

Homily for the Opening Eucharistic Celebration of the XIXth General Chapter
Rome, November 5, 2006
Sister Therezinha Rasera

Dear Father Andrew Urbanski, Superior General of the SDS and members of the General Council,

I want to thank you for your encouraging words that come for the heart of a true brother. Your presence here is not just a formality; rather it represents the result of our practice of solidarity among brothers and sisters that we have built together through living a common ideal.

A few months ago at your invitation, we Sisters participated in the Chapter of the Society in Logroño, Spain. It was a positive and matchless experience for us that marked our lives.

Dear Deacon Marco Ermes Luparia, Leda, Christian, Judy, Gloria, Claudia, Mauricio, Sabin and Monica

Lay Salvatorians here present,

You are most welcome in our house! You are a very special presence because you represent what is new in the Salvatorian Family. I am sure that this new blood gives us new energy and prophetic courage. Together, as a family, we want to affirm our Salvatorian identity in the world today.

Dear Sister Chapter Members!

What a pleasure to have each of you with us! Please feel at home! This is a warm, welcoming inclusive house that wants to welcome you with joy!

Father João Batista Libânio, Translators and other guests

You are most welcome, all of you!

The Apostolic Exhortation, *Consecrated Life*, in speaking about the prophecy of consecrated life, emphasizes that true prophecy is born of an attentive listening to the Word of God in different historical circumstances (cf. VC, 73). It was thus that in August, 2005, in a meeting to prepare for the XIXth General Chapter, we chose an icon, The Resurrection, and two passages from the Gospel of John, The Apparition of the Risen Jesus to Mary of Magdala (John 20: 2-18), and The Resurrection of Lazarus (John 11: 1-43). These two scripture passages are illuminating, nourishing and guiding our Chapter process, so that together we will envision horizons for **“Salvatorian Women in Solidarity for Hope and for Life.”**

We firmly believe that the Icon of the Resurrection, having a different narrative in these two passages, call us to remain attentive and to seek to root our Congregation in a radical following of Jesus the Savior, our Risen Lord.

On this occasion, I want to briefly meditate on the impact of these two resurrection narratives presented by John’s Gospel on our journey as Salvatorian women today.

In this founding event for Christian faith, women are inarguably witnesses to the Resurrection! Jesus appears first to women, as the Gospels tell us. Mary of Magdala is the first to receive the mission of proclaiming the Good News of the Resurrection from Jesus himself. Through this, Jesus the Risen One opens the way to a new vision of human life and a new way for human beings to be in relationship.

Going more deeply into the meaning of the text, Mary Magdalene represents the poor, the cast aside, those without hope, those to whom everything has been denied. She represents a community in search of its loved one.

All along the Gospel of Saint John, Jesus is presented as a spouse several times, his bride “the communities.” In the episode with Mary Magdalene, Jesus calls her “woman” and she calls him “Lord,” “Rabbuni,” a term that the disciples used for the Master they followed. What John’s Gospel wants to reveal is that Jesus had a passionate love relationship with the communities and with his disciples. He promises and sends the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is He who remains to help the community become the bride of Jesus. In all of this, Mary Magdalene is the proclaimer of this great event.

Jesus, in appearing to Mary Magdalene, only uses her name, “Maria!” This is a personal, existential revelation. The call of Jesus is a discrete call of freedom. Calling her by her name, which symbolizes inner and personal identity, Jesus frees Mary from her situation as a poor woman, a victim of discrimination and stereotyping. Mary is taken out of her geographical condition that symbolizes the reality of marginalization.

At the same time that Jesus is revealed to Mary, the true Mary is also revealed to herself: a woman full of sensitivity, affectivity and tenderness. She is a woman full of burning desire to go beyond death and human boundaries.

In order to reach the interiority of this Resurrection action, we must correct our erroneous and confused searching. We must recognize that Jesus is with us and allows us to have resurrection experiences, even when there is little hope in our hearts, even when we cry our tears of helplessness.

Jesus is alive and is returning to our Father, his Father and the Father of all humanity. This is the mission of the Johannine Community: to proclaim Jesus alive and bringing life for all! This is also the mission of the Salvatorian Community.

The Resurrection is the central message of our faith, and Jesus wanted it to be delivered first to a woman. Jesus relates the center of faith – the Resurrection – to the reality of rejection and discrimination of the women of his time. Therefore, the Resurrection of Jesus and the liberation of women are closely connected. What are the consequences of this for the mission of Salvatorian women today? Jesus is sending us to be, first of all, a faithful presence of the Risen Lord to women discriminated against, exploited and oppressed. This includes also all those people who are wronged in our world today, because poverty today has a definitely feminine face and a face of children, migrants and of the exiled as well.

Let us go on to the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, which is found only in the Gospel of John. It is the seventh sign realized by Jesus in this Gospel. The number 7 is the biblical symbol of perfection. All the signs performed by Jesus in the Gospel of Saint John are related to life. The death and the resurrection of Lazarus signal the death and the Resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Lazarus is a proclamation of what happened with Mary of Magdala, at the dawn of the Resurrection; Jesus is life even when there is no more hope of life!

For the people of the Bible, there was hope the dead would return to life, up until the third day. After this point, the body began the process of decomposition. For Martha, the death of Lazarus has passed this point of no return. She has lost hope. Everything is finished: “Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day” (John 11: 39).

There is a unique difference between the resurrection of the friend and the Resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus awoke with “bands” about him, characteristic of human beings (cf. John 11:44), he returned to his own and then died later. Jesus, on the contrary, is resurrection without “bands” and forever (cf. John 20: 5-7)! The **death** of Lazarus is a sign, a sign indicating a deeper reality, the resurrection of Jesus, the summit of Christian life.

Upon learning the news of the death of his friend, Jesus declares to his disciples that he is going to Judea. This decision of Jesus is met with the indifference of his disciples, “*Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews wanted to stone you; are you going back again?*” (John 11: 8-9). The disciples do not understand the dimension of life that brought Jesus to go to Jerusalem. They lived only for the here and now and not for the vision of a better future. They do not follow the Master’s reasoning. “Our friend Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him,” says Jesus (John 11:11). The resurrection makes us return, awaken and it frees us for a new life in Christ.

The Easter of Jesus does not bring us automatically to the kingdom of dreams, however. The mystery reaches our heart and has us travel a path of deep personal and communitarian conversion. This paschal process within us is driven by the Spirit of Jesus, working to effect daily change so that we may serve the Kingdom, without *bands*, joyfully and with hope.

Because of our activism, often we are anxious, anguished or cold women, forsaking the living of the warmth of the resurrection. Perhaps we need to give more importance to the envoy the Lord left us: “*Go and tell my brothers and sisters of Galilee...*” Our existence as Salvatorian Religious Life needs motivations and deep convictions that are capable of directing our daily life. The more radical our choices, the greater conviction we need.

Our Rule of Life, in speaking of life and mission in Chapter 1, Article 6 states: “*Our apostolic zeal is sustained by the giving of our selves without reservation and is constantly renewed in the living of our mission.*” Our mission begins with the mission of Mary Magdalene: we are called to be proclaimers of a most extraordinary event: “**Jesus is alive and with us!**” It is not the time to restrain Jesus with our interests and egotistic projects that do not generate life. Rather it is the time, through the impetus of the Spirit, to proclaim Him alive and bearing life for all in the innumerable Galilees of today. Let us recall that Galilee was the geographical and symbolic place where Jesus preached and gave signs of the Kingdom. Matthew 4: 12ff retells what the prophet Isaiah had said, in describing “*heathen Galilee*” a marginal place where “*the people*

lived in darkness,” and *“in the shadow of death.”* The *Galilees* to which we are sent today are no less dark than the Galilee of Jesus!

The Resurrection of Jesus is the illuminating and restorative fact for all of history, and for us Salvatorians it is the deepest central aspect of our Charism: the Salvation brought by Jesus. It is an event that transforms into reality a constant and universal hope of freedom written on the heart of each man and woman.

To live from an act of Faith and Hope after death, we accept the challenge of our human frailty. This is because we understand that the news of the Resurrection of Jesus transforms our fragile expectations into blazing light, allowing us to see the possibility of life, solidarity and hope for all.

Like Mary Magdalene, we want to go beyond death and human frontiers. The presence of the Risen One transforms menacing situations, fears, injustice, exploitation, wars and death...all into new life. We want to be vigilant and go to the tomb very early....! Vigilance will give us the necessary time to take care of our quality of life and our mission.

Our deep and involving experience with the mystery of the Resurrection has us create a mystique that sustains our enthusiasm for living and for promoting more life. As *Salvatorian Women in Solidarity for Hope and for Life* we want to realize our most authentic and human desires, our dreams that go beyond the present and make us journey without tiring, in search of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev.21:1).

“Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.” He is the Lord and He tells us: I send you: “Go and proclaim.” May it be so!