Columns
Spirituality



"To become the word of God is our prophetic task, both at 'home' and in our ministries, that is our fruitfulness. That is why we have left fathers, daughters, brothers' ... land": Sr. Carmen Notario (Photo: Pixabay).



by Carmen Notario

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Hannah, in the first book of Samuel, is one of the Old Testament women who embodies the affront that barrenness meant for women in the ancient Jewish world. At the beginning, the narrative describes the sorrow of a woman, seemingly loved by her husband but who does not feel "complete" because she lacks what, at that time, was essential for all: to have her own offspring. This situation reflects that of the people of Israel who, loved by God, do not produce the expected fruits from that love and relationship.

Hannah experiences the mockery — due to her condition — from Peninnah, her husband's other wife, and this makes her suffer tremendously. We can already sense the prophetic dimension of this book because Israel has to suffer the rejection and mockery of other people in order to turn to the Lord with faith and trust, hoping that the Lord will have mercy, as with Hannah, and make it fruitful.

> 'How well we, religious, know that the call is a process! It begins with a decision to adopt a concrete lifestyle, but that response is only the beginning of an ever more refined commitment.': Sr. Carmen Notario
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Certainly it was difficult for Samuel to tell Eli what the Lord had revealed to him about himself and his sons, but it was the truth, and that is the only thing Eli demanded. To become the word of God is our prophetic task, both at "home" and in our ministries, that is our fruitfulness. That is why we have left fathers, daughters, brothers' ... land. Some of us have also left the first community to which we belonged. A narrow and superficial view may label this as infidelity. However, if we delve deeper, we may discover that it is out of fidelity that someone leaves one structure, which does not help it to be fruitful, for another. The call always remains; the response is given throughout life.

Just as Hannah unburdens herself to her God by asking for a son and promising to dedicate him to God for life, perhaps the people can also emerge from their sterility, translated into stagnation and social, religious and political decadence, and evolve towards a project of a people more in accordance with the project of justice and life to which the Lord has called them.

The young Samuel, a symbol of new life and the new era that the people need, is in contrast with the sons of Eli, a good priest, but who can no longer do anything to bring the religious institution back to its original meaning. His sons, who embody this institution, sin against the cult, against the women who served in the sanctuary and against their father. For all this they will be annihilated, but it does not end here; history repeats itself again and again.

> 'The call is a process, a process of personalization and maturation that is totally united to our process of human maturation. We choose to live in community because the following of Jesus becomes real in living together.': Sr. Carmen Notario

Therefore, it is worth asking ourselves: What needs to change when we notice these traits of decadence, the actors or the institutions and structures themselves? In the 21st century, we are once again seeing how we deviate from God's plan — which is always the same and which we find so difficult to put into practice — when we place other interests before it.

From the light that Jesus shows us in the Gospel, it is clear that everything that is useless must fall to make way for a new life. However, this only happens through the change of people from within, by accepting a new conscience that is born from a personal relationship with God and an openness to the new, no matter how challenging it may be.

For this reason, the figure of little Samuel, dedicated to God, but still with much to learn and mature, seems to be a good example to return to the original call, both for young and old.

In Chapter 3:1-2 of the book of Samuel we read: "The child Samuel officiated before the Lord with Eli. The Word of the Lord was rare at that time and visions were not plentiful."

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Living faith without seeing and hearing is very hard. It is true that it is an internal experience, but the senses also help us to enrich it. Samuel, despite living with Eli,

lacked much to discern the voice of God. Perhaps for him, the word of God was filtered through what his teacher told him.

How well we, religious, know that the call is a process! It begins with a decision to adopt a concrete lifestyle, but that response is only the beginning of an ever more refined commitment, if we want it to be the fruit of a relationship of love.

It is curious how three times Samuel confuses the voice of Eli with the voice of God. The Word bursts with force in the midst of the darkness, in the darkness and in the newly begun life of the young Samuel. He, who has been at the service of Eli, will now be at the exclusive service of the Word, not to a specific community or to our superiors in our case.

> '[Conversion] is not always a question about morality, or sacrifice in favor of the institution; this can be a great deception in order not to face unsustainable realities.': Sr. Carmen Notario
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For this reason, the call is a process, a process of personalization and maturation that is totally united to our process of human maturation. We choose to live in community because the following of Jesus becomes real in living together, in surrender, in sharing the talents received with those close to me. But ultimately, I am responsible for what I "hear" and "see," and there, in that conscience formed and worked on daily, only God and I "enter."

This is also where the change of the person that we were talking about earlier comes in, so that the structures that no longer serve can be changed. Conversion is not always moving from a negative attitude to a positive one. It is not always a question of morality, or sacrifice in favor of the institution; this can be a great deception in order not to face unsustainable realities.

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