the itinerary, we allow ourselves now to be guided by some verses of the first letter of Peter, very dear to us; thus we will have the way of enjoying the profound theological and spiritual synergy that unites the magisterium of the two great apostles and shepherds, who have been given to us as models.

“...because He cares for you” [1Pt.5:7]

In diverse ways we have affirmed that our ministry of pastoral care is fruit, result of our personal rapport with Jesus Good Shepherd. In our personal and communitarian journey we make the experiences of being cared by Him, loved by Him with a gratuitous and eternal love. From this source of true Life flows the mandate of taking care of others and the strength and the modality in order to realize it. In this journey of Intimacy with Him, in the participation to His Paschal Mystery we learn everyday to entrust our life totally, discovering the fruitfulness of the suffering lived with Christ, aware that the Gospel shines in weakness and that trial unites our sacrifice to the great sacrifice of Christ for humanity. In his trustful abandonment in the hands of the Father, our abandonment! Only in this way we can be in the midst of people transparent sign of His love, sacrament of His presence and loving care for all.

The awareness that the pastoral care is not our work, but work that God fulfills through us, whose faithfulness does not depend on our strength of will, but from the action of God, as consequence of our relationship with Him, is strong.

From here is born also the need of continually centering our life in Christ and of strengthening ourselves in the journey of conformation to Him. That which favors this journey emerges with clarity: allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit in the daily listening of the Word and by the nourishment of the Eucharist. Moreover need of reinforcing the reading, the contemplation and the relish for the Word; is noted; remaining in prayerful listening of Him who speaks to us in intimate relationship with him in order to learn from Him his way of taking care of the people.

Thus we can little by little allow ourselves to be converted by the Lord in such a way that He is incarnate in us. In this sense we highlight also the need to live, for us first the experience of being loved, saved, pardoned by God, in the commitment of guarding everyday this salvific memory, to recall in moments of trial and difficulty, always nourishing a grateful and open heart to all.

“Stay sober and alert...” (1Pt 5:8)

In order to allow ourselves to be taken care of by God and thus make us available to dedicate ourselves to the care of His people, in diverse ways, in our responses to the forms we emphasized the need of an ascetic journey. We consider how, many times, immersed in great activism, we neglect the intimate relationship with the Lord, and consequently we become ourselves protagonists of the pastoral care and not him. From here the tiredness, the lack of fruits, the sterility, the loss of motivations.

Like St Paul, we realize that “not what I want to do, but what I hate” (Rom.7:15). In fact, although knowing the importance of caring our spiritual life we do not always succeed to dedicate time and energy to do it. From here is the need to live the spiritual combat against all that can separate us from God.

In this sense, before the challenges of the world, the main need that we feel, is that of assuming a continuous attitude of discernment: guard the thoughts and sentiments, purifying every moment the mind, the will, the heart in such a way as to acquire that interior freedom

that renders us open and attentive to others, seeking in life and in the mission only those that "God" wants and not those that out "I" wants. In this sense it seems that all, even with difficulty, have the awareness of the importance of the interior discipline, in order to learn to know Christ and His will through the efficacious instrument that the Founder has recommended to us many times; the daily examination of conscience.

We also realize the necessity of making reference to a spiritual guide. Only if we allow ourselves to be accompanied by God through the spiritual paternity/maternity of another person, can we be able to accompany others and to live our ministry of care also as spiritual accompaniment of persons who are entrusted to us. Make ourselves accompanied in order to accompany others.

The responses to the forms, born in prayer, highlight also the lack of a constant and assiduous study, which is not to be finalized only to the immediate preparation to the apostolate, on the contrary they are to become nourishment of the interior life and continuous commitment on an on-going personal formation, to cultivate that studiosity that Alberione often speaks of.

"In you relations with one another, clothe yourselves with humility" (1Pt 5:5)

Another aspect that appears clear from the responses to the forms is that we Pastorelle do not exercise our ministry of pastoral care in one's name but as community. We are convinced of the necessity to journey together remembering the work that God accomplishes in us and through us. One sister has used this beautiful expression: "It is not anymore time of self affirmation but of communitarian work, in the style of Jesus Good Shepherd."

The awareness of the urgency of an authentic communitarian life that is to be support so as to remain faithful to the Lord in our ecclesial ministry is developed. We need to express in a visible manner our being church, body of Christ united in the communion of faith and of charity, ready to the help and to the reciprocal encouragement of sharing, of the entrustment, of gratitude. We are also aware that this is not done only with good will, but requires daily commitment in accepting ourselves reciprocally, with our capacity and limitations. This asks us to draw from that personal experience of God that allows us to accept the other as she is, caring at the same time, a most profound communication.

In fact, in our communities the need to share the experience of God is always stronger, in such a way as to favor among us that communion of life which is gift of the Spirit and not only to share that which one has or does.

The necessity to guard the communitarian life, as place wherein we train ourselves for the care towards the people of God, is always more intensely done. We point out also with clarity the temptation of living a rather formal communitarian life, with fraternal relationships that do not require much commitment. The demands of fraternal life are not attended to because many times commitments that absorb and remove the time to the necessary communitarian moments are assumed. From here is the awareness that a care of the people that is apart from the community is not authentic. All emphasize how it is necessary to grow in a style of life that is to be witness of the love of God; only a beautiful life could re-awaken in the young generations the desire of the following of Jesus in our Congregation.

"God's flock is in your midst; give it a shepherd's care..." (1Pt 5:2)

The experience that we make of the loving care of God in our regard, lived among us, does not allow us to remain close in ourselves. And here we return to the questions of the beginning: that which we live in the intimate rapport with the Lord, taken cared of in the community, we cannot keep it only for us. The experience of being loved by God makes us find journeys that may bring every person to the meeting with Him. Being in silence, in the listening of the Lord we feel the cry that comes from humanity of today, its real needs, even those inquietudes, those clamors of which the human heart is not always aware.

From those responses to the forms the necessity of pastoral care incarnated in the reality, is also pointed out, since our ministry is directed to concrete situations of the world and of the persons entrusted to us. The commitment to accept persons as they are is required, as Jesus Good Shepherd has done, whose presence has not been of threat but of freedom. It has always been often emphasized, as requirement of our care to look at situations with eyes of mercy, in a continuous deprivation of ourselves, assuming the diverse culture and helping them to confront themselves with the Gospel.

In this sense there is the awareness that we should do in such a way that the Gospel, Jesus Himself, may arrive in the heart of every person, but to do this there is need of allowing ourselves to be evangelized, as disciples-missionaries. To live among people, sharing their life without demands, remaining in listening of the persons and of the situations, speaking their language, is a challenge that we strongly feel. We want to be attentive to the reality of the present world, but many times a sense of fear accompanies us, of distrust before the multiple necessities of the people and our lack of preparation. A way, however, is the certainty that remaining only in the Lord, in the strength of His Word, can we find the journey to be able to respond to the needs of the world of today. In fact, we feel as God's appeal the search of new ways of the mission, having the courage of working with the new poverty, keeping in mind lucidly what is happening on the planet and the causes of such events.

Another point which goes always more clarified is in recognizing that our mission of pastoral care should favor a strong experience of salvation, lead to encounter with Christ. Therefore it is our turn, for mission, to accompany individual persons and communities in their journey of faith. An integral care of the person and of the community educating to reciprocity and to solidarity. This requires accepting the challenge of educating persons to live a vital rapport with God in the listening of the Word and in the care of groups reunited around the Gospel.

Another point to be discovered in the Congregation is the call to mission. Make the missionary ardor of our charism be re-born so as to be disciple first and therefore missionaries.

In conclusion we can say that the lived experience of the Pastorelle present in the whole world, the awareness that our pastoral ministry is above all sharing an experience of life, is evident: we live and guard in our community as a witness of His love our being cared by God, in such a way that He, even though our littleness, may continue even today to take care of his people.

**Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd – Pastorelle
Rome – Generalate House**