Introduction

Once again Mary Ward Week gives us the opportunity to strengthen the union of minds and hearts as IBVM and CJ. In remembering with gratitude Mary Ward’s birth and passing to God, we want to pray the same text, the same prayers and reflections, as a universal body. Through the power of the Spirit, we humbly seek to live as companions for mission, in prayer and friendship (IBVM Const. Vol. II. 3.1)

This year we have chosen as the content of our prayer two fundamental Ignatian values - the Magis and the Minus, Finding God in all Things, the five Calls of the IBVM GC 2014 and mission. As branches of the same tree we want to deepen what "the Spirit said" to the IBVM sisters in their last General Congregation, a privileged forum for discerning and making decisions for the good of the whole apostolic body.

In that same spirit, we present the Calls and hope you will find spirit, hope and light in them. “As Mary Ward’s companions, moved by the person of Jesus and the needs of our world today, we seek to: “Reclaim the freshness of the Gospel, allowing Jesus to transform our lives. Bring those forced to live in poverty to the centre of our life and ministry. Go where the need is greater. Live sustainably, discerning what is enough. Create the oneness that moves us across boundaries. Acknowledging vulnerability and fragility, we turn to Jesus knowing that “…All we need we will find in Him.”” (Mary Ward)

Collaboration is “never doing alone what can be done better together” (CJ. GC 2011, 4), which statement also entails welcoming the contribution that others can give us on this journey together as a charismatic family, where the charism is the same for all and the living out is different and complementary. We are part of the Church, God’s people, with different charisms, vocations and other faith traditions. For this reason, lay people, Associates or Friends of Mary Ward have enriched this Mary Ward Week from their particular vocation and from sharing the charism and spirituality of this woman, who in her spiritual testament, recommended to us the living of our vocation - in its broadest sense - in a "constant, efficacious and loving” manner. It is a call to CJ-IBVM religious and secular Associates or Friends of Mary Ward, to drink from the same source, the water of the founding charism, to persevere together in the apostolic project of the Institute, confident that God will be with us and "will help us, no matter by whom or where."

We appreciate the generous support of our younger members, CJ-IBVM sisters, the laity, men and women imbued with Mary Ward’s spirituality who gave their contribution to these days of prayer. We are very grateful for their spirit of mutual collaboration, shared mission, fidelity to the love of God, who continues to send us to a world that needs the presence of “people of God."

The daily schedule includes: title of the topic, biblical text, picture to inspire contemplative reflection, questions and prayer. It is an invitation to stop, to taste and feel, "for it is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the intimate understanding and relish of the truth." [Sp Ex 2]
Eph. 3:17-21  May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Reflection

Go up and up, always faster, more and more ... our society is marked by the desire for "more", do more, have more, go up higher. Power, honors and possessions are hidden behind this desire for "more". This ambition often leads to stress, fear, and overload, for lack of relationships, disease and environmental destruction.

Ignatius also speaks of "more", but the "Magis" has a completely different meaning. The key word is "all for the greater glory of God." The criteria for discernment of spirits are "more" joy, more freedom (interior), more peace. These are things that satisfy our lives, that cheer our relationships with ourselves, our neighbors and God. We are invited to be ever more open to God so that he can work in us, through us in our world in ways we cannot imagine. Striving for more and more – in our spiritual life and in our social commitment - can be a temptation.

It can be a help for us becoming more aware of the fact that we have not to redeem the world. God did it already! We are called to bear witness to that good news and live accordingly. Our lives will be more authentic if we do this not strenuously, but quietly.

This requires courage to say "yes" to the "less", strength to resist competitiveness and sincerity to respond to the challenges of our time with a discerning heart.

Questions for reflection:

- Where is “Magis” challenging me?
- How could “Minus” free me so as to have more life-quality and bear witness to faith?

Prayer

“The felicity of this estate (for as much as I can express) was a singular freedom from all that could make one adhere to earthly things, with an entire application and apt disposition to all good works. Something happened also discovering the freedom that such a soul should have had to refer all to God.”

Mary Ward, The Just Soul

God, grant me the serenity,
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Reinhold Niebuhr
Reflection: What is Mary Ward saying to us today?

Our world today is in turmoil and peace seems so distant. And at times the challenges from outside and from within seem to converge and darkness overpowers. Where are you God?

Mary Ward was living in a somewhat similar situation. The world was at war and the Church was needing to defend itself. She was facing her “long loneliness” and God may have felt distant. Where did the strength of her faith in God’s love come from? From her many letters and retreat notes we know that Mary reflected on the Scriptures, especially during times of challenges and decisions. I can learn much from her.

The journey to Emmaus reminds me that God is with me on this journey, beside me, even as I feel the emptiness. And like the two disciples, I may think I know the story so well I fail to recognise Jesus. And only in spending time with the Gospel again, do I begin to recognise Jesus with me - in the other, in nature, even in the emptiness.
In the Gospel, I begin to “discover the deepest meaning of God’s words,” remember the story did not end in the crucifixion and trust again the resurrection. (Pagola)

In the Gospel I gain a deeper understanding of Jesus and as Mary Ward did, I too find love and hope; and my life, my world is again transformed.

To the Scriptures I return hoping to rekindle that fire in my heart when all but embers are left. It is the foundation of my life, my vocation, my ministry. All relationships need an intimate knowledge of that whom one loves if it is to survive. And it is through the Gospels, that I can begin to know the one to whom I have promised my life. In knowing God, I find my true self.

Mary Ward had an intimate knowledge of God and it transformed her life, which allowed her to trust when everything seemed futile. Knowing deep in her heart that despite the “long loneliness,” all shall be well. It is this knowledge and trust in a God who loves her that Mary could have the freedom to refer all to God. Indeed, I can learn much from her.

Questions for reflection:

- How often do I seek refuge in the Scriptures, especially in those moments when life does not seem to make sense, or even in times of joy and certainty? Do I allow myself to be transformed by the life and words of Jesus?

- Does my heart burn with the knowledge of God’s love? Do I live a life that witnesses to this love and the hope it brings?

Prayer

“O Parent of parents and Friend of friends
Without my asking you took me into your care
And step by step drew me to relinquish
Everything that prevented me
From a single hearted love of you
Whom I desire beyond all else
Your choice of me was wholly undeserved.
But this is true freedom!
This is the beginning of a new way of being!
A freedom that comes of knowing and trusting you
A freedom that I value more than anything else in the world”.

Mary Ward – Autobiography
"BRING TO THE CENTRE OF OUR LIVES AND MINISTRIES THOSE FORCED TO LIVE IN POVERTY"

John 1:14 “The Word became flesh, he lived among us.”

Reflection:
Poverty is not a natural fact, rather a consequence of structural actions, of the structural sin that generates situations of injustice and marginalization. That is why we do not refer to the poor, rather to people forced to live in poverty. If we place ourselves before the reality of individuals and peoples who are marginalized, in forced displacement, experiencing situations of injustice and non-recognition of their rights, then we are in a place of active engagement. Keeping the people forced to live in poverty at the centre of our lives and ministries impels these people to represent the criterion for the options and decisions of our personal and mission commitments. Living as companions of Jesus leads us to make his same options,
Questions for Reflection

Whatever our ministry may be, we need to question ourselves as we accept the invitation of Ignacio Ellacuría. (1989)

“All I want (...) are two things: that you place your eyes and your heart on those people who are suffering so much – some from misery and hunger, others from oppression and repression – then, that before those people so crucified you have the Colloquium of St. Ignatius, asking yourselves: What have I done to crucify them? What am I to do to uncrucify them? What must I do to make these people resurrect?”

Prayer

To love the poor (...),
persevere in the same,
live, die and rise with them
was all the aim of Mary Ward.

(Inscription on Mary Ward’s Gravestone)
Mark 10:46-52  They came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, “Son of David, have pity on me.” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage; get up, he is calling you.” He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus told him, “Go on your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.
Reflection:

Bartimaeus calls out Jesus' name from the darkness of his own world. How many times have I called out for Jesus, feeling that I am just calling into the vast space around me? Even when those around Bartimaeus tell him to be silent, he calls out all the more. He doesn’t let anyone determine his course of action. His focus is on Jesus and he is not deterred. Jesus recognizes and acts upon the God-given dignity of Bartimaeus. He listens to his voice and asks for what he needs. From time to time in our own journeys we too experience darkness and need help. With deep faith and trust, we can call out to Jesus and voice our needs. He is our light and faithful companion on the road. The more we call upon Jesus, the more Jesus calls upon us to listen to the cries of our brothers and sisters and accompany them to the light. We too can say with confidence, “Take courage; get up, he is calling you!”

Questions for Reflection

Jesus asks me, “What do you want me to do for you?” So I ask myself in prayer: What is my greatest need? What are the greatest needs of those around me? Do I value the voice of my brothers and sisters? Do I allow them to share their needs or do I assume that I know what is best for them?

Prayer

“All is well and shall be well. Accustom yourself in all doubts to cry out, ‘Lord what will you have me to do?’”

Mary Ward
Mark 2:10-11 "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

Reflection:
A friend of mine was in a team giving a retreat on becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community. They focused on naming barriers people felt to living sustainably, and discerning ways of removing those barriers. My friend asked me to pray for his group of “people who don’t know what to do – paralysed in the face of choice and the scale of the problem”. I used this gospel then and I have returned to it to reflect on today’s Call.
Questions for reflection:

Our hope sustains us to live sustainably

- It was enough for the evangelist’s purpose here that the man walked out and everyone praised God. What might the man and his four companions have discerned they could do next to live towards the Kingdom? How can I, and those with whom I am on the way, see and take the next step?

Prayer

“God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight...

The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.

Praise be to you!

Amen.

(A Christian prayer in union with creation in Laudato Si, 246)
John 17:22  "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one."
Reflection

Indian philosophy emphasises the harmony between the individual and the universal. When we realize our kinship with the world, we see the all-pervasive eternal Spirit in all objects and realize the profound significance of the world into which we are born. We realize oneness with things around us - body, soul, flowers, water, air, earth, and sunshine are all manifestations of the same Truth. The power therefore lies in the power of “union” and not in the power of “possession”. This power unites us with the all pervasive Infinite.

World economies are attempting to create a oneness that is really a pseudo-oneness. We are fooled by what is being bombarded at us as a ‘global culture’, a culture that in actual fact creates systems and an environment of exclusion, separateness and differences.

Jesus was someone who realized and lived this union with the Infinite so there was no fear in pushing the many boundaries of his day – the boundaries of politics, culture, religion and other beliefs and traditions that were dehumanizing not just to people in general but also for women. Mary Ward in her turn, as a companion of Jesus and living for Jesus, did the same in her context. The civil, political and ecclesiastical systems were shaken by her simple, honest search and response – all flowing out of a deep experience of God.

Questions for reflection:

When do I find myself inhibited from moving beyond myself? Are there some old and worn out paradigms I live out of that till today I have not questioned?

Is there one thing I/we can do today that actually pushes me out of myself – out of what I/we have always been doing to what I/ we need to do, to get in touch with another culture, another faith, another perspective, another world view?

Mary Ward’s words that can give us direction and strength to take the small steps and the big leaps to oneness:

“Our happiness, security and progress are not to be in riches, greatness and favour of Princes, but in having open and free access to God Almighty, from where must come our strength, light and protection.”
Mt 28:10 Jesus told them: Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. They will see me there.
Reflection: What would Mary Ward say about this.

The disciples had been summoned to Galilee. No special place for them but where they have spent their ordinary life. Jesus does not call us to remote strange special places. He calls us in the midst of our ordinary daily and most tangible reality. And this happens in a very human moment: Jesus was expecting them on the lake shore, after their day’s work. It had not even been a good day but a hard one when they had fished nothing. But it is there where the meeting occurs with Him. Meeting Jesus is encountering a living acting God.

Pope Francis begs the resurrection of Christ to be reflected in daily life. Mary Ward had that experience in the midst of everyday actions: while combing her hair before a mirror; or on any day after her retreat ... the extraordinary within the ordinary. Chronological time can be suddenly transformed in an instant- as an ineffable, deeply awesome, clear perception - in the favourable time, in God's time, in a kairos. And any place may become sacred. Her message today keeps being wholesome and challenging.

Mary Ward continues to invite us to participate as people who integrate spirituality and contemplation also in action; to a mission that transcends us individually, "collaborate in eternal good works," a mission that brings us to the Galilees of this world, where life goes on, and specially where life is being attacked; a mission which times we know not, but in confidence that "when God is sought sincerely, the way to God is always open." (Mary Ward)

Questions for reflection:

Is our day to day life only a time lag or do we experience it as a privileged space and a moment for encountering God?

Prayer

God Father, Mother, living in the depths of each human being, give me a new heart and new eyes to seek and find you, as I search in freedom to recognize you in everyday gestures, a just soul to welcome you, and confidence that you may be the truth that fills my life.
1 Cor 12:4-7  “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service (prayer/offering, presence, domestic work, formal and informal education, social work, parish work, hospital and prison chaplaincy, health, spiritual, theological, counselling/accompaniment, community ministries, formation, leadership, administration and so on) but the same Lord; there are different works, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Reflection:
We have been blessed with a diversity of gifts and ministries within our religious families. With these gifts and ministries we are companions of Jesus, women at the heart of the church. Our mission is a participation in the sending of Christ to the world and the comprehensive mission of the Church. Its purpose is the realization of the Kingdom of God in the whole of human society, not only in the life to come but also in this life. This Mission is a single but complex reality, which is expressed in a variety of ways. (Cf. CJ. Const CN 7.1 & 2)
If universality and mobility were natural realities for Mary Ward, they should characterize our way of understanding and living our mission nowadays.” (Cf. CJ Const. NC 7.2)

The ministry of being is as authentic as the ministry of doing. Through prayer each of us has a part in the Institute’s mission throughout our lives, whether we are active in deed or present to need.

When energies fail, our desire remains constant, for it is the face of Christ that we seek to manifest in all its compassion and love. When our lives are marked by the cross of suffering, we fulfil in a special way the mission of the Institute. By our acceptance of loneliness, sickness, failure or difficulty of any kind, we bear witness to the living Christ. (Cf. IBVM Const. Vol. II 2.13 & 14)

Questions for reflection:

1. Which are some of the personal gifts received by the Spirit? How do you witness to the diversity of gifts in your community, workplaces and ministries?

2. What impact do we want to make today through our ministries?

3. What would be lacking in today’s world if CJ and IBVM did not exist?

Prayer

“Nothing is more practical than finding God,
That is, falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination,
Will affect everything.
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
What you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends,
What you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart,
And what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in Love, stay in love,
And it will decide everything. –
Everything will be different.

(P. Arrupe, sj)

"Divine love is like fire,
Which will not let itself be shut up,
For it is impossible to love God
And not to work to extend God’s honor."

(M. Ward)
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