



DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST CATHERINE OF SIENA
Via degli Artisti, 17 00187 Rome
-Prioress General-

C.L. 2/2022

Christmas 2022

*I proclaim to you Good News,
of great joy that will be for all the people:
For today a saviour has been born,
who is Christ the Lord.
(Lk. 2: 10-11)*

Dearest Sisters,

With deep joy we celebrate today the Savior who has been born, God's Gift, God himself as gift in our own flesh, in the very earth on which our feet tread!

We contemplate the **Manger**: from it a little Child illuminates the night of the history of his people and that of all peoples, of his time and all times. Poor shepherds of the region and wise men, the Magi from other worlds, rush towards him. All longing for Salvation.

Contemplating this biblical scene, I would like to reflect with you on a condition-dimension present in almost every page of Scripture, and intimately assumed and lived by the Word of God in his incarnation: I am referring to "**foreignness**".

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Indeed, the history of Salvation is woven with stories, episodes, characters, that insistently give an account of this condition. Why? What for? What are the sacred writers trying to reveal, to tell us? They write not only - and not so much - to describe reality, but, above all, to modify it, to transform it. Let us dwell on just a few examples:

In Ancient Israel

Abraham, the father of faith, is called to leave his land to go and settle in another land that he does not know and that will never be his, because the "promised land" itself is given on loan and the patriarchs are considered as foreigners and strangers (cf. Lev. 25:23). The same people, Abraham's descendants, in various circumstances and for many years, are forced to live as strangers in Egypt, in Babylon.

It is in a foreign land that the Lord reveals Himself to His people and becomes their God when they are strangers and slaves in Egypt. God chooses marginality, the "outside". The revelation of God is an estrangement of God from himself, it is the entry of God into an exile until the encounter and acceptance of suffering: the God who reveals Himself in the Old Testament is the God who commits Himself to history, who is with Israel in its exile and suffering, who "knows well the sufferings of Israel" (cf. Ex. 3:7), that is, suffers them, shares with them, participates in them.



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The Ten Commandments, received by the people during their stay in the desert, are a Decalogue of foreigners-emigrants. Thus, it begins: "I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (cf. Ex. 20:2; Dt. 5:6; Jer. 2:6, etc.). These introductory words of the Decalogue constitute the clearest expression of the Israelite identity as a people of emigrants whom God helps. In this sense, the commandments will be life rules for the people who, leaving their old certainties, become a people who create a new social order in another land, a new land.

What Israel experienced in Egypt and the situations of slavery and oppression suffered there should never be repeated in the midst of the Lord's people and in the promised land. Therefore, it is God himself who commands Israel to act with the foreigners who reside with them as God did with them: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Lev 19:33-34).

Moreover, Deuteronomy makes it clear with great force that loving the stranger makes one like God "who loves the stranger and giving them food and clothing" (Dt. 10:18-19). The oldest Creed of Israel begins by acknowledging before the Lord: "My father was a wandering Aramean..." (Dt. 26:5).

A prayer of King David wants to deepen even more the understanding of the people about themselves when he says: "We are strangers and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors" (1 Chr. 29:15), he affirms that all human beings are strangers before God, we are all equal. Being a stranger is the condition of every human being, marked by precariousness and uncertainty. We are all on a pilgrimage towards God.

In Jesus

Already at the beginning of the New Testament, we find in the genealogical tree of Jesus four foreign women who entered the history of Israel - prototype of all history that is linked to Israel and its salvation (Mt. 1:3-6).

In Jesus Christ, God becomes a foreigner, someone for whom at birth "there was no room" (Lk. 2:7), who soon after must flee to a foreign country, reliving the history of his people, returning to His homeland and spending the first 30 years of His life in Nazareth, an unknown village in the Galilee of the Gentiles, and who in His historical ministry will have "nowhere to rest His head" (Lk. 9:58), and precisely "in His homeland", he will experience *foreignness*: despised, rejected, unknown by His own (cf. Mk 6:1-6). Jesus will live his condition as a foreigner, permanently in tension between His being the Incarnate Word and the Father from whom He came, in whom He lived and to whom He returned (cf. Jn. 1:16, 17).

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus marks a clear, decisive and definitive step in the relationship with the stranger: He proposes to place the other at the center, independently of the nation, culture or creed to which he belongs. The stranger is the neighbour to be loved as yourself (cf. Mk. 12:31), and in whom Jesus Himself is welcomed (Mt. 25:35).

The cross, finally, the culmination of the revelation of God, constitutes the moment of radical *foreignness*: Jesus himself appears outside civil and religious society, abandoned by God, outside the



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Holy City, outside salvation. But... this is precisely the moment of the greatest communion with all men, of drawing all to Himself (cf. Jn. 12:32), of making the two groups into one, breaking down with his body the wall of separation, hostility (Eph. 2:14).

God, then, reaches us as a stranger, as a foreigner, but just as He reaches us, He sends us on a search, a journey, a communion in otherness, not in possession. In the diversity of the otherness of the stranger there is an echo, a reflection of the face of the Other, that Other who visits us as stranger and as a stranger, distances himself from us (cf. Lk. 24:13-35).

In us

"Strangers and Pilgrims on earth" (1Pt. 2:11): this is how the New Testament defines Christians, not in a sociological sense but indicating a feature of the experience of faith: entering into this dimension means recognizing that time and space are gifts, made and created by God for us, not possessions, therefore, memorials of being welcomed by God: the time we are given, as well as the land, the space, the habitat we are given, are signs of God's welcome to us. It also means that we are all strangers to others and to ourselves, for our identity is built by confronting the other, my identity depends on the diversity of the other. There is something of the other in my own identity. If this principle becomes a personal conviction, then we will feel the need to consider ourselves pilgrims always on a journey towards the other who is different from us, on a pilgrimage to pass from the condition of strangers to that of brothers and sisters, all citizens of the same world, "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Dear Sisters, I wanted to share with you these brief notes, especially with recourse to Scripture, because I believe that this common condition of *foreignness* is at the base, is one of the foundations of the journey of **Interculturality** that we firmly decided to carry out in the last General Chapter. I invite you, therefore, to make these lines the object of personal and community reflection as a starting point of the formative itinerary that we, as a Family, want to begin in this new year to address the challenge of "**educating ourselves in interculturality**" (GPF 2.8). In the first semester we will have three Zoom meetings animated by Dr. Méthode Gahungu, originally from Burundi, professor at the Salesian Pontifical University.

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The meetings are scheduled on the following dates and with the following themes:

1st meeting: Resources and challenges to Interculturality in the world and in our communities (Saturday, April 1).

2nd meeting: Ecclesial perspectives: a spirituality of Fraternity and Communion (Saturday, June 3).

3rd meeting: Pedagogical perspectives: Proposals of Intercultural pedagogy and plural identity (Saturday, June 24).

All of them will take place at 2:30 p.m. (Rome time) and will last for about two hours.

I also announce that the General Government is planning a meeting for the sisters who are preparing for perpetual vows and for those who have recently done. This will take place between the months of April and May and will include visits to places dear to the history of our religious Family, both in Italy and in the south of France. Further details will be communicated in due course.



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Dear Sisters, in the Manger of our common humanity is born the One who is Light and Blessing for all peoples, let us go together to welcome Him.

Receive in my fraternal embrace the wish of a Merry and a Holy Christmas!

Rome, 22 December, 2022.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sr. Viviana Sisack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr. M. Viviana Sisack
Prioress General