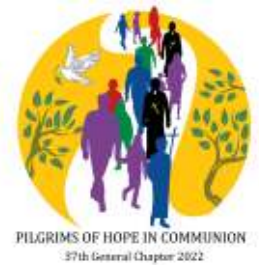


“Come with us as we journey, Santa María del camino!”



Hipólito Olea Tinoco, OMI

I contemplate Mary, our Good Mother, in these strange times, in this changing era. She journeys with us and walks with us in the Scriptures, in Tradition, in our Constitutions and Rules, and in our mission pathways. She also journeys with us in the animation and preparation for our next General Chapter.

Mary the pilgrim¹, that young Nazarian woman who sets out from her Jewish tradition to journey with God. Open to the Spirit (C. 10) when, upon the Angel's greeting, upon being surprised by God, she responds from the depths of her being. She is the one filled with grace, she is the one with ears, eyes, and arms wide open, and she generously also opens her heart: yes, I do accept, let it be done to me... *fiat!*

Mary sets out on the road. The Lord's servant, filled with the Spirit, leaves Nazareth and crosses the country from north to south, to meet her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:39). She who has been filled with life and hope goes in quest of the one who was called barren. Mary is on the move, pilgrim on straight and twisted roads, on paths and trails, through valleys and mountains. Surely, she has faced the hardships of the journey, as many missionaries, overcoming obstacles, fording rivers and streams.

Mary, full of grace, is a pilgrim woman, a woman setting out, a woman on a journey. This young lady, who will soon become a mother, brings joy with her greeting; the soon-to-be-born prophet's leap also expresses joy and communion. "How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" May Mary's missionary joy and Elizabeth's joyful surprise by such a wondrous encounter be ours, too, so that we may set ourselves on the road (Lk 1: 43).

As a thanksgiving for God's regard for this servant's lowliness, Mary sings, exults, magnifies and glorifies, opening a new page for humanity (Lk 1: 46-55). What wondrous works the Lord does for the lowly, for those who have eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to feel, and love and welcome!

Mary is also the young mother who sows communion: hosts, keeps and treasures it in her heart (Lk 2, 19). Mary is vigilant, attentive, always contemplative, to the point that she takes action and gives precise indications as to whom to follow at that wedding in Cana of Galilee. Mary setting out... missionary woman... she goes, sowing communion as a pilgrim of hope.

Mary also sets out as a pilgrim in sorrow: she who journeys with her son to the point of delivering him on a Friday at the foot of the cross, where she receives as children all of the believers (Jn 19: 26-27). Mary, she who awaits on a Saturday in silent hope. Mary, she who surely would have had the experience of encounter and communion with her resurrected Son on the first day of the week.

So many paths and roads on our missionary outings: by foot, on the back of a mule or a horse, on a motorbike or in an off-road vehicle. Some have done this by sailing down the Río Napo by boat, or going to the outstations on canoe along the Río Chixoy... and so many other journeys to reach the communities that joyfully wait for us.

As I think of Mary of Nazareth, I also think of so many women, students and workers, younger and older, single women, mothers, and widows, who make up our missionary communities. It is they, more than anyone, who have an attentive and willing heart to listen to God, and a generous heart to respond in ecclesial participation. They are also pilgrims, women of hope, women in communion with their Lord and in the communion of the local church. I think about the implications of our vocation for them, especially as described by our name: Missionary... Oblates... Mary Immaculate. I recall the famous words from the Preface of our Constitutions and Rules: "How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy and holy the undertaking!" And, as I have done so many times before, I feel called to reread the Preface in a prayerful ambiance, and perhaps rewrite it from our current circumstances in a Marian key.

When Mary of Guadalupe interrupted Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin along the path of worries, she encouraged him to take up again the path of mission that had been entrusted to him. These are the words of consolation that Juan Diego received from Mary on the hill of Tepeyac:

«Listen. Put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that frightened you, the thing that afflicted you is nothing: do not let it disturb you: do not fear this sickness nor any other sickness, nor any sharp and hurtful thing. Am I not here, I who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need something more?»² May these words encourage us today as missionary disciples.

In preparation to the General Chapter, we could meditate, pray and chant:

"Be With Us Mary Along The Way, Guide Every Step We Take".

¹ In Spanish the verb peregrinar (to set out on a pilgrimage) also has the following meaning: "to live understanding life as a road/path to be traveled in order to come to union with God (...)". Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la lengua española, 23.^a ed., [versión 23.5 en línea]. <<https://dle.rae.es>> [1/04/2022].

² Antonio Valeriano: Nican Mopohua – available in several languages; no. 118-119: <https://virgendeguadalupe.org.mx/el-relato/>