

A WOMAN WHO GENERATES LIFE CONCEPCION CABRERA: APOSTLE



With this worksheet, we want to share with you the life of Concepcion Cabrera, a Mexican woman who will be beatified on May 4th, 2019. This is the third of four worksheets we are presenting about this woman. In this worksheet we want to present Concha as an APOSTLE.

What do you think when you hear the word “apostle”? Maybe we immediately remember the twelve apostles. The word means “sent”. Think of a time when you received an important assignment that required you to prepare yourself, to think, to give it all you’ve got, to make a serious effort. The experience of being an apostle is something similar. For believers, it means being sent by Jesus to bring the good news of the Kingdom.

Concha was an exceptional apostle because of her passionate love for God and her unconditional dedication to others. Let us be surprised by the life of this woman who, from her condition of a lay woman, wife, and mother, was able to open so many ways of life for others.

Let us begin from our own experience

Las Patronas

Maybe you’ve heard about them. They are a group of volunteer women from the community of La Patrona, Veracruz, who since 1995, provide food and assistance to migrants, mainly on the train tracks (“the Beast”) where they hand out food to migrant men and women. This is the story of the beginning of Las Patronas, as told by one of the women who started the group:

I sent my daughters to go to the store for a bag of bread - Mrs. Leonila says while cleaning black beans from a yellow plastic bucket. When they were coming back, they saw the train was loaded with people. When the girls stopped in front of them, the migrants asked them to give them bread because they were very hungry. On the way home I remember that they looked at me very seriously. I asked what was wrong and they said that the train had a lot of people begging for food. At that time I embraced them very strong and told them not to worry because they had done the right thing. And that is how we began helping migrants at La Patrona.

These women are one of many examples of what it means to be an apostle: sent to give life. Or as they express themselves “We have a mission of love”.

We invite you to reflect on the following:

- Remember some experience in which, in a time of difficulty or need, someone has done something for you for free. What happened? How did you feel? What do you discover when you remember this?
- At the place where you live and work, what person needs you to do something for her/him, who is in the need of receiving good news today?

Share your answers with your family, friends or community, and listen to what they say.

Concha: A woman who generates life

Concha, in her own time and circumstances, also learned to be attentive to others, and felt the deep call that humanizes and resembles us to God: to share our life so that others may live.

Concha was a girl like anyone, with eleven siblings, and did not lack opportunities for fun and play. But the character of her parents marked her from a young age with attitudes that would begin to forge an apostolic identity in her, a sensitive and generous heart.

For example, despite the fact that her family had resources, she learned not to live from appearance and superficiality: "My mother liked to dress us simply... I owe my mother this detachment from jewels and the luxurious dresses". She learned to scrub floors, to embroider, to mend clothes, to milk cows, to cook, to run de household expenses: "at the age of twelve I already took care of the expenses of the house". She also learned how to care for the sick and help them to die well. "Thank God I have never been attached to rags nor ornaments of any kind; poverty and the poor have always been my inclination. "

Do you find experiences in your childhood that made you open your heart to others?

The beginnings of an Apostle

Concha, in love with God, made Jesus' mission her own: how could Concha not vibrate with the same passion of Jesus of Nazareth, her Beloved, that is, the fullness of life of all human beings? She begins to glimpse this from the beginning of her experience:

One day, when I was open with all my soul to what God wanted from me ... I heard clearly, in the depths of my soul, without being able to doubt, these words that amazed me: "Your mission is to save souls ". I did not understand how this could be. It seemed so strange and so impossible!

She hasn't fully understood what this will mean: "I thought this would be sacrificing myself in favor of my husband, children and servants". But she accepts it and begins to live that way. Sometime later, when she spends some time at the hacienda of Jesús María, she notices all the people who live and work on the estate and she feels the impulse to share with them what she had received: "Zeal devoured me with a growing fire in the heart and I longed to share my happiness with the sublime teachings I had learned". Determined to fulfill her mission, she gathers the women of the hacienda to give them the spiritual exercises she had just received. She spoke with fire of God's great love, of the immense joy of having been created by Him, and of our call to share that love: "To know you, my God, and to make you known. To love you and make you loved".

The Cross of the Apostolate

The key moment in which Concha makes Jesus' mission her own was when she engraves the monogram and understands that her love for God impels her to love and care for others. Years later she remembers it like this:

I reflect today, thanking that blessed hour of 8 years ago, and I have seen clearly, from the true love of God how spontaneously derives the love for our neighbor ...

... I cut the flesh with a razor, tracing this monogram + JHS and with the blood that came out in abundance I wrote: "Jesus, Savior of all people, save them!"

My soul burned in zeal for the salvation of souls ... without a doubt the Lord inspired me that, because prostrate on the ground I repeated: "Jesus Savior of all people, save them, save them", and I could not say any more.

Conchita feels connected to the suffering and the necessity of so many people thirsting for life and dignity. She understands what Jesus embodied and that became the motor of her life: God wants life for all, that is, salvation. God makes us experience life as a gift and urges us to share it, making that life reach everyone, especially the least.

Remember a time when you felt driven to do good, when the suffering of others hurt you and perhaps you asked yourself what you could do. When we touch the wounds of others, our appointment with God usually takes place. We can turn our backs, shut ourselves in, or we can face all that pain and collaborate on this mission to transform this world with the power of love. This means saving through the cross, and this is what Concha did.

God responds to Concha's great desire to share in Jesus' mission by giving her a symbol: the Cross of the Apostolate, which Concha receives on February 1894, one month after the monogram:

I saw an immense image of very bright light... and over this sea or abyss of light with thousands of rays like gold and fire... I saw a white dove spreading its wings... (And after two or three days) a big cross, very big, with a heart in its center... It seemed to be floating in a twilight of clouds that appeared to have fire inside... The heart was alive, pulsating, human, but glorified... It hurt to see the thorns that surrounded the heart, how they chewed that delicate and tender heart.

The Cross of the Apostolate is a symbol that expresses what God is like: he comes into the human history and responds with love to the ultimate consequences. By offering His life, He generates life in abundance. It is also a symbol of Concha's missionary vocation. The Cross of the Apostolate is good news and it is a proposal of life for all!

Sharing the Spirituality of the Cross to the world

What Concha is living is not just for her. She will be God's instrument to give the Spirituality of the Cross to the world.

This lay woman and mother was opening the way for many of us in the future, so we could have the same experience: to follow Jesus in his passionate love for God and his solidary love for all men and women, to give their lives. All of us who live in this spirit wish to continue recreating what Concha understood that Jesus asked her: "Offer Me and offer yourself". That is, we want to unite our life, our efforts and joy, our love and also our suffering to Jesus on the Cross, to transform the realities of death into realities of life. This way of sharing Jesus' mission we call the Spirituality of the Cross, or in other words, to follow Jesus Priest and Victim.

Thus, from Conchita the Works of the Cross and the Family of the Cross would be born to the Church, where many of us can live our lay, religious or priestly vocation from this spirituality, seeking to be contemplatives and in solidary in the way of Jesus.

Concha reminds us our priesthood

Something that surprises us is that Concha lived all this as a lay woman in her daily life, going through everything as any mother does: joys and sorrows, her own illnesses and their children's, work and financial hardships, problems with the education of her children, painful losses, etc. That is why Concha's sanctity reminds us of something that many years later the Vatican II Council was to emphasize strongly: our baptismal priesthood, the missionary vocation of all the followers of Jesus.

What Conchita experiences regarding Jesus is a mutual possession, a total and definitive union in the depth of her being. Little by little she captures what it means, through the concreteness of life and the depth of prayer. Thus, she goes so far as to say: "Yes, my beloved Jesus: now I see that I order to fulfill

my mission of saving souls will I achieve it only by standing before You, only by offering You...Now, I am happy on my misery because it is not me who works, who lives, but Jesus in me”.

You and I are invited to have this same experience. Every time you choose compassion instead of selfishness, when the common good moves you and not only your personal interests, when you encourage yourself to have gestures of solidarity, tenderness, forgiveness, hospitality, when you put forth your own time and abilities for the cause of the poor by building community...you are living your priesthood allowing God to live and grow deep within you, to be a living memory of Jesus in our history!

What does Concha tell you today?

Try to connect your own experience with Conchita’s. Reflect and share with your family, friends or community:

- What do you like about Conchita’s way of life?
- What aspect of the Spirituality of the Cross do you identify yourself the most in this moment?
- What does it mean for you today to live your baptismal priesthood, to be a living memory of Jesus? Think of concrete ways that you would like to experience this.

Praying with Concha

Take a deep breath and remain silent so you can perceive what resonates in your heart about Conchita’s story. Let yourself be accompanied by her, ask her to help you to be an apostle, to renew the joy and beauty of your missionary vocation.

Say any prayer out loud with your family or community, and finish by reading together Concha’s words as a final prayer:

Life is a gift that you can communicate without losing it, that grows by communicating it, that makes the person who owns it so much happier, when it is shared with generosity ...

Those who possess God, long to communicate Him with such ardor, with such a strong impulse, as if this infinite Gift could not fit in the narrowness of a person so it overflows onto others.

Sometimes we think that happiness is selfish, that we should look for it within us, and keep it with grieve in our interior garden; but no, happiness is outside of us, because it springs from love and love is ecstasy: it projects us out of ourselves, onto people we love. To be happy is to make others happy; to spread joy around us is to possess the source of it.

Beatification of Concepción Cabrera:

Saturday May 4, 2019 at 12:00 hours - Basilica of Guadalupe (Mexico City)

Website: concepcioncabrera.mx