

A WOMAN IN LOVE WITH GOD CONCEPCION CABRERA: MYSTIC



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 second of four worksheets we are presenting about this woman. In this worksheet we want to present Concha as a MYSTIC .

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “mystic”? We want to clarify that mysticism is not a matter of strange phenomena, nor is it something that will alienate us from this world in order to keep us in a “spiritual bubble”. Mysticism is the experience of opening ourselves to the encounter with God, and we are all capable of mysticism because God is the Mystery that lives within us and within everything that exists. It is just a manner of learning to look at Him and letting ourselves be found by Him. Concha was a great mystic because she loved God deeply, and from God she learned to love greatly. You will see that, as you get to know her. She will make you want to live a passionate love like the one she lived.

Let us begin from our own experience

- We suggest this exercise:
- On a blank sheet of paper, draw a big heart.
- Ask yourself: what and who are most present in my heart, that is, what are my greatest loves and what am I most passionate about in life?
- Let the answers come up and write them down or draw them into the heart.

Reflect: that which is in my heart, where does it come from, how and why did they come about? What are their consequences? How do I keep and nurture them? Talk it over with your family, friends or community, and listen to what they share with you.

Concha: deeply in love with God

A poem by Pedro Casaldaliga goes like this:

At the end of my journey I will be asked: “Have you lived? Have you loved?” And without saying anything I will open a heart full of names.

If we invited Concha to paint her own heart and fill it with her loved ones, what would she write? No doubt we would find Pancho, her husband, her nine children, the Church, Mary, the priests, and many faces and names. And in the center of it all we would find Jesus. With this text that she wrote at the age of 70, she could answer us:

I have traveled many paths, I have gone through many places and stages and very painful times, and I have loved many souls of mine and others, but, oh yes! by my own desire, all these things, have formed a frame that encloses a single figure: Jesus! yours so lovely and divine, my Jesus, the only yearning of my poor heart, my life's ideal, the only owner of all my instances, the center of my words, of my writings, of my actions, of my sorrows, of my joys, of my working and of my resting.

We know much about Conchas's heart because she wrote a lot, especially in her spiritual diary: sixty-six volumes! Her spiritual diary is marked by the fascinating and sometimes inexplicable language of the mystics, and therein lies a huge legacy which allows us to enter her inner experience.



The beginnings of the journey

It all started in her youth. She grew up in a religious environment: she learned how to pray from her parents, how to seek God, to go to mass, to help and share with others. Being Pancho's girlfriend, her desire for God kept growing: "I would take my crucifix before going to bed and I do not know what happened to me when I contemplated it, a turmoil inside of me, an inner, deep commotion, a my heart as if nailed to Him, impossible to explain, it attracted me, absorbed me, overwhelmed me, and then I ended up crying." She also writes: "I was never that my courtship with Pancho would prevent me from becoming more of God. It was so easy for me to do both things! When I would go to bed, once I was by myself, I would think about Pancho and then about the Eucharistic, which was my delight."

Once she understood she could not quench that thirst, Conchita understands this is a serious thing with God and she takes the task of slowly balancing her married life and her daily chores with that inner world where God seeks her out more and more and she feels overwhelmed by profound joy. She manages to keep her house in order and take time for church, the tabernacle and prayer. She enlists in the Third Order of St. Francis, where she could live a stronger religious

commitment as a lay person.

She feels she's on fire inside, she feels more and more flooded with love. She begins writing letters to Jesus, telling Him everything that happens to her. In 1889, shortly after the birth of her third son, while she was walking through the gardens in the hacienda of Jesus Maria, she felt a sudden desire to call out to Jesus to be with her:

As I was walking it seemed clear to me that He was by my side. I started talking to Him and I felt as if He were advising me about this: that I always call Him with a great confidence so that He will teach me to walk all day in His presence, to engage Him as a friend from the beginning of the day. That I take care of Him by talking to Him and taking Him along with me on all my occupations. That the more I invited Him the sooner I would need His company, until the day when we could not be separated... When I went to the kitchen to make bread, to play the piano, even when I was nursing the children, He was right by my side.

As the years go by, the more she responds, the more God seeks her, and their union becomes deeper. Assisted by her spiritual directors she will learn to take care of that relationship and to respond with more freedom and devotion. How did your friendship with God begin? What has happened to that relationship?

The Monogram: I belong to God

A very important moment took place when Concha got a type of "tattoo" known as the monogram. To understand its significance, we need to consider that she grew up in a ranch-like environment. She knew the ranch lifestyle well and was aware that cattlemen would mark their animals so their owners would be recognized. She wanted more and more to belong to Jesus, to be His. She wanted Jesus to recognize her with an unmistakable mark in both this and the afterlife.

That way, in a limitless "outburst" of love she made a decision: she took a knife and a hot iron and marked her chest with the letters "JHS", which represent Jesus' name. This took place on January 14th, 1894, and this date is considered as the birth of the Works of the Cross. At the time Concha was 32 years old, she had been married to Pancho for 10 years and she had 5 children.

God was very moved by Concha's gesture. A few months later, Conchita understands that the belonging was mutual, and writes this to her spiritual director:

After Jesus slowly reminded me the significance of my writing, encouraging me to continue to overcome these obstacles, which I am already working on, he told me: "Now give me your word that you will be totally mine, without anybody's interference, not even that of yourself, and forever... Look...." He said and Father, how embarrassing! I saw my name written on His chest with golden letters, like printed, Father, what did I feel? I don't know, but I threw myself at His feet, and I said to Him with all my soul... "Yes, Jesus, I give you my word, I will be all yours, and forever yours..."

If you truly trust too will discover that Jesus has your name printed on His chest. that God has loved you first, without asking anything in return, you Contemplate your name printed on God's heart forever, what does that tell you, what awakens within you?

The secret for joy: knowing oneself to be freely loved

For Concha, knowing she was loved was the key to her life, the experience that grounded her, that gave her direction, and it would become a source of peace when things got difficult. One day she wrote:

One time as I recollected to show Jesus my love for Him, I felt a divine and extraordinary sensation, and it was that instead of feeling my love for Him, like always, I felt His love towards me. I know He loves me, but feeling His love is very different from knowing it.

For a moment I felt the invasion of His love, the softness of that love, the intensity of that fire, a sweetness that impregnated my whole being. My God, I could feel I was loved! And clearly, if the sea encompasses us, we would be lost within it.

The roles have been changed. He calls me instead of me calling Him. He seeks me instead of me looking for Him. He pours into me, His gaze and love surrounding me. Now I have to let myself be loved. I can't caress Him but need to let Him caress me. Oh my....I don't know how to say anything but this!"

When she was 64 years old, she expressed how God's gratuitous love was foremost for her:

I have noticed progress in my soul, my faith has grown with His love and I don't find my falls strange, which thanks be to God are not grave sins, but instead trash, dust, weaknesses, dirt of which I'm made. Now I clearly see that worrying about our misery comes from our pride and the lack of faith in God. Now, when I fall, I humble myself and turn my eyes towards Jesus like telling him: "Look at who I am. But I know who You are". And I continue my path without stopping, and I keep on loving him as if nothing had happened.

Sometimes I ask myself whether this is a lack of delicacy, but I come to the conclusion that it is not so, what happens is that love is abundant, and love covers everything...

Give it a try, let yourself be loved, and try to open yourself to this profound truth: "God you do not condemn me, you are not scared of my darkness. You know me and love me with my lights and my shadows, and so you want me to learn to love that way."

Her passion: Jesus Crucified

Concha's love for Jesus crucified increased throughout her life, yearning to be like Him. The cross enamored her because in it she finds the biggest expression of love: a God that loves to the extreme of giving up His life so situations of death may be transformed into realities of life.

Look, Jesus, when I see you crucified, my soul feels many different things: pleasure, confusion, sorrow, love, embarrassment because it is my fault that You are nailed there, and yet there is no other image that captivates me more than You on the cross... You my Creator, Holy God... so much kindness has filled my hours of meditation, causing my soul to melt into feelings of tenderness and gratitude.

She identifies so much with Jesus on the cross that she condenses into one sentence the meaning of her life: to be the living cross for Jesus. She understands that Jesus tells her:

You will be my image, you are my beloved cross... To unite more with me through the perfection on the cross, are you not my wife that I love so much?... I want you to be like the purest mirror, in which the image of Jesus crucified is reflected.

The experience of the cross is in the heart of her life. Concha does not beat around the bush: she wants to live her life united with Jesus, her Beloved, precisely during His most difficult and darkest hours, but also the



moment of greatest fidelity in Jesus where His solidarity without limits was manifested: a life offered to the end. Could Concha be reminding us of something very important in our time, by telling us how valuable the cross is? We live in a broken world, think about the painful situations that exist in your life, in your family, in your country... Jesus is inviting you to do your part in the construction of a different world. Today, what does it mean for you to live the way of the cross?

What does Concha tell you today?

Reflect and share with your family, friends and community:

- What element of Concha's mysticism do I like the most and why?
- By knowing a little about Concha's story and mysticism, what do I discover about my own story and mysticism? What moves in me, what decision would I like to make?

Praying with Concha

Look back at the heart you drew at the beginning. Stay there with God in silence. Invite Concha to join you, ask her to teach you to love and follow Jesus.

We can say any prayer out loud and finish by reading together this text that Concha wrote in 1907:

I am yours, my God, and my desire is to repeat it with my words and in all my acts. I am yours, I have always been yours, my body, my soul, my heart, my mind, my will. I am yours, I am yours at night and during the day, asleep or awake, I have gifted myself, devoted myself, abandoning myself in your arms; I feel that if the smallest fiber of my soul did not belong to you, I would tear it away from my heart. Because I am yours, You will know, my Lord, what to do with me, you might lift me, you might drop me, you might give me life, or you might take it away. Oh my God, God of my life, how happy I am of belonging to you!

Books for further reading:

"Conchita's Spiritual Journey" by Ignacio Navarro, MSpS
"Respuesta a la invasión de Dios" by Juan Gutiérrez, MSpS
"Concepción Cabrera de Armida: la amante de Cristo" by Javier Sicilia

Beatification of Concepción Cabrera:

Saturday May 4, 2019 at 12pm EST - Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexico City)
Website: concepcioncabrera.mx