

HOSPITALITY INSIDE THE MONASTERY.

Abbess M M.del Mar Albajar-Viñas, Monastery of Sant Benet (Montserrat). Region 2

CIB Symposium Roma September 2018

First of all, I want to thank S. Judith Ann's invitation and confidence to take part in this meeting. It is the third time I come to the Symposium. The other two times I came as a translator and this is why this time I have fond memories of them.

In my statement, I am going to share with you a reflection that comes up from a daily verification of the difficulty of hospitality inside the community and of the suffering involved. And it also comes from the verification and joyful experience of many big and small expressions of hospitality, marvels of love, that I have seen among the sisters along the years.

I am talking from my personal and community experience in my monastery and also after sharing with many nuns and monks from other communities, some of them already closed. I am also talking from my training on fundamental theology and the fields of humanistic psychology and experiential philosophy, which really help me to understand and to lead my personal and monastic line.

I want to emphasize a basic principle for me : the difficulties we face at the time of accepting each other in the community are not a problem for our vocation; they are not essentially necessary to be nuns. Neither they are the price we have to pay for living in a community. For us it is our vocation, our real vocation. We choose looking for God in community the same as other people focus on the sanitary field, for example serving God through the ill people. They know they are not going to deal with healthy people but with ill people who need treatment. Thus, our vocation means finding God in the same relation with the sisters, in the community relations such as they are. It is there where we discover ourselves and discover God's mercy on each of us. Our vocation is to live the kingdom of God on earth, on our community and with our community.

A second principle: Hospitality, according to what it has been said, is not a luxury, it is not something else to add to my being a nun, to add to my agenda, to my time of work or prayer. It is neither something for a type of sister with a better character than mine. It is just the possibility of existence of each person and also of the community. Hospitality is the mutual acceptance that we offer each other to support ourselves in our unique way of being thus able to create a community. (RB 72) Widespread hospitality means peace in the biblical sense.

And a third principle: we cannot give hospitality further than the hospitality we are able to receive.

"Carelessness in the determination of cultivating and keeping a proper relation with your neighbour, towards whom I have the duty of looking after him, destroys my inner relation with myself, with the others, with God and with the earth. When all these relations are

neglected, when justice is not in the earth any more, the Bible says that life is in danger". (Pope Francis, LS, 69)¹

And nevertheless, in our daily life, my sister often appears as a stranger, someone much more distant from me than many of the nice and sensible people that come to the guesthouse. In spite of sleeping a few metres from her, of having meals just opposite her, I feel my sister kilometres away and I am sure that many things in my life would be much better without her. My sister sometimes becomes someone who takes up my place, my resources, my acknowledgment, my possibilities, my quietness, my precious time. Someone who can bring forth work or problems. Someone who can let me down, maltreat or hurt me, and because of that, someone I have to protect myself from to avoid being hurt again. The other, my sister, the one I share my Project of life with, is sometimes seen by me as a stranger or as an enemy. Why is it so difficult to get along? Why is it easier to get along with people from outside the community than with my sisters? Wouldn't it be much better for me to choose my sisters? And, at a different level, how can we be so incoherent with our faith and keep fighting after praying together and taking part in the same Eucharist where Jesus is given to us for love?

There are uncountable published researches which help us to understand the complexity of human relations and offer practical guidelines to live them better. Next follow some elements from those researches I consider important:

1.- Human relations, as all types of human reality, are gift and task. And for that task there are tools which make its understanding and management easier. The same as knowing the driving rules helps reaching your destination and avoids accidents and casualties on the roads, knowing the tools of communication makes understanding among people easier and avoids unnecessary wounds.

2.- We are different and the way everybody is also good. There is no a style of personality better than the other and everybody can contribute from the way they are, to the good running of the group.

3.- It is necessary to know the universe of the other person and also to share our own to be able to understand each other. Relations need time and dedications in order to work properly.

4.- Relations improve by improving relation. I mean, the solution is always a good relation. We cannot do without relations; what we need is to improve its quality. A wounded relation heals up with a healthy relation.

¹ *This quotation from Pope Francis shows the dimension of the earth. Because of shortness I only deal with personal hospitality, but hospitality as I present it includes the whole creation and circumstance.*

5.- Relation is an adventure where I leave my safe and well-known starting point, something that is not easy, and I get into a new landscape, wider, from which I will come out different and enriched.

The tale of the eagle and the hen.

Let me start with a tale that many of you probably know and which is the title of book by Leonardo Boff where he explains it². And I tell you it with some little modifications. James Aggrey, born in Ghana in the XIX century was a man who contributed to the education of his people and was also a forerunner of nationalism in his country. It was him who told this tale during a meeting of popular leaders. In that meeting they were discussing about the English colonization. The leaders were divided: some wanted the liberation of Ghana using the army, others using a political way, others accepted the colonization as many other countries in Africa and others were pro colonization considering it could bring them modernity and progress. When James Aggrey saw that some leaders were beginning to support the English position, he stood up and started:

“Once upon a time a farmer went out to the fields and found a young bird. What he found was a young eagle. He picked it up and took it home. He left it in the yard with the hens. Soon the young eagle learnt to eat and drink like the hens. The years passed and the eagle was growing more than the hens. But nothing changed. He ate like them, he drank like them, he moved like them.

-This bird you have in the yard is not a hen, is an eagle – he exclaimed-

- yes, I know, said the farmer, it is an eagle. But I bred it like a hen and now it is not an eagle anymore, it is a hen. Although it has wings nearly three metres long it has become a hen like the others.

-No, said the biologist, it is and it will always be an eagle. It is got the heart of an Eagle and this heart will make it fly to the heights one day.

-Don't get your hopes up – insisted the farmer – it has become a hen and it will never fly like an eagle.

They finally decided to make an experiment. The biologist held the eagle, placed it on her arm as high as she could and challenging it she said:

Since you are an eagle and not a hen, since you are made for flying and crossing the skies and not to be all the time on earth, spread your wings and fly.

² Boff, L. *The eagle and the hen. A metaphor on the human condition.* Trotta, Madrid, 1996

The eagle stood on the arm of the biologist for a time, looking around, absentminded, looking everywhere. Then, it lowered its head, saw the hens underneath eating the grain, jumped off the arm and joined the hens. The farmer said: I had already told you; it has become a hen.

But the biologist didn't give up. –No, she finally answered, it is an eagle, it has the heart of an eagle and it will always have. We will have to try again. I will come back tomorrow and I will make it fly.

The next day, the biologist and the farmer got up early. They caught the eagle and took it outside the town, far from the houses, up on a mountain. The sun was rising and painting red and gold the summits of the mountains.

The biologist raised the eagle as high as she could and told it:

Eagle, since you are an eagle, since you are made to fly and cross the skies, open your wings and fly.

The eagle, as in previous times, looked around absent-mindedly, but this time it started to tremble. But it didn't move. Then the biologist held it strongly and led it towards the rising sun so that its eyes could get filled of the light and the immensity of the horizon, as mothers do with eaglets. The eagle, slowly stopped trembling and stared breathing in a different way. And after a few moments it started to stretch its huge wings and to open them, and jumped and started flying upwards unsteady at first and then safer and safer until it got melted with the infinite sky....”

That's the tale. This tale, as all tales, can be interpreted in different ways, but what it is not is a criticism to the hens. It means an example of the possible limits and possibilities of hospitality in the community.

Widespread hospitality is peace. Benedict's proposal.

The Abbot of Nursia presents the community, the community relations as a part of the structure to get to the Kingdom which is the destiny, destiny which is the community again. The community, the relations are now full, liberated in God.³ My job is to finish this journey, my “**ascesis**” which in the words of the theologian Zizioulas it is not but the opening to love.⁴ This journey, according to St. Benedict, is made inside the monastery

³ *This idea comes from J.M. Rovira Bellosó*

⁴ *J.Zizioulas uses “ascesis” as love, like the personal process to transcend individualism and exclusivism to open to communion, to the process of being free and living in the corporal nature as a means of inclusivism. “Being as Communion. Studies on Personhood and the Church”. N.Y. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985*

and it is a process of lack of protection, of dispossession, to be reborn naked to our most full humanity (RB7). A difficult journey based on as many resistances and protections I build in my life and wider as long as I am covering it. (Prologue 48-49)

Saint Benedict, as St. Gregory tells us in his Dialogues, has suffered the lack of hospitality of his brothers. He has suffered himself the effects of rejection and exclusion. And it is a proof of the conflicts which arise among his monks from so many different origins. However, when he presents the monastic life, he does not present it as a fight with the brothers of the community. The fight, which exists, is internal. It is a truth that Benedict makes a great effort of organization to make living together easier, but he presents the monastic life from the beginning to the end as a search of peace, of moving forward and honour one another,⁵ of supporting one another to have happy days.⁶

Benedict invites us repeatedly together with the psalmist to look for peace, to run after it. And that peace is associated to life and happiness, to see happy days. And we know that the biblical meaning of peace is the absence of conflicts, not more.

Peace, which is the translation of Hebrew *Shalom* refers to the peaceful comprehension between people and countries (1Re 5,26), that is true, but it also means economic prosperity (Sl 73,3), health (Is 57,18), tranquillity, descendants and salvation (Is 45,7). *Shalom* can be translated as “peace” but meaning human plenitude and happiness. Thus, peace, human plenitude or happiness is the name we give to that which inside each person. The desire or horizon that push the human being to get out of his limits in order to transcend them. Peace is the future, the “not-yet” which is beating inside us waiting to be fulfilled. The desire that never runs out.

Looking for peace means hearing the beating in the deepest of the human heart, being faithful to our own heart and desire. Looking for peace is believe in our own depth, listening to its voice and make it alive. Running after peace means taking ourselves seriously, trusting on our own goodness and deciding to be one with ourselves.

Isaiah says that peace, besides, sticking to the Hebrew root, is the fruit of a type of relation, a fair relation.⁷

Biblical theology defines what *Shalom* means for Israel as “the full harmony inside the community and creation, which penetrated by God’s blessing makes possible an obstacle-

free growing of the person in all its aspects”.⁸

⁵ RB72

⁶ Prologue, 17

⁷ “ Peace will be the fruit of justice”. IS, 32,17

Peace is then the fruit of a type of relation which helps an obstacle-free growing of the person in all its aspects. First, it is a type of relation, so it is not a personal or individual condition that we can reach by isolating, protecting ourselves or eliminating other people. On the contrary, it comes up when we establish a certain relation with the others.

Peace, well-being are not something we can possess or acquire, they are not the result of getting something or the consequence of things being as they are. Peace and happiness are not the result of hard work either nor of my personal success. Peace is not the result of removing problems or the sisters who cause them, but peace is the result of the way I mix with them.

Peace, then, is both the possibility of being faithful to myself and living my own coherence and the possibility of doing it in relation with the others. In the relation with the others, but not any type of relation. There are relations that are harmful, and the victims of gender violence are a good example. Peace is the result of a way of relation which favours the global development of each person . A kind of relation which enables an obstacle-free growing of the person in all his aspects. Peace does not restrict, control or dominate the minds, it does not make people drowsy, it does not tame people. Peace is just a type of relation which revitalizes the uniqueness of people promoting their capacities.

Peace is inclusive or it is not peace. There is not peace if someone is left aside. If my peace, my faithfulness to myself leads me not to take responsibility of my sister, that so-called peace is not peace. I am half way, I have not reached the goal yet. If the type of relation I have with my sister leads me to lose touch with my deep desire, that relation does not promote peace either, that peace is not real.

The type of relation which promotes peace is what we call hospitality. Hospitality as the relations that acknowledges the person, accepts her as it is, looking after her , going with her and letting her follow her own way, the way of being and becoming herself and each of us.

⁸ Gross,H. "Peace" a Bauer,JB ed. Dictionary of biblical Theology, Herder, Barcelona 1967

Some notes on humanistic and experiential philosophy and psychotherapy. Eugene Gendlin and Carl Rogers.⁹

Eugene Gendlin (1926 – 2017), philosopher was born in Vienna in a Jewish family. When he was young he saw his father taking decisions which allowed the whole family escaping from Nazi occupation and emigrate to the USA, while other friend families could not get it. He kept wondering why his father has taken such decisions having the same information as the families which could not succeed. With this question in mind, years later, as a philosopher in the University of Chicago, his investigations led him to collaborate with the famous psychotherapist Carl Rogers (1902 – 1987). From this collaboration came out a research trying to identify the reason why people who follow a therapy change and improve their lives. Gendlin and his colleagues verified that there were people who attended therapies and did not show any significant change, while other did and got better. He concluded that what these people did was the same as his father had done to take the decisions which permitted him to save his life.

The team of investigators led by Gendlin recorded hundreds of therapeutic interviews. After looking for the reason why either the therapy or the therapists were successful, they realized that the only explanation for the change of the person in the therapy was the capacity the person had or did not have. Focussing the research on each client, they could foretell 98% free of error, in the first or second interview, which people would improve their lives and which would not.

The people who did not get better were people who went to therapy and talked all the time. Usually, they were people with good speech, well organized sentences and who had a way with words. The people who got better with the therapy, instead, they were people with a less fluent speech, stopping from time to time to look for the words, keeping quiet and mumbling sometimes.

This external difference indicated an internal ability. Investigations showed that the clients who changed and got better were those who had the ability to contact with the corporal sensation of what they were telling, the ability to realize the way they lived inside what they were explaining, instead of expressing only what they had thought about. The therapeutic change, I mean, the good development of the person was related then to an ability: the capacity of paying attention and listening to how what we live affects us personally. And express it.

Gendlin defined consequently the concept of health. A person is healthy, works properly, is happy when he is able to listen to his inner living, the internal experience of what he is

⁹Barceló, T. "Eugene Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit " in *Miscelánea Comillas*, Vol 66 (2008)

living and express it. The expression can be through words but also through any type of art or the way we choose to live our life. The dysfunctions appear when the internal experience of a person and its expression get far from each other or lose contact. For instance, when I insist on saying that I am all right though I am aware that something is going wrong with me. The first symptom of this internal disconnection appears at the level of human relations. These turn more difficult and tense, they lose smoothness and distrust comes up. If nothing is done, the next step can be the appearance of some kind of physical pathology.

Carl Rogers had defined the human being as an organism self-stimulated by a natural tendency to the development of inherent qualities. Let's get into that.

When Rogers speaks of an organism or body he is referring to an organism which is always in a relation, a being in a relation. There are no isolated organisms. Organisms are always interacting with something or with somebody, they are interactions. And they affect and are affected by the relations they keep. The organism that is the human body is like a net of relations where the unique being of each person lives and expresses itself. The whole existence lives in the body as well as all experiences; it is the expression of life, it is the vital trip of each person.

Gendlin states that the human being, when living from inside instead of from outside, when able to listen to his body from inside, gains access to a knowledge which is bigger than that of his mental knowledge. By listening to his inside, the person gets to his most personal ego, unique and original, wiser than what he is able to think, and from this point he can walk all the way to get to be what he is, the way that only he can walk.

Gendlin also said that this unique and personal ego you get to by listening to your body from inside, the person in its depth, is in contact with the other people, in a natural connection with the other people and the other beings. This ego, lived from inside is in a specific place and in all places at the same time, now, in the past and in the future. This internal place which is the most intimate and personal is also the widest. Thus, Gendlin, from philosophy states that our personal ego is naturally connected with all human beings, all places and all times.¹⁰

When I make decisions from my mental ego, I need to create divisions, classifications, parts, competitions, opposites. When I get into my inside and reach my true ego, divisions

¹⁰ *Your internal ego, as you see yourself from inside, "it is in fact a part of a giant system from here and from other places, now and in other times, you and other people, in fact, the whole universe". Gendlin E.T. Focussing. Proceso y Técnica del enfoque corporal. P.102*

disappear and there is a global comprehension, unified from a very diverse reality. We find it already in the oracle on the door of Delphos temple: “oh man, get to know yourself

and you will know the gods and the universe.”¹¹

This relational organism, according to Rogers, is a self-stimulated process. Being a person is a process, a becoming person, transforming ourselves into persons. Everything we live is part of a bigger process to become who we are. Humanistic psychology says that health means changing, illness is stay standstill. Gendlin said that happiness means facing new problems (instead of dragging the old ones).

This process of being the person we are is revitalized by a natural tendency to the development of its inherent qualities. Rogers’ position is based on the fundamental concept that the human being – and after getting in the fields of quantic physics through authors like Prigogine and Capra¹²- he added all human beings including glasses are revitalized by an underlying current which moves the organism towards its balance and positive fulfilment.¹³ This is so both at a psychic level – when we are sad we struggle to recover happiness – and at a physical level – the body looks for healing when it is suffering from any type of illness -, and also at a moral level, the human being always looks for good.

Abraham Maslow had stated about this tendency : If we allow it to act as the guiding principle of our life, we will develop in a healthy, useful and happy way. This nature is not strong, dominant and unmistakable as it is the instinct in the animals. It is weak, delicate, subtle and easy to be defeated by habits, social pressure and wrong attitudes. Though

¹¹ *In his classical research on the management of Delphic precept by the patristic medieval tradition, Pierre Courcelle stresses this background in the “habitare secum” of St, Gregory Magnus. Courcelle,P., “Connais toi-même de Socrate à St. Bernard, Études Augustiniennes, Paris,1975*

¹² *Rogers was fascinated by the development of the theory of the modern systems and he supported the idea of a self-organized order. When Y.Prigogine was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, Rogers was one of the first psychologists who wrote about the relation of his theories. “Person Centered Approach and System Theory : Research and Theory”. Cornelius-White, J.H.D.Motsschnig-Pitrik,R., Lux,M.,ed.*

¹³ *“Your body knows the direction to healing and life”. Gendlin, o.c., p 103*

weak, it rarely disappears in normal people and may not disappear either in ill people. Though neglected, it lives on quietly struggling to come out to light.¹⁴

So, this tendency, in contrast to the strong and dominant animal instincts that we know well, is weak, delicate and subtle. Due to these qualities, it is easily drowned by the rules of politeness, social habits and wrong attitudes. But Maslow says that though being weak it is not easily destroyed, but it lives on quietly waiting to come out to light and help us develop in a happy way.

To give hospitality means accepting, accompanying, looking after and giving room to the person as we know that it is inhabited, revitalized by a persona, unique and positive dynamism, which is fragile and delicate. This internal dynamism is self-stimulated, says Rogers, and that means that the person is growing from inside, it has its own direction. Self-stimulated means that it does not need to be driven from outside, but it is an inherently dynamic and energetic dynamism. The process of being comes from the inside of each living being. We can see in the plants and the animals. The seed that falls on earth carries the information which leads it to take roots and then a stem and leaves which will elaborate the photosynthesis. This process is self-stimulated from the inside of the plant and if we want to force the growing of the plant from outside by stretching the plant, the only thing we will get is either cutting it or killing it. In the same way, the chrysalis inside the bud knows its whole process to get to leave the bud and fly as a butterfly. If we want to speed up the process from outside by breaking the bud, we will prevent the butterfly to develop the necessary strength in its wings which will allow it later to spread them and fly.¹⁵

Thus, the person that acts in a full way is the one who chooses being let guided by the wisdom inside his organism and acts consequently. The person who lives his fullness assumes the process of being himself, takes charge of his unique way of being himself and carries on.

This path, the process of being a person, is self-stimulated and does not need any external guide, but it really needs provision. A plant without light, water and nutrients can not live. I cannot force its growing, but I can farm the land, fertilize and water it to help. From outside we cannot force anyone to health, to a personal change or to holiness because the change comes from his inside. But we can make it easier, through a relation

¹⁴ Maslow, A., *The self-realized man*, Barcelona Kairós, 1983, 30

¹⁵ "Thus, once the person has discovered his inner source, the subject cannot be replaced by anybody or by something different, because he perceives clearly that no one else knows better than himself his own life as well as the steps to a future evolution. One is open to all types of knowledge, but evolution always comes from inside". Gendlin, E. "Focussing, proceso y técnica del enfoque corporal" Bilbao, Mensajero, p.9-10.

that recognizes the singularity of the person, and remembering, validating , looking after and encouraging him to make his own way. This is hospitality.

Hospitality in the community.

Hospitality with the sisters is, then, the relation that recognizes them, looks after them and accompanies them wishing and promoting them to be who they are and who they may become.

We have seen that the relations with the others begin to suffer when the person loses the connection, the confidence inside herself. Hospitality starts being difficult when we lose the connection and the confidence with the other or with ourselves and we replace it with our analysis and judgements. Then, instead of seeing and recognizing my real sister, I see the sister of my interpretations, an image of her according to my fears and demands. And I lose contact with her, with myself and with life.

This difficulty joins together the difficulty of facing very different ways of being. Benedict knows it very well, “ the temperaments the abbot has to serve are very different” *¹⁶. The monks have different ways of being and different degrees of intelligence, each with his different needs and capacities.¹⁷

Evagrio Póntico in the 5th century and now the professionals of coaching say that hospitality means opening to a way of being and perceiving life different from mine. Each of us has a different biography, with different familiar, political, cultural and social environments which determine our way of living and facing the circumstances that arise. And even inside the same familiar nucleus each person is born and develops a unique way of being. There are who move, work or decide faster or slower than others. There are people who need to understand and explain everything in a rational way while others need to feel it deeply. There are people more expansive and extrovert while others are more introvert and shy. There are people who live in a chaos and others who live completely organized. People who plan and people who improvise. People who respect the rules and people who break them. People who demand public recognition and people who hide. People who rest in loneliness and people who rest when they are together with the community.

Also, a person lives different situations and vital moments depending on his health, age or the changing circumstances. The same person can live moments of great strength and moments of weakness. Moments of speed and moments of slowness. Moments to decide

¹⁶ *RB 2,31

¹⁷ **RB 2,32; 8,3; 34

and moments to collaborate with the decision taken. Moments to give and moments to receive.

In the world of business they use today an idea that St. Paul had already expressed brilliantly with his image of the human body : we are a unique body formed by many different members; they are all necessary; they are all good. The same as there is not a human organ better than other, there is not either a type of personality better than other, but each has its own characteristics to contribute to the good working of the body.

Each organ needs to be accepted, needs its room and a right relation with the rest of the organs to contribute positively, from its peculiarity, to the good working of the body.

Accepting my sister is recognizing who she is with her particular way of understanding life and give it an answer. Looking after her and giving her the room she needs to walk her way. And I can do this if I do it with myself, if I do not lose contact with myself and trust and pay attention to the way I am who I am.

“Love the other as you love yourself”¹⁸ does not mean to give the other what you give yourself. What can be a help for you may be bad for the other, and the other way round. Love the other as you love yourself means recognizing the uniqueness of the other, the values of the other as you recognize your uniqueness and values, and let her be who she is as you let yourself be who you are.

Hospitality is the capacity of recognizing the other as other, and offering her the room of my relation, of my love, so that she can recognize herself, open herself to the otherness and set out again to be herself.

Hospitality towards myself.-

The capacity of being a guest is also important. Hospitality is also the capacity of letting myself be accepted, of letting me be looked after, accompanied and liberated to walk my own way.

In fact, the hospitality towards my sisters is only possible if I am able to accept myself and let others accept me. “Love the other as you love yourself” is at the same time an evangelical commandment and a verification. As a commandment it is God’s appeal to love the others as I love myself because love is something we share because we all have received it. For us, it is the appeal to accept the others as I accept myself. Love, hospitality is an act of freedom made by a free person. “Love the other as you love yourself”, as a verification is the proof that the limits we impose to our capacity of accepting ourselves are the same we impose at the time of accepting od accepting the

¹⁸ *Mc 12,30; Mt 22,39; Lc 10,27

others as they are. We can give hospitality to the other as long as we can give to ourselves.

In the same way as hospitality towards my sister means to recognize and value who she is – with her particular way of understanding and answering to life- to look after her and let her have the room and time she needs to walk the way of being who she is, hospitality with myself means to recognize and value who I am – with my personal way of understanding and answering to life, to look after myself and to give myself the time and room that I need to walk the way of being who I am. And hospitality with my sister is only possible as long as I live the hospitality with myself.

Hospitality of God.

“We have asked God, my brothers, who is the one who will be allowed to stay in his tent and we have listed to the conditions to be allowed to dwell there: to fulfil the commitments of any inhabitant of his house”, says Benedict in the Prologue.¹⁹

A nun is a woman who looks for God and aims at being accepted by God. A nun is the one who focuses her life in God itself. Hospitality has an end, which is a new beginning, and the beginning and the end of everything. In fact, it is a new birth, it is a jump to grace when who accepts knows she is infinitely accepted.

Hospitality towards the others and myself ends, starts and received nourishment from the hospitality of God. They are not consecutive stages, but relational moments which take place contemporarily as in a dance.

We hold hands with an expert, Teresa de Jesús, to explain it. Her superiors ask her to write a treatise on the difficult subject of prayer, and she does, obedient, addressing to the nuns of her monasteries and whoever else who could benefit from it.²⁰ She writes the text of *El Castillo Interior* (The Inner Castle) or *Las Moradas* (The Dwellings) where she compares the human soul with a castle and she describes the process of prayer as the path which goes from the edges of the soul – or the patrols of a castle where the guards do not know what is inside – to the heart of the soul, the main chamber of the castle which is God’s chamber, “in the very inside, somewhere very deep that she cannot describe because it has no letters”.²¹

¹⁹ *Prologue 39

²⁰ Prologue,5

²¹ *Séptimas Moradas*, 1.8

To begin with, Teresa reminds her sisters of “the beauty and dignity”²² of the human person’s interior, what she calls the soul, which is a castle made of diamonds and very light glass where God lives, enjoys Himself and takes pleasure.²³

When Teresa de Jesús tells what happens inside the castle, in the Séptimas Moradas with respect to what happens in previous “Moradas” she repeats once and again that it is very different.²⁴ You do not get into the Séptimas Moradas, it is God who takes the soul in; you do not get there through suffering and efforts, but the soul is received. With God everything is grace.²⁵ God’s hospitality is at a different level, it is God who takes the initiative, provides the soul with accommodation in His chamber and He does not want to leave it²⁶, the soul sees the Trinity and the Trinity communicates with the soul.²⁷

Teresa tells how she got into God’s dwelling for the first time. During Eucharist, after communion, Jesus appeared to her as after resurrection, with great magnificence and beauty. Jesus told her that from that moment she had to take Jesus’ things as hers and He would take care of Teresa’s,²⁸ and other things difficult to explain, she says.

Suddenly, according to her story, everything turns into simplicity. The mystical ecstasies of the saint give way to an indescribable peace which nothing or nobody can disturb. There are no levitations or visions, but a complete abandon and confidence in Jesus. But not only from Teresa in Jesus but from Jesus in Teresa.

²² *Primeras Moradas 1.1,2*

²³ *Séptimas Moradas, 1.1*

²⁴ *Idem., 1.7,2.2,2.4*

²⁵ *Idem 1.6*

²⁶ *The soul remains, I mean, the spirit of that soul unified with God, (...) and He wanted to join the creature in such a way that He does not want to move away from it as those who cannot move away from it. Idem 2.4-5*

²⁷ *“Divinization is always given but never conquered by the individual”, says Maximo the Confessor. St Maximo comments St. Paul’s verse “I am not who lives, but Christ is the one who lives in me” and he says that this does not mean the destruction of freedom but a cognitive abandonment in the context of an erotic ecstasy in which one lives the life if the loved person embraced completely and freely by him. No particular being can survive death which is fact is being, apart from in and through this type of communion with the Other. Maximo The Confessor quoted by J.Zizioulas in “Communion and Otherness: Further studies in Personhood and the Church”, T&TClark, 2006 p84-85*

²⁸ *Séptimas Moradas,2.1*

Thus, Teresa experiences God's hospitality as an admirable exchange in which God accepts and liberates her asking her and trusting that she accepts and liberates Him.

Jesus accepts Teresa and Jesus, resurrected, asks Teresa to be accepted by her. And so Teresa understands that everything related to Jesus is her own business and everything is devoted to serve Him. She lives a deep imperturbable peace, but this peace is now a struggle because everything related to Jesus is now related to her. Inhabited by the "sweet guest"²⁹ there is not a task big enough to stop her, and she reminds her sisters with her gracious and direct style:

"When I see very conscientious souls to understand prayer and very clouded when they are inside it (it means they do not dare to move or shake their thoughts just in case they waste a bit of the pleasure and devotion they have had) they make me see how little they understand the way through the union. And they think the business is there. No, my sisters, no; the Lord wants acts and if you see an ill sister you can give any kind of relief, do not care about losing that devotion to take pity on her, to sympathize with her, and if she has any pain, let it hurt you; and if necessary, fast so that she can eat and not so much for her but because you know that your Lord wants that; that is the true union with His will.³⁰

As a conclusion.

Hospitality is the process through which the eagle gets to recognize its heart of eagle and flies. The process implies being accepted, looked after and finally recognized and liberated in its unique way of being. This process gets fulfilled when it is able to recognize itself in its depth thanks to the initial caring of the farmer and the relation with the biologist which help it to face the light of the Absolute and thus opening itself to the true freedom.

Hospitality is the way to opening to the Spirit, to the "sweet guest" who dwells in our deepest nucleus introducing us in the mystery of God and inviting us to spread out His dynamism in and with us (Jn 14, 17), in and with our sisters (Gn 4,9), in and with the whole creation (Rm8, 22-23)

Hospitality inside the community is the source of our hospitality towards outside; it is not a luxury, it is the real possibility of our being persons, of our being nuns and creating community. The widespread hospitality is peace. Hospitality is the

²⁹ *The eastern monastic tradition reminds us that interiority is the way to open to the Spirit, to the "sweet guest" who dwells in us.*

³⁰ *Quintas Moradas, 3,11*

relationship by which the eagle comes to recognize its eagle's heart, to face the infinite sky, and to fly.

And it flies because this heart beats in its eagle's body. The eagle recognizes its heart and integrates its body to fly. It does not fly in spite of its body. It is not the denial of its body that allows the eagle to fly, but on the contrary. The eagle flies as the sunlight fills his eyes and invites him to jump opening his big wings and all the possibilities of his beautiful body.

The monastic vocation, like every human vocation, is a call that is born in the human person, with her body. Often the monastic tradition, however, along with a part of Christian spirituality, has suspected the body, especially the woman's body. We know that the body is important and that is why we use some postures to pray, and not others. We know that the body expresses our relationship with God. But we often find it hard to believe that God saw God's creation and saw that it was good, good indeed, as Genesis says. Human body included. The shame of our nakedness appears with doubt, with suspicion toward God, does not arise from God's presence says the story. Centuries later St. Paul tells us that our body is God's temple. To be temples of God means to be inhabited by God and animated by God's spirit to love. And we need our body to love, just as the eagle needs it to fly. Jesus learned from the hugs and kisses of his parents, and he loved with his body. God frees us for life, to love, so that we can fly. With our body.

It is not the denial of the body that avoids the sexual abuses and unwanted relationships that are being discovered. On the contrary, I think we need to put light on the issue of assuming our corporeality in positive. Asceticism is to open ourselves to love, says Zizioulas, that love of God incarnated that wanted to be found and expressed in the human body, through the human body. I believe that in monastic life we have a pending reflection on the hospitality we give to our bodies.

Monestir de San Benet de Montserrat