



XVIII World Assembly of the Christian Life Community (CLC)

La Providence, Amiens, France - August 7th, 2023

Arturo Sosa S.J. - CLC World Ecclesial Assistant

Discerning the paths of hope

Introduction

It is a great joy to share with you this meeting at the eighteenth World Assembly of the CLC in Amiens. At our first meeting as ecclesiastical assistant in Buenos Aires, I spoke to them about the importance of discernment as a privileged tool for building a community of Ignatian lays in the world. Today, five years later, I can say that we have used this tool of discernment and that we feel grateful and once again in God's hands.

As we contemplate the work of the world community in the different frontiers of its apostolate:

- ^a In the growth of the spiritual life facing the indifference.
- ^a In the care of the vital processes of families in all their diversity.
- ^a In the help of young people facing the intra-descending models.
- ^a In the work with the excluded and the poor facing the dynamics of social exclusion.
- ^a And in the initiatives of care of the Common Home facing the selfishness and the exploitation.

In all these frontiers, I see that the world needs men and women, like you, who know how to enter into the same dialogue that Saint Ignatius presents to us in the contemplation of the Incarnation. A dialogue in which he discerns the situation of the world and we come up with a choice: "let us redeem the human race". A daring choice that seems impossible at first sight, but is made possible by placing all hope in the affirmative response of a small and wonderful woman from Nazareth.

The discernment and hope go hand in hand in God's relationship with the world. Just as it may be in our journey as a Christian Life Community. By choosing "Discerning the paths of hope" as the motto for this World Assembly, you wanted to unite discernment and hope, which today allows me to deepen with you the meaning of this union in Ignatian spirituality.

Hope in the life of Ignatius.

If we take a journey together through the life of Saint Ignatius, we see that throughout his pilgrimage, the hope is the compass that guides his steps. Let's remember how, on his journey to Jerusalem¹, in the year 1523 – 500 years ago now – Ignatius did not want to bring companions to help him, nor did he want material subsistence...; He wanted only to have God as refuge and thus to grow in the three theological virtues: the charity, the faith and the hope. Ignatius repeated on his travels that "this confidence, this affection and this hope, he wanted to have them in God alone". For Ignatius, the hope was a way of travelling, a pilgrimage both on the roads of life and in the spiritual experience. Today, we put our mobile phones on "air plane mode" for our travels or so that no one disturbs us. Ignatius put himself in "hope mode" in order to follow the paths that only the Lord could take him.

The "mode of hope", at the beginning of the life of Saint Ignatius, was a personal spiritual apprenticeship between God and himself. Later, it became a communal experience, a shared hope, communal and institutional. When the first companions met in Venice, years later, to try to go together to Jerusalem and spend their lives for the

¹ Autobiography 35: And as such, at the beginning of the year 23, he left for Barcelona to embark. And although he was offered some company, he only wanted to go alone; that his whole purpose was to have God alone for refuge. And one day, when some people were urging him, because he knew neither Italian nor Latin, to take a company, to tell them how they would help him, and thanking them very much, he said that, even if he were the son or brother of the Duke of Cardona, he would not go in his company; because he wanted to have three virtues: charity, faith and hope; and bearing a companion, when he was hungry, he would look to him for help; and when he fell, that he would help him to rise; and thus he would also have confidence in him and affection for these respects; and that this confidence, this affection and this hope he wanted to have in God alone.

benefit of souls², their plans failed, but their hope in Christ prevented their lives from being paralyzed and they moved to Rome to make themselves available to the Pope. Because they had put themselves in *hope mode*, the Society of Jesus emerged.

This hope of the first Jesuits was crystallized in the Constitutions as the best mean for the union and the preservation of the Society of Jesus. Saint Ignatius left us a legacy of hope in the Constitutions as the best mean of perpetuating the body of the Society. Thus, "placing hope in Him alone"³ proves to be the best way to preserve and advance what He deigned to begin.

When the World Council of the CLC, following its discernment, chose the grace it wanted to achieve in this World Assembly, to ask the Lord to show it His ways, it wanted to look for a path of creative hope that would help it to move forward in the pilgrimage that the CLC has been developing since the last World Assemblies, particularly the most recent ones in Beirut and Buenos Aires. This hope in Christ will be a spiritual guarantee if it is both creative and discerning.

Hope in God the Creator

In the Spiritual Exercises, Saint Ignatius presents the hope as a sign of consolation, along with the other virtues of the faith and love. Where there is an increase in these three virtues, there is God. And where there is no hope, there is desolation, mistrust and agitation. That's why, in his Spiritual Diary, Ignatius links the hope to the reconciliation with God, as a return to the lost devotion, an overcoming of spiritual lukewarmness and a new openness to intimacy with God⁴.

² Already by this time, they had all decided what they should do, it means: going to Venice and Jerusalem and spend their lives for the benefit of souls; and if they could not obtain the permission to stay in Jerusalem, returning to Rome and presenting themselves to the Vicar of Christ, to be used in what He judged to be of the greatest glory to God and of the greatest usefulness to souls.

³ Const 812 It is enough to place in Him the hope that He will preserve and advance what He has deigned to begin for His service, His praise and His help of souls...

⁴ Spiritual Diary 73. ...begging Jesus for forgiveness from the Holy Trinity, a devotion in growth, with tears and sobs, and the hope of attaining grace, finding myself proud and confirmed for the future.

The hope is a spiritual guarantee of the presence of God. It is at the same time the root and the fruit of the experience of God. But Saint Ignatius warns that the hope must be placed more in things "above" than in things "below", more in the Creator than in created things, or rather, not in them. And it is here that Ignatius asks us to deepen our spiritual life, because if the hope is the guarantee of the confidence, of the faith, in God, it is a hope that refers not only to the spiritual, but also to the material.

In the words of Pope Francis: "The discerned hope impels us to act with courage and boldness, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom He gives us to make decisions in accordance with God's will"⁵.

The Hope in God the Creator is an invitation to overcome the contradictions between living confidently in God and using material means. Rather, it is an invitation to live these poles in creative apostolic tension. If we are not rooted in the true hope, we will end up putting all our confidence in the created things and not in their Creator. We will make the means the ends. But, at the same time, we need human, material and institutional means to carry out our apostolates as collaborators with the mission of the Lord. To live creatively the tension between the total dependence on God and the need for material means is possible, according to spirituality, if we militate under the flag of the poor and humble Jesus. The poverty as the detachment of love, as decentralization that leads to give one's life, even to accept the humiliation in order to achieve the humility of gratuitous service, is what makes it possible to contribute to carrying the cross of the Lord.

Hope and poverty

For Ignatius, the poverty is one of those things before which we must "become indifferent" in order to follow the Lord⁶. But this Lord that we serve, it is Jesus Christ, poor and humble, so in the spiritual life, the poverty is a driving force that strengthens

⁵ Pope Francis. Speech at the International Conference "Theology after Veritatis Gaudium in the actual context", 29 June 2019.

⁶ Ex. 23. Principle and foundation.

us in our authentic hope in God. For Ignatius, an affective poverty, of detachment, is not sufficient, but an effective and real poverty, in which faith, hope and love go hand in hand.

When hope in God is lived out in real poverty, inspired by the Gospel, chosen, not imposed by the unjust structures of society, the use of means is lived out in the dependence and the security: dependence on God and security in His Providence. The evangelical poverty makes us dependent on God and gives us the security in our mission, because he will help us to find the means (material and spiritual) to carry it out properly. The evangelical poverty makes our hope of working for justice credible, as the General Principles of the CLC indicate:

With particular urgency, we feel the need to work for justice, with a preferential option for the poor and a simple lifestyle that expresses our freedom and our solidarity with them. (PG 4).

Hope reunited the meaning of the divine providence and the ineluctable discernment in choosing the means we need for the mission, for the CLC support and for our professional and family life. Hope is a virtue that deepens our relationship with God, our trust in Him and His providence with us. As such, all the material and institutional means can be used, or not, *insofar as they* bring us closer to God and closer to the meaning of the vocation to which we have been called and which we have chosen to follow.

Upon the recognition of the spiritual consolation, prayed for and accompanied, hope is presented to us as a necessary driving force for discernment about the means we should use in the mission: on the frontiers, in community life and in our personal and family commitment in the world. What the Christian hope promotes and requests from a community is a correct intention in the use of means, with the Ignatian indifference, without trusting only in things, but without burying the talents and goods received.

The anchor of our hope

In his letters, Saint Ignatius liked to speak of "setting the anchor of our hope in God"⁷ as a necessary attitude in difficult moments that required a discernment. To cast the anchor, it is to anchor ourselves in the depths of God, it is a call to the radicality of hope in the Christ, to attain the grace of being what He has called us to be. The more radical our hope will be, the more it is anchored in Christ, the better we will find the paths that lead us to live out the plenitude of our call. It means, that if the CLC lives the grace of hope in Christ, it will be what it is called to be: a community of Ignatian and apostolic lay people.

- **Community.** A group that feels united, in communion, with God, that is a gift to the Church, because it celebrates the life of faith and is unified from the most local, familiar and close, to the worldwide community. A community that discerns and sends, but also accompanies and *examines* (evaluates) the best service that each of its members can provide. A community that knows how to put in place the human and institutional means to remain in communion throughout the entire world, that discerns national, regional and world structures to concretize a universal charism called to be present at the frontiers of the world.
- **Laity.** A community of people identified with the People of God, lays, men and women, who find their place in the Church and in the world. No one is defined by what he/she is not, but by what he/she is. A lay person, far from being a non-ecclesial, a non-priest or a non-nun, is a person committed to the Church from the most radical baptismal vocation of the Christian, who lives in the profession, in the family and in all the private and public facets of life. The lay character of the Vatican Council II and the synodal process that the Church is currently living

⁷ But in this part what has been said is sufficient, that is to say in brief: to use human means in their time, directed solely to their service, is not bad, when in God and in His Grace, we have the firm anchor of hope; but not to use them when God, by other means provided, excuses them, or when we do not expect them to help in their greater service, on this point we are all agreed.... [Epp II,483].

make us all aware of being the People of God, in its unity of faith and apostolic commitment, in its diversity of charisms, and far from the rigorist uniformity of an exclusive clericalism that can affect all the members of the People of God. Organizing ourselves as lay people, finding the material and institutional means necessary to live our vocation, it is building the Church.

- **Ignatian.** It is a community rooted in the experience of God of the Spiritual Exercises. The belonging to the CLC is the individual response to the question of the Spiritual Exercises, "What must I do for Christ?"⁸ And he/she finds in the community other people who have in God their Principle and their Foundation: a community that knows and wants to praise, venerate and serve God our Lord. And for this, he/she will have to discern the personal and institutional means, of the personal and community prayer, in the Spiritual Exercises: enjoying the proximity to God in the consolation and not to abandon his vocation in the desolation.

Saint Ignatius taught us a way to follow the Lord that distinguishes between gaining and losing one's life in the style of Jesus. For this reason, a community of the CLC will be in permanent formation, using the Ignatian tools so that, through the prayer, the examen and the spiritual accompaniment, it can seek and find God's will.

- **Apostolic.** Recalling the general principles of the CLC: "Our life is essentially apostolic. The mission field of the CLC has no limits: it extends to the Church and to the world, to make the Gospel of salvation present to all and to serve the person and the society, opening the hearts to the conversion and striving to change oppressive structures". (PG 8)

⁸ Ex. 53

This apostolic essentiality of the CLC is rooted in hope. Living the radicality of our commitment in the world is not a commandment, but a grateful response to so much good received from the Lord. We do not give a glass of cold water in the heat because there is a promise of reward, but we give it as the best we can, escaping into our hands, but giving a little of the water of life that we have received from Jesus. This water, which has irrigated our vital lands, which has flooded us, satiated us and filled us with our spiritual experience, cannot remain within the limits of the Community, but must reach those who are most thirsty for God and his justice.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by recalling the Letter to the Hebrews, when it speaks to us of the hope as a guarantee of the promises of God, and states: "*God cannot deceive, and He brings powerful comfort to those who take refuge in Him to maintain the hope to which we are destined. A hope that is for our lives like a firm and sure anchor, and that penetrates to the very depths of the sacred*"⁹.

As such, hope is a condition without which we cannot enter into the discernment, just as a ship cannot anchor without dropping the anchor. At the same time, hope holds the community's boat firmly together and unites the creatures to their Creator and Lord.

God has not promised us an easy path, but he has promised us that he will always be with us. When the doubts hit us, when difficulties rock our boat, when it's harder to make a decision, that's when we need to pray the most, to put all our hope in God. Only in this way, by following the poor and humble Jesus, will you be able to discern the new institutional channels required by the international reality of CLC and weave together the networks required by the apostolic frontiers to which the world Community feels called in unity. The Lord will help us to discern and to find the human and institutional means so that we can once again cast the net, even in waters where we have never fished before.

⁹ Heb. 6:18-20.

Living in an Ignatian and apostolic lay community, it means collaborating in the "redemption of the human race"¹⁰ with the same "May it be done to me according to Your Will" of the Virgin Mary in the contemplation of the Incarnation. Practicing the discernment of hope is a way of acknowledging so much good received for bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, by repeating in the plural and with Saint Ignatius a prayer of thanksgiving, of gift and of radical trust in God... ". Give us your love and your grace that it may be enough for us."

¹⁰ Ex. 101.