



*"let your light shine" - encaustic painting  
- Roland J. Scheid SVD, Steyl*

## **Spirituality and Charism**

Sr. Krystyna Szweda SSpS - Rome

The **Spirituality** and **Charism** of our SSpS Congregation stem from the vision of Saint Arnold Janssen, a German priest who founded three mission Congregations in XIX century. His spirituality was centered on love and veneration of the Holy Trinity. *"May the knowledge and love of God enlighten and gladden people all over the world."*<sup>1</sup>

We live in a rapidly changing world that is becoming more fluid, polarized and technology-driven which makes it easy to lose the balance between being and doing. Analyzing missionary reports, reading community chronicles or simply reflecting on our daily lives, we can say that SSpS Sisters are very good workers... but, *are we faithful to our spirituality and charism?*

The word "charism" comes from the Greek word *charis*, which means **grace**. God's grace flows to all of us and in turn, we channel His grace as our gift to others. *What gift would I like to give to others?*

Spirituality is essentially about how we see, experience, and respond to the world in which we live, and to God's presence in it. Historically, it was often associated with the so-called religious aspects of Christian life such as prayer, penance and fasting. More recently, it has been defined in wider terms and we can say that "spirituality" is our daily life lived in response to the Holy Spirit. I would like to offer some points which can help us to reflect on how we value and live the heritage of our Founding Generation, and the thousands of SSpS who came before us, in our missionary call "*here and now*".

The key elements of our Spirituality are: *Trinity, Divine Word, Bible, Eucharist, Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mission, Holy Spirit, Divine Indwelling, Contemplation, Nature, JPIC and Communion*. Our spirituality offers:

- A new way of relating with God because God loves us unconditionally. God forgives and forgets, He is always with us. God is totally different from us. God is close to us, sustaining us, in the depths of our being.
- A new way of relating with the neighbor who is a sister or brother to me. They are essential to my being human, not to lord it over others, but to be at the service of God and neighbor.
- A new way of relating with self as God's beloved One, a loved and forgiven sinner.
- A new way of relating with Mother earth, with the whole of creation.

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Prayer of Intercession with St. Arnold Janssen*, Manila 2004, p. 23.

The mission of Jesus flows from his ABBA experience: “You are my Beloved Son... In you I am well pleased. *Do I feel “I am God’s beloved” in the ordinariness of life?*

The goal of our Founding Generation’s efforts “was that all people might come to the joy of communion with the God who loves us and who gave his beloved Son for us that we might have life in Him.”<sup>2</sup> To talk about a religious community’s charism is to speak of the God-given gifts that it offers to the world.

*How do I witness to the people around me when I allow Jesus’ Spirit to permeate my service and life?*

Our Spirituality is really very rich and beautiful and it is nurtured if we allow God’s grace to work in us. We become women missionaries and disciples of Jesus when we take time for reading, meditating and praying. Contemplation is a graced experience brought about by God. There are different stages in our missionary life, various realities, diverse possibilities in which we are invited to discern and choose the right way to nourish and sustain the contemplative dimension of our call. Bl. Mother Josepha use to say to the sisters: “*Raise your heart with devotion to God as often as you remember. In that consists the whole way of walking in the presence of God.*”<sup>3</sup>

Christian contemplation **loves silence**<sup>4</sup> and it is an experience in time and history. The more deeply a person experiences God in contemplative prayer, the more she feels urged to share this unconditional love of God with others. Mother Maria’s contemplation was hidden and simple, her life was marked by surrender to God in which every instance was consumed by the fire of the love of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> She was in truth a woman for others. But, from her letters, we know that her contemplative disposition did not come easily. She had to struggle for it time and again and felt, as we do, the tensions of a missionary-contemplative life.

*What are the fruits that I can take for myself today from the life of our Founding Generation?*

St. Arnold’s prayer was dedicated to praise, adoration and thanksgiving to the Triune God who lives and dwells in our hearts. He was so close to God that he felt he was in God’s hands at every moment; he was aware of God’s presence and action in every situation of daily life and able to find in them God’s will. “*God’s will is eminently precious; it is the fount of all happiness. Our God means so well with us. If only we would always faithfully fulfil His Holy Will and pay attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.*”<sup>6</sup>

The Incarnate Word fascinated St. Arnold in such a way that he saw in the Heart of Jesus the perfect dwelling of the Trinity. “*I will strive to come as close as possible to the attitude of Jesus in his life, his teaching, his actions, his suffering and death. During Holy Mass I will offer myself up with Him to the Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit with all the suffering and afflictions that it pleases God to send me.*”<sup>7</sup>

He was keen to proclaim to the people, in a very simple way, the infinite mystery of the Trinitarian love. The Holy Spirit was for St. Arnold “*the sweet breath of love of the Father and the Son*”.<sup>8</sup> Prayer

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<sup>2</sup> Rehbein, Franziska Carolina, *Silent Presence*, Steyl, 2012, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Rehbein, Franziska Carolina, *Silent presence*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Ibid.* p. 35-36.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Ibid.* p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Prayer of Intercession with St. Arnold Janssen*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Rohner, Albert, *Arnold Janssen: Personal Notes of the year 1906*, edited with commentary by A. Rohner, Rome 1981.

<sup>8</sup> Rehbein, Franziska Carolina, *Silent presence*, p. 23.

that implored the grace of the Holy Spirit was as important to him as all the active missionary work. The more he was gripped by the Holy Spirit, the more he was transformed into living prayer and was at the same time able to practice true love of others.

*The fundamental question for each of us, in every situation of our life and mission is: what is my image of GOD?*

Looking back, we can see how beautifully each member of the Founding Generation contributed their own talents, gifts and presence, complementing each other in the work of God in the Spirit, which is our SSpS history rooted in our charism and spirituality. *How grateful are we to our Founding Generation and the thousands of SSpS who came before us for their generosity to fulfill the common call?*

Our missionary calling is rooted in the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In our Constitutions we read: “The Father has called us to be servants of his love.”<sup>9</sup> The same Spirit that inspired Jesus now empowers us to follow him and live his values in our respective situation. “Gifted with the Father's love, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we are sent to pass on that love as Jesus did.”<sup>10</sup>

*How often do I take time to read and be inspired by our Constitutions? How does they enflame my life as SSpS today?*

“As Servants of the Holy Spirit we are called to participate in the proclamation of the Divine Word as the One who is sent to reveal the Father. We are to do this in the strength and joy of the Spirit and in a manner appropriate to our womanly nature.”<sup>11</sup> All are called to enjoy Abba's love.

Concretely, how do I reveal the Father's love where I am now and to the people I am with? What are the changes in my life, which I am aware of, that make my presence life-giving to the people I am living with and serving?

Spiritual life is a process. It is not a matter of doing things right so that we can be perfect. Rather, it is a movement towards transformation. We are always on the way. *Do I notice the transformation that is taking place in my heart and in the history of my life and vocation?*

The foundation of the vitality of our missionary vocation is faith in the Triune God who lives in our hearts. To fulfill our mission, we are all trying to find the best way so that we can move the world just a little bit towards compassion. Our conscious and loving existence gives glory to God. We are encouraged by St. Arnold to be the “...ambassadors of divine love, to make known God's wonderful deeds and establish the kingdom of divine love.”<sup>12</sup>

#### Bibliography:

1. Rehbein Franziska Carolina, *Silent Presence. The Contemplative Heart of the Founding Generation of Steyl*, Steyl 2014.
2. *Prayer of intercession with St. Arnold Janssen*, Manila 2004.
3. Rohr Richard, *Falling upward. A spirituality for the two halves of life*, San Francisco 2011.
4. Different study materials on our Founding Generation.

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<sup>9</sup> SSpS Const., 118.

<sup>10</sup> SSpS Const., 119.

<sup>11</sup> See: Documents of the 12<sup>th</sup> SSpS General Chapter.

<sup>12</sup> See: *Arnold Janssen. Serving the Universal Church*, Societas Verbi Divini, p. 30.