**15.**

## **Apostolic Community: a place of mutual acceptance**

## **and of being responsible and accountable**

**Intention:** Apostolic Community as the place of acceptance (Gregorio Iriarte) and accountability (*WAC* #10).

**Hymn**

**Prayer**

**The Word of God – *2Jn* 1:1-6**

The elder, To the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth -- and not I only, but also all who know the truth -- because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

***Jn* 8:31-32**

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

**Oblate Texts**

“Happiness awaits us in this holy Society which will have but one heart and soul”. (*Letter to Henri Tempier,* October 9, 1815: Oblate Writings, VI, p. 7)

“But, in spite of our best efforts, it can happen that we forget, through the power of the darkness and blindness that sin has left in us, that we sometimes find it hard to recognize our own faults, the associates, who should be interested in the perfection of one another, dare to have, for each other, the great charity of pointing out the failures which they have seen in their confreres”. (*Règlements et Statuts de la Congrégation de la Jeunesse,* in: Missions, 37, 1899, p. 23)

**Commentary**

From the beginning of my formation, I heard about “The Coulpe”. When I heard about it, I seemed to notice two positions among the Oblates who had experienced these meetings: one, a cynical sarcasm about what the meetings turned out to be, definitely a caricature of what was intended. The other, a certain nostalgia, because in the view of many, since these meetings were no longer held, they found no other means to make fraternal correction in community. Why did these meetings fail? It is difficult to judge when you have not had the experience. From what I could gather, they failed, first, because they had not sufficiently considered the sensitivity of each brother and sometimes there was not due respect and care. It also seems that they degenerated by focusing increasingly on external details that had nothing to do with the real life of each Oblate.

Feeling loved and respected on the one hand, and being taken seriously and challenged on the other, are two essential elements for growth. Let me give an example that might shed some light on what I later want to explain. It is not so much about having a meeting in which I am “accused” of coming late to prayer or not fulfilling my missionary tasks during the last two months as it is about having the chance to say at a community meeting that, since the death of my mother two months ago, I can’t pray in peace, I’m distracted and I find it difficult to carry out my assigned mission. We can all understand that our feelings, as we grapple with a problem, as well as what we propose as the means to overcome it, change radically when we know not only the facts but also when we analyze what is happening within the person who is dealing with it. That is to say, the way we “see” and “judge” changes when we do so by “walking in the shoes of another.”

Those who were formed after the 80’s have not experienced “The Coulpe” but rather, a demanding “discernment process.” During first formation, different means and many meetings were meant to “evaluate” our choices and “challenge” our brothers. Suffice it to read the *General Norms for Oblate Formation* from the 80’s to see how demanding it was on this point. But notice, this was only intended for those in initial formation. It seems that once that stage was completed, we were “released” from evaluating our choices and seeking the challenges of the community so as to grow in truth. We didn’t find many communities where we were asked to “be accountable” for the quality of our religious and missionary life nor those that facilitated exchanges about our life and mission. It seems that respect, which was often misunderstood; the different kinds of formation we received; the always difficult intergenerational living together and other reasons were day by day devouring the dream of living more radically an Oblate missionary life or at least, we did not find the adequate means to properly speak about it in and with the community.

We all need to feel recognized and respected, not judged or accused. Love, respect and recognition are basic to our growth as individuals and as religious missionaries. Moreover, we all need to see ourselves as challenged by our reality; we need to live in the truth. Even more so, if our ideal is to make ours the Gospel life. Without this “challenge”, this “evaluation,” we cannot grow. What is to be done? The secret is to dynamically associate these two points that they are not mutually exclusive. That is to say, we can grow in love and trust while we grow through evaluation, while being accountable for our responsibilities. If the other person takes me seriously and takes seriously my human, Christian and Oblate vocation, he will ask me to give an account of all that, without ceasing to love me. He will be for me the image of God the Father who loves me and calls me to give an account of my given talents. On the other hand, the one who asks me to give an account must be open to being loved in the same way, letting himself also be challenged by others in order to find the truth.

We can ask ourselves: about what are we accountable and what should we evaluate in order to be loved, understood and respected? I believe that all dimensions of our common vocation come into play: the human dimension, our consecrated life (living the vows), community life and mission. Each community must find a way, tailored to its circumstances, to have formal meetings for respectful sharing and responsible evaluation. I am aware that in a community there may be pathological or difficult cases. These should not impede this process and where possible, one should find a way to incorporate them, one way or another (and on one level or another) in this common activity. The Founder, with a fiery heart which at times was inclined to extremes, gives numerous examples of how to be demanding in a loving way. He invited other companions to live in community in order to experience charity and live radically the call to holiness. With him, we know that when a brother feels loved, the obligations that are requested are not experienced as a threat. Instead, he feels that he is taken seriously and has something to contribute to the good of the family, of the Congregation, so as to grow as individuals and communities in our common vocation.

**Sharing**

– do we remember that in the spirit of the Gospel, a conflict of ideas never becomes a conflict of persons?

– do we recall that a plurality of perspectives fosters a deepening of the question?

– do we promote communication so that the free exchange of ideas makes the positions clear and causes the positive contribution of each one to emerge?

– do we understand that the ideal is not that of having a community without conflicts but instead a community that is willing to confront its own tensions in order to resolve them positively, looking for solutions that ignore none of the values that must be taken into account?

**Personal Commitment**

**Prayer Intentions**

**Final Prayer**

Help us, O Father, to feel in our midst

the presence of Christ your Son,

promised to those who have come together in His name,

and in the Spirit of truth and love,

let us experience in ourselves an abundance of light,

of mercy and of peace.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who is God,

And lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit

Forever and ever. Amen.

**Concluding rite**