



Presentation of the theme: **BREAK THROUGH THE GATE**

Sister Iliana Suarez

“The first word that each one of us heard was that which had to be, that which came from Jesus Himself: *Ephata*, that is, “Be opened.” This is the only word that Jesus spoke in this whole account, and obviously it is not directed at the ears of the deaf man but at **his heart**. This word has come down to us, as Sister Françoise just explained, and each Daughter of Charity has experienced that this word is and will always be addressed to the heart of the Company and the heart of each one of us individually; it contains a fruitfulness that frees for love and service.

To the extent that we open ourselves, the Spirit can inspire us to go further, to take an additional step and *break through the gates* that foster our rediscovery of the creative boldness of our Founders and the beauty and power of the charism and, from these living roots, foster our response to the challenges of a new era.

In referring to living roots, I am thinking of the Charter of the Company, this very unique way of conceiving of our vocation at that time, which is for me the **major gate broken through**, opened by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in the history of the Church, the history of religious life, contemporary society and the very life of those who are poor. With this gate, many other gates that transcend time were opened and have led the Company to the geographic and existential peripheries of those who are most abandoned.

The life force that emanates from this inspiration of the Spirit in our Founders continues to be a source of hope and apostolic courage for breaking through gates, going forth to encounter others. Indeed, “*Going outside the gates remains a symbol of all the goings forth of our Founders and Foundresses*,” a **“recovering of the charism”** (cf. Proclaim, 62).

Let us allow this question to challenge us: *Through which gates might the Company need to break?* I share with you some of these “gates,” because together we will discern and discover many others during this Assembly.

- ◊ the gate of fears that paralyze us, of “unchangeable” ideas and of preconceived structures in order to welcome the urging of the Spirit who recreates and renews in weakness.

- ◇ the gate of our presences, services and life styles in order to review them in freedom and establish missionary priorities that always opt for those who are poor and excluded.
- ◇ the gate of cultural barriers in order to allow for the diversity and richness that the Spirit brings forth and that are a source of opportunities.
- ◇ the gate of uncertainty caused by a decrease in membership so that realism about the scarcity of Sisters does not prevail over the real needs of the weakest people nor “pen in” or asphyxiate missionary projects and dreams.
- ◇ the gate of different generations in our Provinces in order to recover the sense of gratitude, valuing each step and passing on what is essential in our vocation.
- ◇ the gate of political and social divisions to clarify our positions and decisions regarding the right to respect for the dignity of every human being, for justice and for truth.
- ◇ the gate of care for creation, our common home and for an economy for the common good in order to increase solidarity with those most in need.
- ◇ the gate of fraternity without borders, open to all, to recover the essence of the Gospel.
- ◇ the gate of service in collaboration with the Church, with other religious congregations, among ourselves on all levels and with the Vincentian Family in order to assume the mission as a real possibility for sharing gifts, mutual assistance and communion of charisms and as a fraternal path.
- ◇ the gate of the effects of the Covid pandemic, the profound changes that have occurred and their repercussions on all levels in order to meet challenges and strive to offer a response inspired by the Gospel.

Perhaps this is the “itinerary” of the life of the Company to break through the gates and go toward others with an open heart. Let us ask the Holy Spirit, giver of life, always to show us the way.

This is precisely the itinerary of Sister Rita, originally from the Province of Amazonia, who will share with us how she broke through the gate to come out of herself and enter into the indigenous culture.