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**ONGOING FORMATION AND OPENNESS TO INTERCULTURALITY**

**SETTING:** Oblate Cross, candlelight, a symbol that represents your culture, and ‘blank paper’ which symbolises launching into the ‘unknown,’ openness to other cultures not known to you.

First step: spend some time looking at the items set before you. *What it says to you*, at this very moment?

**SONG**: invoke the BLESSINGS of Holy Spirit, the spirit that renews, the spirit that makes things ‘new.’

**WORD OF GOD: Gospel of Mark 7:24-30** *Jesus honours a Syro-phoenician woman’s Faith*

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

“First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

“Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

*Close your eyes, make a mental image (vision) the conversation – Jesus and Syro-phoenician woman – see what insight you come with and/or what is happening to you at this very moment?*

**OBLATE TEXT:**

**General Norms on Oblate Formation, #34:**

The first aim of the Oblate Formation is the mission of the whole Congregation. Internationality is therefore a growing priority in Oblate Formation, determining the composition of our formation communities (formandi and formators), the knowledge of other languages and international experiences like regency.

**GOING DEEPER INTO THE THEME:**

First there is Jesus’ Jewish ethnicity. In the Old Testament Judaism concretely developed into the closed system prevalent in Palestine in Jesus’ time. Jesus was born into this society and grew up in it. At first he would have shared this closed mentality. Hence when confronted by the Syro-Phoenician woman he automatically replied that he came only to save the lost children of Israel. But the woman challenged Jesus to respond differently: she emphasized the occasion – the illness of a daughter and the mother’s anxiety, sentiments that are not confined to Jews but transcend the confines of ethnicity. The Word of God, the spirit in him, would have burst free to find new avenues, where faith in God shone through narrow ethnic walls. This is a remarkable example of mutuality in dialogue.

Jesus’ humanity should be taken seriously; otherwise we either nullify it or undervalue it. He grew up in a particular – Jewish – culture and its age-old tradition. As a Jew he had time, especially in his boyhood, to reflect on his people’s history and destiny. Thus their concept of freedom at that time was independence from Rome, influenced by living under Roman occupation. But Jesus was preoccupied with a deeper understanding of freedom, going back to their roots, their history: from slavery, a non-people to a people with an identity and a name – God’s people..

In the conversation between Jesus and the Syro-phoenician woman, at first it is Jesus who tries to convert the woman. But it ends with the woman convincing Jesus. It is she who converts Jesus, and Jesus lets himself be converted by her. His conversion by the woman liberates him from his inherited cultural myopia and opens up new vistas for his mission. It expresses itself as a sense of wonder at finding such great faith outside the Jewish ghetto. We could find several examples in the Gospels where Jesus learned more about his mission under the guidance of the Spirit and his experience of human interaction, especially outside the confines of Jewish culture.

Through her words the woman changes Jesus’ mind, his thoughts, his understanding of his mission; he changes, grows, converts…In her approach to Jesus, also appears as a catalyst – while being an outsider – in provoking his change.

Jesus was open to modify his stance because of people in need, regardless of their origin and condition.

The story of Syro-phoenician woman shows its specific relevance nowadays. Functioning as a ‘mirror’ the story is an invitation to cross boundaries as Jesus and the woman did: gender, ethnicity, social class, culture and religion. The story challenges us to engage in transformative encounters with other cultures, other people whose way of life is completely different. In this time of migrations and cross cultural setting particularly the story is called to follow the steps of Jesus by building new spaces of inclusion. With regard to our religious formation processes there should be a place for openness to intercultural and international sharing and living.

**FAITH SHARING:**

The animator invites each Oblate present to share what has inspired him in the reflection and around the questions:

* In my life experience who are some people who have helped me to grow?
* How or when have I had to become more aware of interculturality as an Oblate?
* What have I learned personally from a person of another culture?
* Can I share a time that someone’s question or remark to me was a light that brought me an insight and opened me up to new understanding?
* When have I blocked something that I heard?

**COMMITMENT**: Taking into account the heritage of our Congregation as a multicultural apostolic body, we recognize and choose the crossing of cultural and national borders as one of the essential components of our missionary formation.This option acknowledges thatsuch formation requires a certain level of personal maturity and rootedness in one’s own cultural identity. The following are proposed ways of conversion after the 2010 General Chapter:

* *New formation programmes*: understand and live missionary ecclesiology of solidarity and communion.
* *Formation to internationality*: The strengthening of formation to internationality, in the post-novitiate stage of formation, creative way need to be devised to foster internationality in collaboration with other Units.
* *Consolidation and regrouping of existing formation houses*
* *Creation of international formation houses.*

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/INTENTIONS**

**FINAL PRAYER**

**SONG/BLESSING**