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**DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CONGREGATION OF THE  
MERCERDARIAN MISSIONARY SISTERS**

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**A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Diploma in Spirituality and Religious Studies**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material  
Used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution. All  
sources have been acknowledged in full.

Signed:

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this long essay  
to the Holy Trinity, to my parents, sister and to  
all the members of the Mercedarian Missionary  
Sisters, specially, the Province of Mozambique.

With affection and love.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Finally my thanks go to the directress of the Institute of Spirituality Sr. Loretta Brennan and all the lectures who contributed for my spiritual growth, to all the classmates and staff members for your help and love.

May Lord and Our Lady of Mercy reward and fill you with abundant graces!

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CGMCTJB</b>	Commentary on the Gospel of Mark with Complete Text from the Jerusalem Bible
<b>NJBC</b>	The New Jerusalem Bible Commentary.
<b>ICNT</b>	International commentary on the New Testament
<b>PNTC</b>	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
<b>AIDS</b>	Acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This paper is a study on discipleship in relation to the charism of my Congregation – Mercedarian Missionaries Sister. The relevance of this study lies on the fact that it has helped me, and hopeful will help other religious, to reflect on our call to pay more attention to the marginalized in the light of Mark's Gospel. It is also a challenge to my Congregation, especially my Province, to evaluate our commitment to our option to the most abandoned and neglected in our society.

The paper is divided into three chapters: the first explains how discipleship is in the Gospel of Mark. Here, we define what discipleship is and we go on singling out the requirements of true disciples; we also look at the mission of a disciple. The second chapter is about the Mercedarian Missionaries' understanding of discipleship. This is where we focus on the foundress' understanding of discipleship and how we understand and interpret it today.

The third chapter is basically a comparison between discipleship in Mark and the Mercedarian Sisters. This is where we try to see the relationship existing between how Mark looks at discipleship and how we Mercedarians look at it today and what can we improve in our understanding of it. After each chapter, follows a brief conclusion and at the end there is the general conclusion.

# CHAPTER I

## DISCIPLESHIP IN MARK

### Introduction

Mark begins his writing by presenting the disciples' immediate response to the call of Jesus (cf. 1:16-20; 2:14)<sup>1</sup>. Then he goes on to show their total dependence on Jesus' initiative and authority as they take part in the work of building the Kingdom of God (2:13-28). The evangelist also gives a portrait of disciples who are not only ready, but also willing to go out to proclaim the Good News. This chapter is an overview of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. We give the definition of discipleship, followed by the requirements asked from a true disciple; the mission of the disciples, challenges and failures encountered in their mission. We end with a small conclusion.

### 1.1 Definition

Discipleship is not a way of salvation by which an individual can secure her/his own happiness. The concern of discipleship has always been how the 'Good News can be best proclaimed and passed on to others<sup>2</sup>. True discipleship mean: to deny one's life

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brothersoflove.com/richiespages/disciples%20in%20mark.htm>, 1, 1/5/2005

<sup>2</sup> A. STOCK, *Call to Discipleship – A Literal Study of Mark's Gospel*, 145.

pleasures, to take up one's cross, lose one's life for the good of others and to be the least of all by modelling one's life on the example of Jesus.

Discipleship is a call for drinking the cup of suffering in the model of the person of Jesus Christ. This becomes the unique way in which any disciple must identify him/herself with the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, being disciple means to follow the person of Jesus Christ as model. Jesus leads the way and the disciples have to follow him; he does not merely preach the way but he really practically shows the way of salvation<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, whoever does not follow him will lose the identity of being a disciple; however as Jesus himself said: "*The disciple is not greater than his master.*"(Jn. 13:16)

In Mark's narrative, discipleship always begins when Jesus calls and names a person, for instance, the call of the twelve apostles. When Jesus called his disciples, they neither had time for personal discernment nor doubted to respond to the call. They immediately answered, "Yes" to the call without much reflection. In a very substantial way, discipleship is a call for action, which is sustained by God's grace<sup>4</sup>. Those who were called had no specific preparation nor did they necessarily belong to those who heard Jesus' Good News. Jesus does not take into account men's status of life or religious sphere or even social class; he is concerned about people's daily ways of living. It is not enough to answer to Jesus' call by saying, "Yes"; what must follow the answer is the practical way of living by implementing Jesus' message in one's lifestyle.

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<sup>3</sup>A. STOCK, 143

<sup>4</sup>A. STOCK, 143

Since the beginning, Jesus was calling freely his disciples and it was always the disciples' freedom to answer to the call.

Each person is made a disciple by the call of Jesus, which is as powerful as the creative word of God and whatever those are called may become, will be the work of Jesus. In short, discipleship is a gradual process of becoming; it is a process where the disciple is to be like his Master (Jesus).<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Characteristics of the disciples of Jesus

The first characteristic of Jesus' disciple is none other than "*being with*". This is to say that they had to spend a good amount of time learning from Jesus, which eventually brought about the formation of a community with him. To *be with him* opens the way to the mystery of the Kingdom of God (4:11). We see this in chapter 4 of the parables on the Kingdom. At the same time we see, the mystery of Jesus himself, where his person is revealed as the embodiment of the kingdom of God<sup>6</sup>. No one can understand Jesus and the reign of God from outside, (see 4:12), but only by getting involved with him in an interpersonal relationship. It is only in the inner space created by the following of Jesus that a human being comes to know who Jesus really is. <sup>7</sup>By living with the Master, the novices learn how to be open to the Master's words and deeds; only then can they assimilate the Master's teachings.

Moreover, this relationship of friendship between the Master and the learner helps the learner to get experiences for mission and maturity and deep growth in their

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1999ii/J23-99a.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> A. STOCK, *The call to Discipleship. - A Literal Study of Mark's Gospel*, 115.

<sup>7</sup> G. FISCHER – M. HASITSCHKA, *The call of the Disciples: The Bible on Following Christ*, 115.

spiritual life, in order to be able to do what the Master does<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, openness in this small community is important because it helps the disciples to understand better who the Master is.

The second characteristic of the disciples of Jesus is the enthusiasm to continue the mission of Christ; and like him, to proclaim the kingdom of God and heal people from their illnesses<sup>9</sup>. It was for this purpose that Jesus called the disciples. Those who “*are with him*”, are also the ones who were sent out in order to communicate to others what they have learned concerning the person of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the Master’s example is important for the future life of the disciples because they will be the ones who will continue the mission started by Jesus.

### 1.3 The risk of discipleship

To become Jesus’ disciple is to risk one’s life; face hardships, misunderstandings, and persecution, lose one’s life, be last and least, drink the cup that Jesus is to drink, to be baptized with Jesus baptism, and risk of failure<sup>10</sup>. The disciples learnt that true discipleship implies what I have said above.

To sum up, we can say that the risks of discipleship according to Jesus’ teaching are two: *to deny oneself*, that is to deny one’s plans and projects in order to put oneself totally at the disposal of the one whom one follows, for instance, Levi’s call (Mk. 2: 13-14) and the call of the first four disciples (Mk. 1: 16-20); what we see is that all of them,

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<sup>8</sup> G. FISCHER – M. HASITSCHKA, 115

<sup>9</sup> A. STOCK, 154.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 154

after hearing Jesus' voice, left what they had for the sake of the call and nothing more. They are called out and have to forsake their old life in order to possess the real life, that is, Jesus himself. One needs to accept no other security except that of God. It is an invitation to abandon even the person's very self<sup>11</sup>.

The second risk according to Jesus' teaching is *to take up one's cross*, which means that the disciple must share with Jesus the way of the cross by giving himself up for the sake of Jesus and the proclamation of the Good News.

Therefore, we can say that the invitation to discipleship is an invitation to martyrdom<sup>12</sup>. Only a person surrendered to Jesus and his preaching deserves the life of a disciple. This call to discipleship is not for everybody and is not a way of salvation by which the individual can secure his own happiness<sup>13</sup>, Jesus shows us when he was teaching about discipleship in the Genasene demoniac incident. The man who had been possessed by demons begged him to be with him (5:18). But Jesus said to him: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you (v.19). This person is sent back to his family and friends contrary to his own wishes while in Mk.1: 16-20, the other person is taken away from home and family.

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<sup>11</sup> G.FISCHER- M.HASITSCHKA, 116

<sup>12</sup> FR.RICARDO G'OMEZ's homely on St. Scholastica's memory- Guadalupe Catholic Parish, Nairobi, 10/02/2005.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

## 1.2 The requirements of discipleship

### 1. 2. 1. *Self-renouncement*

Self-renouncement means putting the needs of others ahead of everything, before your own personal needs<sup>14</sup>. In this way, the disciples were called to seek first of all the “good of others”; they had to give priority to the preaching of God’s Kingdom on earth. After being instructed by Jesus, the disciples had the duty of implementing all the instructions given by Jesus, so that whatever they had to undertake as mission was aimed at proclaiming the imminent coming of the Kingdom. Self-denial, however, is the opposite of self-affirmation, of valuating one’s own self-being, one’s selfish interests, one’s position in life, one’s self-mastery, of claiming rights and privileges etc...

Nowadays, the tendency of our society is that everyone is called to live a self-centred mentality where everything is understood and taken according to one’s personal interests. Now the appeal for self-renouncement represents a total and new reversal of human values. Such reversal cannot be understood and taken as values unless the society is ready to undergo the experience of repentance. Practically, there is need of changing one’s past life, mentality, and behaviour so that the value of self-denial may take place. The value of self-denial cannot be understood by people unless people are ready to follow the biblical example of self-denial; where Jesus takes himself as the first example of self-denial, finding self-fulfilment through self-sacrifice.

In this respect, there are, for instance, people who have been called to renounce themselves and to follow Jesus; but they were not ready to do so. For instance, the parable of the ‘young rich man’ (10: 27-22). From this perspective, the call to

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.r.bowie.btinternet.co.uk/marks/cost.html>, 1/5/2005

discipleship must be irreversible and radical. Following the irreversibility and radicality of discipleship, Leonard Doohan says: "Anyone who wants to preserve his or her life, be first, and share the Lord's glory, must reject worldly priorities of life, serve all, and share the Lord's cup of suffering."<sup>15</sup>

The disciples have to respond to Jesus' call by leaving everything: boats, nets, family, friends, money, sons, daughters and properties so that the material things and possessions of this world may not prevent their mission. They have to commit themselves totally to Jesus call and mission.

### *1.2.2. Change*

Change as an attitude could be seen in two ways: - first relating to the disciple's occupation. According to Mark and other Gospels, the disciples were fishermen; they owned boats, nets, and employees. After Jesus had called them they left their daily life activities and without questions followed Him (Mk.1: 17-19). In short they left their ordinary life without complaining and followed Jesus. On the other hand, at the beginning, the disciples were not aware of Jesus' mission. After being called Jesus said to them: "I will make you fisher of men" (1: 17). It is from this saying that the reality of change had to occur in their lives, and this becomes also a new mission to them.

Second, the attitude of changing places and mission. The first condition to follow Jesus is to renounce one's properties and occupation in order to give oneself totally to the mission. This change can also be called "spiritual change". This is a spiritual process, where individuals are called to dedicate their daily lives for the sake of

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<sup>15</sup> L. DOOHAN, *Mark: Visionary of Early Christianity*, 103

God's kingdom. The disciples had to hear and live the words, the spirit of Jesus as their unique master. It is only after experiencing the master's life that the disciples were able to open up themselves, and were able to clarify doubts concerning their master's mission. For instance, when Jesus walked on the water and the disciples thought that He was a ghost. Clearly, this shows that they did not recognize Him because of their lack of faith (Mk.6: 45-51).

According to Mark, after this event, Jesus asked the question, "who do you say I am?" and Peter on behalf of others, answered: "You are the Christ" (Mk.8: 29, Mt.16: 16). Jesus' question can be understood as a kind of a thermometer that Jesus used in order to check the grade of his disciple's knowledge of who he was. From Peter's answer, Jesus might have perceived that the disciples had discovered who he really was. This was why he stopped Peter and the other from sharing with other people about his own identity.

This attitude is very important for those who want to be Jesus' disciples. Without change one cannot be truly a follower of Jesus, because change as we have seen in the disciples, is the key of other attitudes and Christian values. The change of the follower is to acquire a new life style through baptism. Baptism and sufferings become our Christian way of salvation. Jesus has inaugurated it and everyone as Christian is called to drink the cup of suffering as Jesus did (see Mk.10: 35-40).

### *1.2.3 Humility*

To be humble or the ability to be a servant of others is one of the requirements of discipleship. It is from the perspective of humility that the discussion arose among the disciples about who would be the greatest (9:34) to which Jesus used the image of a child who is dependent, powerless, and innocent as a sign of a true disciple to elucidate their (the disciples) concern. Doonham understands that, "Jesus reinforces his teaching by focusing the disciples and their concern for the importance on a child whom Jesus sets in their midst since the Aramaic word for the child and serve is the same, this child standing in the midst of the disciples is a symbol of disciples' attitudes as they minister in Jesus' name, humility helplessness, dependence, awareness that they have no rights."<sup>16</sup>

These aspects should be the proper attitudes of Jesus' followers in the mission. Humility can also be understood in terms of being at the service of people who are unable to protect themselves and all those who have the greatest need to be served. Humility also can be seen in the fact that there are people who are not aware of their rights, justice and freedom of expression. Every disciple is called to show his gentleness by not compromising the mission of Jesus with the mentality of the society.

There are various areas where humility can be understood as justice: the reality of the orphans, the widows, the out casts, the hungry etc... Jesus did not only preach by words but he also gave practical solutions to the situations in which he found himself in the community of Israel. There are many examples where Jesus had given practical

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<sup>16</sup> L. DOONHAM, 105

solutions for whatever was lacking in terms of being in solidarity with those who are in need and in suffering and then help them practically (6:30-44; 5:21-42; 6:53-56 etc...).

Jesus could not have performed those miracles, if he had not been humble; he became humble by taking part in the situations which people were experienced; he was compassionate with the people during the feast at Cana (see John. 2: 1-10), with the sick people (see Mk. 7: 24-30; 31-37), with the poor etc... On the other hand, the disciples have to follow Jesus' attitude of humility, they have to seek the master's examples so that on their part they may be effective to Jesus' mission. The value of humility becomes one of the key elements of being Jesus' disciple. This does not apply only to the first disciples but also it becomes a call for all of us today as religious and missionaries.

#### *1.2.4 Service*

The disciples of Jesus were called to share in Jesus' mission with authority. They first of all were to detach themselves from social ranks, power and the privileges of this world. Both the disciples and Jesus were united by the mission. Here mission is understood in terms of spreading God's kingdom on earth with the spirit of service, without expecting anything in return. These echoes in Jesus' statement: "*For the son of man himself came not to be served,<sup>1</sup> but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many.*"(10:45).

Jesus' followers have to show their faith through commitment in showing love to others. The value of service is a fundamental option for discipleship. Service

presumes the fundamental commandment of love of neighbour “Charity”. This fundamental commandment of love was shown by Jesus when he washed his disciples’ feet during the event of the last supper and taught them to do the same for their fellow brothers and sisters (see John13: 1-15). It is from this fact that the spirit of service is stressed, because we are called to extend our love to everyone we meet in our mission, not only to those we know. There is greater need to be available in serving the people of God, especially those of this world who are suffering from various problems.

Practically, the idea of service does not only mean “material service” but also “spiritual service” because besides material service, there are people who are in need of spiritual assistance namely: word of God, counselling, consoling etc... For instance, being religious and missionary, we are called to be God’s instrument through which God’s love, mercy, peace, justice, and reconciliation is expressed. Therefore, service as availability is a call to witness to all these values by living them out because they are good and God gives to humanity.

As Liptak says: “Christian conception of happiness is determined by the quality of the service that one does, makes to the people of God and not the quantity of the works or the amount of money that one is paid for the service provided”<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, as Jesus’ disciples it is important for us to serve others out of love and not to serve in order to gain any fame or to be applauded.

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<sup>17</sup> E. P. LIPTAK, *Discipleship and Ministry*, 28

### *1.2.5 Selfless Love Towards The Needy*

If we look at Jesus' life, we see that he did good things out of love, especially for those in need. Being God himself, Jesus was not happy seeing people suffer, that is why he was always attentive to the people in need in order to give them his hand even when the teachers of the Law were against his position.

When Jesus cures the man whose hand was withered (Mk.3: 1-5), the opposition of the people who know the Law was clearly shown; for them, the Law was more important than life, that is why they did not answer Jesus' question (3:4); however being merciful and compassionate, Jesus does what he sees as good (3:5) because for him life is more important than the law, he himself is life (Jh.14: 6). So we see Jesus challenging the "know-it-all" in order to do the will of the Father. The Father's will is to make mankind free from every kind of tribulation in order to enjoy the love and dignity of God's children. This Jesus' attitude was for the disciples a lesson to learn and they learnt well that is why in their mission they do the same.

In chapter 12:28-34, the two greatest commandments of love are highlighted. That is the love of God and the love of neighbour. These two commandments are in relationship to discipleship. Jesus explained fully the meaning of these two commandments, when he was confronted by the teacher of Judaic law<sup>18</sup>. As good learners, the disciples assimilated this lesson about love. Consequently, wherever they went as missionaries, they exercised and preached what they had learned and experienced from their Master. We see this in Mark when Jesus sends his disciples two

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.courseworkhelp.co.uk/GCSE/RE/06.htm>, 1/5/2005.

by two. Their mission involved preaching and healing the sick (6: 7-13). In Act 3: 1-8; we see a vivid example of such healings when Peter and John healed the lame man.

In this biblical text (Acts 3:1-8) we let us exegetically consider a word from Exodus 3: 7ff, this word is: "See". We will associate the word "*Look*" in the book of the Acts with the word "*See*" in Exodus. These two words express *compassion* and *empathy* towards people's situations. Compassion and empathy are the result of Love. No one can empathise with the other person's situation, if he or she is not oriented by love. Love is the driving force of all the good we do towards others. As a result, full of God's love and compassion in their hearts, the disciples were driven to share this love with the needy in order to make their preaching credible. Therefore, the disciples' empathy and compassion drove them to immediately respond to the needy.

#### 1.2.6 Faith

Speaking of prophetic witness to which the disciples are called, Doohan says "The disciples are called to courageously proclaim their dedication to Jesus (8:38) and be a lamp on a stand for all to see (4:21). Left in charge until the Master return, they were to be vigilant in looking after his interests (13:32-37) and promote the realization of the kingdom"<sup>19</sup>. Jesus call; them personally, but no explanations are given to them while being called; but their response is immediate and implies detachment from relatives, possessions and one's own way of life. In this line Doohan says again that: "just as Jesus' messiahship in Mark is seen more in deeds than in his discourses, so also

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<sup>19</sup> L. DOOHAN, 110

the nature of response in faith is seen more in actions and relationships than in statements on faith itself<sup>20</sup>.

Thus faith needed by the disciples is the “motivating force” of their commitment. Faith is important in the life of the disciples because it gives sense to their vocation. The misunderstanding of the disciples about their Master can, somehow, be associated to their lack of faith. For instance, in the scene of calming the storm (4:34-41), the disciples were cowardly about what Jesus had done and that is why he asked them the following question: “why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?” (4:40). The increasing failures of the disciples to understand seems to be Mark’s style in order to warn those who want to become Jesus’ followers of their own possible failures and a challenge to them to reach a genuine understanding of Jesus and his call to them.

### *1. 2.7 Prayer*

Prayer is an intimate dialogue with the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit<sup>21</sup>. Prayer in Jesus’ life was very important and this is evident in Mark’s Gospel. Mark shows many occasions where Jesus is at prayer, for instance, after his preaching in the synagogue at Capernaum; after healing Simon’s mother-in-law, the list is endless: “Jesus, rising very early before dawn, left the home and went off to the deserted place, where He prayed” (Mk. 1:34). Undoubtedly, at special moments of His life, Jesus dedicated his time for prayer, for example, before choosing the twelve, Jesus went to the mountain to pray and spent a night in prayer to God, the Father (Mt.3: 13; Lk.6: 12).

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>21</sup> N. FOGLIACCO, “Trinity and Spiritual Life”, Class notes, Tangaza College- Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi.

Having fed the five thousand and having said goodbye to them, Jesus went off into the hills to pray (Mk.6: 46). When His disciples returned from a successful missionary journey, Jesus gave a prayer of gratitude and praise to the Father, who is the fount and origin of everything as follows: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do" (Mt.11: 25-26; Lk.10: 21). And in Gethsemane as he was preparing himself for the suffering, (Mk.14: 32-42). According to Doohan, "Jesus teaches that the disciples' prayer is intimately connected with faith and action. In Mk11: 24, Jesus equates prayer and faith, and in 12:40, he condemns the emptiness of prayer without service of others"<sup>22</sup>

Upon experiencing their master at prayer, the disciples also felt the need to pray constantly. This was why they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. In response to their petition, Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer (Mk.6:9-13; Lk.11:2-4) and showed them the way of praying as follows: "when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Mk.11:25; Mt.6:6). At another occasion, Jesus narrated a story concerning a Pharisee (full of himself and self-exaltation) and a publican (who felt unworthy to stand before God) in order to show that God is full of compassion and mercy and that he forgives whoever comes to Him in humility of heart.

The lessons we can learn from these narratives are that prayer and faith are linked. And to become Jesus' disciple, one has to develop a life of intimacy with the

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<sup>22</sup> L. DOOHAN, 101

Father; the source of our strength. The disciple must be a prayerful person in order to sustain one's life as a follower and to succeed in mission.

### 1.3 The mission of the disciple

#### 1.3.1 *Preaching the Gospel and Healing*

Perusing through the gospel of Mark, we could be tempted to notice that the mission of the disciples was simple because they had to redo what Jesus did<sup>23</sup>. Jesus gave them the authority over evil spirits and ordered them to take as little as possible on their journey, that is, leaving behind worldly possessions in order to go out and preach the good news (Mk. 6:7-11). From this fact, we can deduce that since the beginning, the disciples had an explicit mission. After choosing the twelve, he said, "...I will send you out to preach, and you will have authority to drive out demons..." (Mk. 3: 14).

The promise became a reality in Mk 6:6b-13 when he called to him and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits... so they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them. The disciples now are doing what Jesus was doing in fulfilling the promise. This exercise helped the disciples to become closer to the person of Jesus, deepening their own understanding of mission. The disciples seem to go far away from Jesus, until they all forsook him and fled (Mk.14; 50)<sup>24</sup>. They thought that what they were doing was by their authority, they have forgotten that what they were doing was done because of their relationship with him (Jesus), as the scripture says: "...he gave them authority over unclean spirit" (Mk.6; 7).

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.courseworkhelp.co.uk/GCSE/RF/06.htm>, 1/5/2005.

<sup>24</sup> F. J. MOLONY, *Disciple and Prophets: A biblical Model for the Religious Life*, 141

Therefore, Jesus' personal mission is multiplied through his representatives, the disciples.

### *1.3.2 Challenges and Failures in the Disciples' Mission*

Prayer and faith are two of the most important requirements for those who desire to follow Jesus as disciples. Jesus as, a good Master, shows these two elements through his life; he prays to the Father before making a great decision, for instance, the choosing of the twelve disciples, before feeding the crowd and so on, because he knows that the mission that he is doing is not his own mission, but the Father's mission, that is why he trusts in him because he is the owner of everything. He does this in order to help his followers to know the importance of prayer and faith in God for their mission and life. It was not enough to teach them the Father's prayer, but the most important was to show them by praying and trusting in God the Father.

In chapters 6:30-44 and 8:1-10, Jesus charges the disciples with the responsibility of feeding the crowd, but the disciples' response to Jesus' request shows that they were not spiritually prepared to take this responsibility<sup>25</sup>, because they took the responsibility from a human point of view. This is shown through their answers to Jesus: "Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for the people to eat?" (Mk.6: 37), and "Where could anyone get this people enough bread to eat in a deserted place?" (Mk.8: 4). These two answers show us that the disciples are not considering the

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<sup>25</sup> R. C. TANNEHILL, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role" In W. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark*, 146

person of Jesus, but themselves<sup>26</sup>. They have forgotten that the one who is asking them to feed the crowd it is the one who saved their lives by calming the storm in the sea through his powerful word (see Mk.4: 39). Their answers also show us their unwillingness to take on the responsibility given by Jesus. To emphasize this idea, I would like to say that usually rude answers are used as *defence mechanisms*; I mean that they are used to cover up someone incompetence. This is what happened with the disciples.

In Mark 9:14-29, the disciples failed to cure the epileptic demoniac boy because of their lack of faith and prayer. The disciples were convinced that only the power that they received from Jesus was enough to respond to all the needs encountered in their mission. Prayer and faith were put aside. Jesus as a good Master reminds them that in order to succeed in the mission faith is important by saying that: "Everything is possible for one who has faith" (9:24) and also prayer is important: "This is the kind that can be driven out only by prayer". He said prayer after the disciples' searching for the reason why the dumb and deaf spirit did not come out when they tried to expel it (see 9:28).

Therefore, Jesus through these scenes is reminding the disciples that prayer and faith are needed for those who really want to follow him because it is through these two elements that the disciples can be able to overcome all kind of difficulties that they will find in their mission.

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<sup>26</sup> Class Notes

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion we can say that according to Mark, discipleship is a journey in the direction as the Master – resurrection, ascension and exaltation. This journey is not for everybody (see Mk.10: 17-22), but for those who are able to share the fate of the Master and be able to leave every personal good for the sake of the Master's call (see Mk.1: 16-20; Mk.2: 13-14). This journey on the part of the followers has to be realized through their growth in faith and trust in God. That is why Mark presents to us the healing of the blind man of Jericho in chapter 10:46-52 as a model of faith and trust in Jesus. "The two stages healing of a blind man at Jericho is closely related to the Peter's partial blindness in his confession where the spokesman for the disciples does not fully grasp the heart of the message of salvation".<sup>27</sup> In short we can say that discipleship is a journey made through faith and trust in Jesus, the one who is orienting the travel. And to make it easy it is important that the disciple be open to the Master's teaching or orientations because the way has obstacles such as the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, the scribes etc that can put barriers on the way.

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<sup>27</sup> A. STOCK, 148

## **CHAPTER II**

### **FOUNDRESS' BACKGROUND**

#### **Introduction**

In this second chapter I would like to develop the theme of discipleship according to my congregation, starting by looking the foundress understanding of discipleship and ours today. The foundress' understanding gives some elements of consistency to our understanding. In the first part we talk about the foundress' background, foundress' vocation and her understanding of discipleship. Second part is the Mercedarian sisters today, their charism, mission, understanding of discipleship, the major characteristics of being a disciple and the challenges encountered in their mission.

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#### **2.1 Foundress Background**

Lutgarda Mas I Mateu (see appendix I) was born in a family with deep Catalan roots. Catalan people know how to save, how to fight for a better life, they are enterprising and take risks. These characteristics and her mother's personality (a woman

who is strong in character, tenacious, austere, sensible towards others' suffering) formed Lutgarda's personality<sup>28</sup>.

She was born in a family of eight children in Barcelona - Catalonia (Spain) in a small village called Gracia in 1828. Her father was a well-known baker who owned a bakery where the employees were all grown up children and her mother was a housewife. She was from a very religious family<sup>29</sup>; that is why she received a Christian education. She acquired some values such as: love to God and Our Lady of Mercy, respect for human beings and attentiveness to others' needs. When she was growing up, she became one of those devoted to Our Lady of Mercy and joined the small movements that were appearing in her village.

In her village, she heard a lot about the exploitation of women and children. Women were being exploited in the factories and subdued by their husbands in their homes and considered inferior to men<sup>30</sup>. They were not given an adequate education and some were not allowed to go to school. So this situation touched her and that is why in response to this, she founded a Congregation that could help the women and children to be free from ignorance.

## 2.2 Foundress' Vocation

It was in XIX century, an epoch well known as the Industrial Revolution that Lutgarda saw the inhuman conditions in which workers lived: lack of protection, the salaries were not covering the monthly expenses, and women, children and men had the

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<sup>28</sup>Mercedarias Misionarias de Barcelona, *Plan de Formacion Inicial Y Permanente*, 15

<sup>29</sup>E.G.CASTRO, *Lutgarda*, 33- 34

<sup>30</sup>Ibid, 64

same work but the salary was different<sup>31</sup>. Being an educated and sensitive woman, Lutgarda became more interested in women's and children's situations because these were the people who could not express their thoughts and feelings for they were not prepared for that or they were lacking proper education.

Even within the church, women were not considered as "living stones", and their essential task was charitable work. And to emphasize this idea, I would like to translate one of the bishop's ideas on women in the church. He said: "we forbid the women to sing mass' hymns; silence is important for them and this was marked by the apostles<sup>32</sup>." The letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians inspires this idea (1Cor 14, 34- 38). This is to say that women in the church had no voice; it implies that they were excluded or marginalized.

It was by observing and hearing women's conversation that Lutgarda drew more attention to the women's and children's situation and decided to found a congregation whose aim was to free ignorant people, especially women and children, by giving them an integral education. Therefore, we can say that Lutgarda's vocation was a fruit of many reflections about the marginalized people of her time mainly women and children who were in need of liberation from their ignorance. For her, liberation could help these people to fight for their own rights, welfare and dignity as human beings.

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<sup>31</sup> E.G.CASTRO, 65-66

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 75

### 2.3 Lutgarda's Understanding of Discipleship

Looking at Lutgarda's family, we can say that she was born in an economically stable family. According to Ernesto Castro this family had a bakery and a good portion of land where they could grow anything for the family's sustenance<sup>33</sup>. After her father's death, she inherited some goods. Her father left a will where he distributed his possession to his children and Lutgarda like any child in her family received her portion, but she was not attached to those goods because for her the temporary goods were passing and she was looking for those goods that could not pass.

What she was seeking was to help those whom she had observed suffering oppression in her society and to do the will of God by founding a Congregation whose aim was liberation of the captive, which is why she left every earthly good and followed God's call. From this, we can say that discipleship for Lutgarda is to leave everything (possessions, family, and friends) in order to do the will of God through a total trust in God and Mary our Mother.

This "leaving everything", implied a total confidence in God and Mary, that is why she had a motto: "God and our Mother shall provide"; it implies also a strong relationship of friendship with God and Mary through prayer. It was during her prayer that Our Lady of Mercy appeared to her in vision, in which she was told to restructure a religious family, which Peter Nolasco and Maria 'de Cervello had founded in XIII century whose aim was to liberate Christians who were oppressed by the Muslims because of their faith in God<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 33-34

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 92-93

In her prayers, some biblical texts called her attention such as: Ex. 3:7-10 (God proclaimed the Good News of liberation) and Mt. 25.31-46 (God who identifies himself with the oppressed). So we can say that Lutgarda, in her prayers, discovered that God was starting point of liberation action and that she was an instrument of this great mission.

Therefore, in this kind of understanding of discipleship, trust, faith, good observation and good listening are important because through these elements Lutgarda was able to discover more and more what God was asking her to do.

From her understanding of discipleship, we can say that she was a person who strongly believed in God's providence in everything that she was doing and thinking; and also we can say that she was a **woman of faith**, because she believed that God's hand was directing her in this great adventure of starting a religious Congregation in the middle of a society where the rich were mostly concerned with factories and acquiring more and more cheap manpower. She was a **prayerful woman** because she got power and strength for founding the Congregation from her daily prayer. She also was conscious and convinced that the Holy Spirit was the owner of this work and she was a simple instrument of God.

## 2.4 Mercedarian Sisters Today (see appendix II)

### 2.4.1 *Charism*

Charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which is given to some people who have been chosen by the Father to reproduce in themselves one of the mysterious aspects of the life of Christ. In the history of the Church, many religious families came about to

address the various needs and challenges that the Church was facing. Each religious family had its own charism handed over by the founder or foundress. Each charism manifests in itself one specific mystery of Christ and addresses a particular need of the time according to the teachings of Christ in the Gospel.

As for us Mercedarian Sisters, our charism focuses on *proclamation of the Good News and liberation of the captives* that is expressed by the promotion and education of women and men through Christian teaching, mission and social work<sup>35</sup>. The biblical texts that underpin our charism are: Ex.3: 7-10, Mt.25: 31-46 and Lk.4: 16-19<sup>36</sup>. Mary has a central place in our spirituality; she is the model of our total self-giving and our mission because she cooperated with God in the redemption of humanity by her acceptance to be the mother of God. So our foundress directed her attention to the redemptive mystery of Christ who proclaimed the Good News to the poor, the freedom to the captives. As Mercedarians, we are called to identify ourselves with Christ the redeemer. So we have to make ourselves free first in order to liberate our sisters and brothers who are suffering from any kind of oppression. The captives today are not only those who did not have opportunity to go to school, but the sick, those in prisons, those without voice in our societies (widows, orphans, street children, old people) and those rejected by the society because of their physical disability (the lame, the handicapped and mentally sick). These are the new kind of captivities that our societies are presenting to us today.

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<sup>35</sup> Mercedarias Missionaries de Barcelona, *Constituicoes*, 3

<sup>36</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Plan de Formacion Inicil y Permanente*, 17

In order to give answers to these new appeals, we must adapt the charism to these new realities that our world is presenting to us today, but having in consideration the initial charism of the Congregation<sup>37</sup>, says our directory. The charism is not a personal gift or a private property, but God's gift to the church, which is why fidelity to our foundress' charism is important. And John Paul II also in his document appealed to religious Congregations to be faithful to their founding charism by saying: "In the first place there is the need for fidelity to the foundress/ founder charism..."<sup>38</sup> Enlightened by these two documents (the Pope's Exhortation and our Directory), we feel the obligation of conserving the initial Charism and adapting it according to the signs of the times. Therefore, our Congregation's charism is always updated. We try to give answers to any kind of need that society can present today. The one thing that we are called to do is to respond to them without losing the foundress' charism.

#### **2.4.2 Mission**

For the Mercedarian sisters, mission is not just the sharing of the Good News with others, but also helping them to be free from every sort of slavery in order to experience the redemptive power brought by Jesus, the Saviour. Freedom is the first value that the Mercedarian sisters have to seek before communicating God's love to the people we serve. The Mercedarian sisters must seek their own freedom: we must be free from our own cultures, worldviews, tribes, costumes and beliefs and learn the culture,

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<sup>37</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Directorio*, 5

<sup>38</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation – Vita Consecrata*, 37

costumes, beliefs and world views of the people; at this process we call insertion<sup>39</sup>. This insertion will make our missionary activity easier and we will be able to communicate God's word of liberation.

By looking at Jesus' public life we can understand that he was all the time with the poor, marginalized, and rejected, sinners, and women etc, in order to reincorporate them in the society and recover their human dignity denied by their society's cultural structures. We see that Jesus did not just preach Good News, but also denounced all kind of things that made the human being not enjoy life as human, so we can say that he was a prophet of his time by announcing the Kingdom of God with words and signs that point at the complete liberation. According to Bellagamba we can say that Jesus' mission end was to change the way of life and attitude that makes people slaves<sup>40</sup>.

Following Jesus' example, our mission is addressed to the group of people mentioned above: the poor, marginalized, rejected, sick, women, because they are Jesus' beloveds<sup>41</sup>. These people are the priority of our mission. This priority makes us become part of their struggle either directly by joining them or indirectly by sponsoring their goals and becoming their voice. That is why in our mission we strive to provide an integral education<sup>42</sup>, so that people may be able to work for their own freedom. Through education we help women and men to experience the love of Christ and we empower them with values that can make them transform the society in which they are by their own commitment and initiative.

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<sup>39</sup> Mercedarias Missionarias de Barcelona, *Critérios Gerais para a Formação*, 18

<sup>40</sup> A. Bellagamba, "The Preferential Option of The Poor-African Perspective", *African Christian Studies*, n. 3, 33-34.

<sup>41</sup> Mercedarias Missionarias de Barcelona, *Critérios Gerais para a Formação*, 18

<sup>42</sup> Mercedarias Missionarias de Barcelona, *Constituições*, 48

We provide a teaching that can help women and men to integrate faith and life in a balanced way<sup>43</sup>. In women promotion, we present Mary as example of freedom, true believer and committed on human liberation<sup>44</sup>. This example of Mary will help them to be efficient instruments as they strive for their own freedom and for other peoples'; in social work, we share the love of God with the orphans, the prisoners and the sick by taking care of them. Therefore, we are sent for mission to proclaim a year of grace to all people of good will, regardless of their social, political and economic conditions as Jesus did in Lk.4: 16-19, having in mind that the poor are at the centre of our priorities. This proclamation is made in words and deeds in order to make more credible our mission. As La Verdiere states, the missionary is called to follow the example of Jesus the Master; she/he must proclaim the Good News in words and deeds<sup>45</sup>, which means that words and deeds must be congruent. We know that actions touch more people's life than speech.

The Mercedarians' mission implies having eyes to see the oppressions; ears to hear the cries of our sisters and brothers who are suffering as God heard the cries of his people in Ex.3: 7ff and Jesus in Mk.10: 46ff. This mission implies having a merciful heart in order to give ourselves for the sake of the poor.

Our mission in Mozambique includes working for the maintenance of peace (peace-making), reconciliation among the political groups (especially FRELIMO, the party in power and RENAMO, the opposition). For this task we have prepared sisters who are directly involved in the process of peace and reconciliation. We also have the

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 49

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 52

<sup>45</sup> Cf. LA VERDIERE, *The Mission of the Church According to Mark*, 12

ministry of healing the wounds of those who have suffered in the civil war. This ministry is practically carried out in the orphanage we run with twenty-five girls. Here, the traumas and all the emotional problems that they have are taken care of.

## 2.5 Their Understanding of Discipleship

For the Mercedarian sisters, to talk about being disciple of Jesus is strictly connected to the value of freedom. This is what we seek as Jesus' followers. To be free from family ties, social ranks and material possession. In one word, to be free from all those things that prevent us from being total followers of Christ. Therefore, discipleship for Mercedarian sisters is to freely follow Jesus, the Liberator, in fidelity to the charism given to our foundress by the Spirit; and be a prophetic sign of liberation in order to give efficient responses to the new challenges that our epoch presents us<sup>46</sup>.

This understanding implies:

- ❖ Being a woman of prayer. Looking at Jesus' life, we discover that he was a man intimately linked to God the Father through prayer (Mk.3:13; Lk.6:12-13; Jh.17; Mt.11:25-27). From his life of prayer, we learn how to be intimately linked to the Father through him in order to do the Father's will and to give ourselves to those who are oppressed in this world. Therefore, to give priority and to be constant in our prayer, as our constitutions clearly state, will cultivate our friendship with Jesus the Master and will lead us to a total life of self-giving to others<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Mercedarias Misionarias de Barcelona, *Directorio*, 8

<sup>47</sup> Mercedarias Misionarias de Barcelona, *Constituicoes*, 32

- ❖ To have good ears and good sight like God who has heard the cries of his people, claiming for help; he saw the suffering of his people and came to rescue them (see Ex.3: 7ff). We, Mercedarian sisters, must have good ears and sight in order to see and hear those who are shouting and crying in our society, like the blind man of Jericho (see Mk.10: 46-52) seeking for spiritual, physical and material help. We believe that having good ears and good sight, we will be able to give new answers to new kind of oppressions presented by our society in fidelity to the God of life and of liberty who is present in our history.
- ❖ Being free. Since our charism is liberation, we are called to be free from every kind of oppressive force, those forces that can prevent us from liberating those who are suffering; for instance, we must be free from fear, material goods, social rank, tribe, nationality and family ties as Jesus the Liberator was. Our slogan is: *Be Free in Order To Liberate*. If we are not free, we cannot preach the Good News of liberation to our sisters and brothers, if we do so we are preaching in vain and our preaching will not be credible. -
- ❖ To be sent. Jesus himself was sent by God the Father to share with humanity the message of liberation, peace, and love through his life. We, as his collaborators, are called to go everywhere in the world to preach the same message to other peoples. That is why self-emptiness, self-

sacrifice, self-giving and readiness to be sent where there is need are important.

- ❖ Confidence and trust in Jesus the Liberator. Through the Scriptures and the congregation documents that we read every day in our prayer, we discover that Jesus and our foundress Lutgarda are faithful people; so being the called ones to continue the mission of liberating the oppressed, we must be confident and trust in him because he is the one who can show us how to go about liberation, after all, he is the great Liberator. That is why prayer is important as one of the requirements; to pray as Jesus the Master, who at any time found a moment of conversation with the Father in order to get power and strength for the mission. So we must develop our relationship with the Father in order to grow in confidence and trust.
- ❖ To be with the poor. Jesus was always with the poor, the sick, the sinners and the marginalized. These people were Jesus' beloved ones because they had a total trust in God and they accepted Jesus' message of liberation with joy. They were dependent and trusting in God for everything. As the Master, we his followers are called to share the Good News of Liberation with these people: the marginalized, the sick, the downtrodden, and the outcast as Jesus did<sup>48</sup>. We must be closely linked to the vulnerable people in our society, to welcome them and to show

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<sup>48</sup> Mercedarias Missionarias de Barcelona, *Critérios Gerais para a Formação*, 17

them that God's liberation is for them, especially the sinners (Lk.5: 32, Mt.9: 13).

- ❖ To serve. As Jesus' followers, we have to show our faith and commitment through hospitality to others. This hospitality implies the service to others as Jesus did when he washed the apostles' feet before his death at the last supper (Jh.13: 3-16). Serving others therefore is a fundamental option for all who have been called to participate in the life of Christ the liberator. Humility and love are principal criteria through which this openness to serve others as Jesus did happens. Our service is unconditional, that is, we do not serve in order to get any gain.
- ❖ Availability. Mary is our model of availability; she accepted freely to collaborate with God in his plan for liberation of humanity through her "Yes" in the Annunciation (see Lk.1: 38). She forgot her own plans and will in order to give priority to God's plan and will. Like her, we are called to be ready to do God's plan and will and forget our own plans in order to take the word of liberation to God's people. Therefore, we must give our whole person (what we are and what we have) to God as a simple instrument of his mission of Liberation.
- ❖ To share the same fate with the Master. Jesus the Liberator freed the humanity through suffering and death on the cross. We, his followers, are called to experience the same destiny of our Master by giving our life

for the sake of sisters and brothers' lives<sup>49</sup> as our constitutions says in the profession formula, especially, women and children because they are the most vulnerable in our societies. These are the two groups that in many occasion their rights and dignity as human beings are forgotten or no respected.

- ❖ To be a prophet. People consider Jesus as a prophet (Mk.6, 15 and 8, 28), and he also identifies himself as One (Mt.12, 41; Lk.13, 33). As a prophet, Jesus affirmed and announced the Kingdom with words and signs (Lk. 24:19), which points at the complete liberation and fullness of life for all (Lk.6, 20-23; Jh.10, 10). Jesus was full of the Spirit (Lk.4, 11) who anointed him and sent him to “preach the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set liberty to the oppressed” (Lk.4, 18-19).

Jesus also denounced all that enslaved and corrupted the Kingdom of God: unjust wealth, (Lk.6: 24), oppressing powers (Lk.22: 25-26), false religions (Mt.7, 1-5) and unjust attitudes of the leaders. In this way, being Jesus' collaborators in the redemptive mission, we are called to be prophets in-our society, church and world in at large in order to announce the Good News of liberation to those sisters and brothers who are suffering any kind of oppressive forces. We are called to denounce through our life and words these malicious forces. Our mission is to restore the dignity of our brethren created in the image and likeness of God (Gn.1, 27).

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<sup>49</sup> Mercedarias Missionarias de Barcelona, *Constituicoes*, 6

These are the requirements needed to follow Jesus as Mercedarian sisters. Those who really want to share the charism of liberation of the captives must be dressed up with these requirements in order to continue the liberation mission started by Jesus the Master. These requirements will help us to develop some unique characteristics that I will show next.

## 2.6 The Major Characteristics of Being A Disciple

As a family, we have some characteristics that give us an identity or make us different from other religious congregations. To be the follower of Jesus the Liberator in our world, we Mercedarian sisters must acquire the following characteristics:

- ❖ A Mercedarian sister must be a contemplative woman, with a profound experience of the God of Jesus<sup>50</sup>; a God who is merciful and liberator and makes his the suffering of the poor and oppressed (see Ex.3: 7-9). That means that we are called to experience this God of Jesus through our everyday prayer in order to be able to hear, to see and to feel the sufferings of our sisters and brothers around us; we are called to experience this God of Jesus Christ who is merciful and compassionate towards other's situation in order to share this compassion and mercy with the captive and the needy. In our everyday prayer we offer to God these children of his needing spiritual and physical freedom so as to find ways of redeeming them.

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<sup>50</sup> Mercedarias Missionarias de Barcelona, *Directorio*, 9.1

- ❖ The Mercedarian sisters are women that identify themselves with the person of Jesus of Nazareth who assumes and socializes with the poor and the needy. We are women who announce the Good News of Liberation (See Lk .4: 18-19: Mt. 25:31-46). We are called to make ours the pain of those who are suffering oppression of any kind in our society and, as Jesus, to liberate these people.
- ❖ The Mercedarian sisters' example of prayer and freedom is Mary<sup>51</sup>, who freely accepted to collaborate in God's plan of salvation and proclaimed God's option and preference for the poor and oppressed in the *magnificat* (see Lk. 1: 47-55). We are called to be with the poor and oppressed of our time in order to show how God loves them and how he is interested in them as his beloved children.
- ❖ The Mercedarian sisters' lifestyle denounces all those things that are against the Kingdom of God. We are called to announce the Good News of liberation and also to denounce the injustices that are oppressing our sisters and brothers through preaching and our way of life. Words and deeds must go together.
- ❖ The Mercedarian sisters are sensible mothers with merciful hearts<sup>52</sup>. Full of tenderness and compassion toward women and men in need of liberation; they must discover God's presence in the suffering people.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 9.4

<sup>52</sup> Mercedaria Missionaria de Barcelona, *Criterio Geral para a Formacao*, 20

Tenderness, compassion and sensitivity towards others' are values that go along with every Mercedarin sister in the task of liberation.

- ❖ The Mercedarian sisters are free, simple, risky-taking, and critical; they know how to discern in the light of the Gospel and through the intuition of Lutgarda the kind of responses to give to new challenges presented by the world<sup>53</sup>. In order to liberate the sisters and brothers who are oppressed, first of all the Mercedarian sister must be free from every kind of oppression, (spiritual and material and ideological) and must be courageous in order to share her life for the freedom of those in oppressive state.
- ❖ The Mercedarian sisters recognize their limitation as human beings and their sinful state and seek conversion everyday<sup>54</sup>. Through the sacrament of penance, we recognize our littleness towards God and go back to him as prodigal daughters seeking for forgiveness and mercy.

As I said above, these characteristics give us an identity, thus all the Mercedarian sisters must have some of these because what is important for us is complementarity. The different characteristics in us help us to approach the reality of oppression in different ways and help us to recognize that we need each other's support; that we are called to complement, to support one another and live in mutual dependence. So the differences help us to be more linked to God and among us as bees in the same beehive.

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<sup>53</sup> Mercedarias Misionarias de Barcelona, *Constituicoes*, 18.1,32,42

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 12,30,37

### *2.6.1 Their Challenges as They Serve and How They Respond to it*

As any religious community has challenges in its mission, we also, as Congregation, have challenges. They are part of our life and we cannot avoid them. If we look at them positively, we can say that they help us to grow as a Congregation and make us to be more united when searching for ways of overcoming them. We do not look at them as something that stops us, but as power that pushes us to go ahead in our liberation mission. If we look attentively at the mission of Jesus, we see that he also found challenges. For instance, political and religious challenges, but these did not stop him from doing the will of the Father because he was sent to the world to preach the Good News of liberation to everyone on earth. So, enlightened by Jesus our Master, we are following his example of preaching the Good News of liberation in any difficult circumstances of life. To test what the Master tested.

These are the challenges that we experience as Congregation:

1. Decrease of the number of vocations: nowadays, in general, the number of candidates to religious life is reducing in the world and the world is presenting us uncounted sorts of slavery that need to be responded. It is also true in our Congregation, where the reduction of vocations is very clear, specially in Africa (Mozambique); we see many young people joining religious life, but because of development phenomenon that is occurring in the continent many of these young people, after few years of profession leave religious life, thing that makes difficult our mission

because these people are prepared for a specific task in the Province. The result of this is the lack of good number of personnel for mission. To respond to this challenge, we as Province opened our “doors” to lay people, by giving them the opportunity to share our mission, especially in areas of teaching and promoting social works. We found a small NGO with our spirituality everywhere we are in order to help us in this great mission of liberation of the captive.

2. Lack of formed Sisters for mission. It is our obligation to form our personnel for mission in order to respond to all the needs faced by our charism today. As I said, our charism is liberation, so as a province (Mozambique), we have to free our sisters from ignorance that prevents them from being effective instruments of liberation in our society. Since the world is rapidly growing, we realize that many new problems are appearing and they need to be solved or responded to. For instance, we have the problem of HIV/AIDS, Orphans, and ignorance; so as a Province, we are trying to give the best preparation to our young sisters in order to respond to the needs that are appearing in Mozambique and in the world. We are preparing nurses in order to take good care of the sick people, especially those with illnesses that are not curable; we are also preparing future teachers in order to carry out the great task of educating and freeing people from ignorance that is oppressing them. We are also preparing sisters in social work, in Bible studies and theology in order to

help women and men to provide for their own lives and to grow in their friendship with God the Liberator; we are forming sisters for administration of goods of the Congregation. In the area of religious formation, we are forming young sisters that can be able to take this responsibility of forming others according to what the world is living now. In short, I would like to say that in this moment the Province of Mozambique is very concerned with the young sisters' academic and spiritual formation.

3. HIV/AIDS. This infection is affecting many people in our society; for us as a Province, it is an urgent appeal to respond. This illness is affecting and infecting religious Congregations everywhere in the world. For instance, in my Province last year, we discovered that one of our sisters was infected. After knowing her status, she became unhappy and the Province did not know how to go about it. She was already prepared as a nurse in order to take care of the leper people and she was supposed to go for preparation for her final vows. In March this year, she left the Congregation; I suppose that she felt that she was not able to go to her mission in this condition or to be a happy sister in this condition. In this way, the mission was affected as well. One more sister out, and the leprosy centre was waiting for someone to take care of the sick. Having in mind that we may come across more similar cases of the sort, we decided as Province to accept and take care of sisters infected by

HIV/AIDS because they are part of our family. If our charism is liberation of the captive, these people are also slaves of this disease and they need to be count as full members of the Province and the Congregation in general in spite of the illness that they are suffering from. Encouragement to the infected sisters must be given in order to help them to accept the reality they are in. To respond to all these as a Province, we decided to have a check up of all the candidates willing to join the Congregation. The ones who are HIV positive are not accepted to join; however there are some who contract the disease while in the Congregation. They are cared for and accepted as they are. For example, there is a sister who is infected, we accept her the way she is because we believe in her life as a faithful follower of Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, I would like to say that this reflection made me discover that to be Jesus' follower in the context of liberation is not an easy task today. It demands a lot and one's of these demands is to give ones life for the sake of those who are suffering. To be a follower in of way of Jesus, one should act as he did; preach the good news, denouncing all kind of injustices that oppress the children of God (become a prophet as he was); we have to be able to renounce all things that can enslave us and be ready to be sent where God's children are suffering oppression. There, we have to be able to welcome everyone with an open heart and with no prejudices.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **SIMILARITIES BETWEEN DISCIPLESHIP IN MARK AND DISCIPLESHIP ACCORDING TO THE MERCEDARIAN SISTERS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter shows some similarities between discipleship in Mark's Gospel and the Mercedarians' understanding of discipleship. Though the gospels were written in a different time from the one we live in today, our Congregation is deeply rooted on the teaching of Christ. We are inspired by the Scriptures and nourish ourselves in them through daily meditations. This is why there are many similarities between the way we understand discipleship as a Congregation and discipleship in the gospel of Mark.

#### **Main Similarities**

Discipleship is a call to follow Jesus radically and, if necessary to die for this cause. It is so in the Gospel of Mark and it the basis on which our Congregation stands. It is my belief that all the congregations have as their model Jesus Christ though according to the interpretation of their founders. Slight differences might be there, but all of us are called to be disciples in the way Jesus wanted his apostles and disciples to

be. The following are some of the similarities we, Mercedarian Sisters, have with Mark's way of seeing discipleship.

- ❖ Discipleship in Mark's Gospel and Mercedarian sisters' understanding is to follow after Jesus the Master and Liberator.
- ❖ In Mark's Gospel and Mercedarian sisters, the requirements are the same: to develop a prayer life, to serve, to be humble, to have faith and trust in the Person of the Master and selfless love toward the other.
- ❖ In Mark's Gospel and Mercedarian sisters, to follow Jesus implies to have ears and eyes in order to hear and to see those who are suffering and claiming for help, for instance, the sick, marginalized, children and women in need (Mt.25: 31-45).
- ❖ The disciples' mission in Mark's Gospel and in the Mercedarian mission is to preach the Good News in words and deeds to those who do not know it.
- ❖ To both, the disciple and the Mercedarians sisters is to continue the mission of Christ and, like him, proclaim the Kingdom of God and heal all kinds of sicknesses including the spiritual one.
- ❖ In both cases, to share the same fate with the Master Jesus is the main goal, that is, to share the way of the cross with Jesus by giving oneself up for the sake of Jesus and the proclamation of the Good News.

- ❖ The disciple's in Mark Gospel and Mercedarian sisters' service are made unconditional and to everybody and everywhere as Jesus the Master did (see Jn.13: 3-13).
- ❖ The disciples and the Mercedarian sisters are sent to preach the message of Jesus to everybody in the world, especially the poor (God's beloved children).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter shows me that, though the time and place where the gospel of Mark was written are different from today, the basic mandate is the same and the ways on how to go about it are basically the same. What we, as a Congregation do, is just interpreting them and actualising it so as to fit our mission places. The Good News brought by Jesus are still very good and still provides relevant answers to the many questions people struggle to answer. This comparison helps me and my Province (Mozambique) to reflect more about our call and mission in this society of ours and to make us aware that the mission of liberation started by Jesus the Master must be continued.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Going through the preparation and writing of this paper, with this particular theme – discipleship – has given new meaning and understanding of my charism as a Mercedarian Sister. The profundity of the meaning of discipleship, especially as Mark sees and describes it, leaves us with a lot to do as individuals first and as a Congregation in order to rediscover the real life of a disciple of Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark, being a gospel of discipleship, call us for a constant reflection, meditation and creativity in order to reinterpret the meaning of discipleship for the Mercedarian Sisters today so as to serve society better and in line with the Master.

For us Mercedarian Sisters, discipleship has been living a life of personal freedom in order to free (heal) the others. This has implied surrendering oneself to unconditional service, self-giving and readiness to be sent to wherever there are people in need. We try to be aware that following Jesus – the Liberator – is to share fate with him for the sake of liberating the forsaken and rejected in society. We also think that being disciples of the Master implies developing good sight to see the needy and oppressed in society and sound hearing so as to hear the cries of the poor (Ex. 3:7ff; Mk

10:46-52). Discipleship in the Mercedarian Sisters also implies being compassionate and empathises with others' pain, suffering and anguish (Mt 25:31-45).

As the years go by and centuries drift far back, and new and challenging problems arise in our societies, we (Mercedarians) risk forgetting the original dream of our foundress. We ought to reinterpret the charism in order to answer today's problem. The Mercedarian Sisters in Mozambique will live the foundress' dream if they strive to "bring liberation to the needy" by empowering their personnel with educational training that can enable them face future challenges that this *technology* and profit oriented world will present us.

When young Lutgarda Mas I Maten founded the Mercedarian Sisters in 1860 in Barcelona (Spain), the purpose of our existence was to liberate physical captives. Today, this liberation, we think, is not just physical one but includes also spiritual and psychological healing of people. This is why we are more for education, teaching and promotion of social works directing our utmost attention to those in need.

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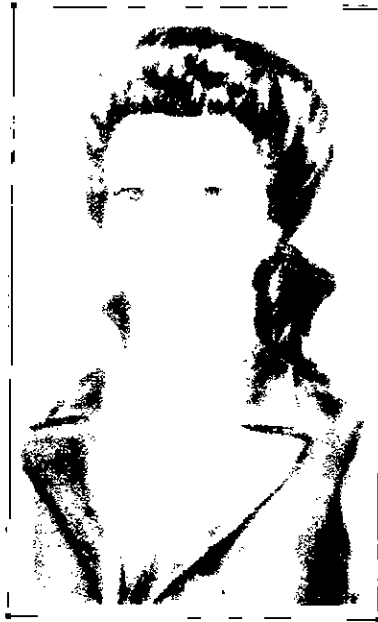
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APPENDIX 1



THE UNIVERSITY OF STRATHMORE

## APPENDIX II

