



# Presentation of the theme: **ENCOUNTER**

## **Sister Luisa Farri**

It's my pleasure to be able to share with you a few thoughts on the word "encounter." Although it is the last word in the Assemblies' theme, that doesn't make it the least important! Quite the contrary! Genuine encounter is a divine grace that gives birth to new things and can change our life and the life of others. An authentic encounter begins when we have the courage to "stop," to let ourselves be disturbed in order to give whoever approaches us a little of our time, an encouraging word and above all our presence with all that we are so that the other person feels accepted, loved and important in someone's eyes.

Just like Jesus: He let himself be disturbed, He stopped to encounter, to offer an understanding, sharing and compassionate look and to speak about the unconditional nature of God's love for all people, especially for those who are "labelled" and marginalized.

We, the Daughters of Charity, also experience encounter with God, in community and in the service of persons who are poor daily. Each encounter is an opportunity for us to discover *Christ in those who are poor and those who are poor in Christ* (C. 10b). It is an opportunity to create a relationship, to welcome the other person, to give hope. The Gospel show us many examples; let us take a moment with a few of them.

Consider Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. Jesus does not see a tax collector, a rich and dishonest man; rather, He sees in Zacchaeus a "man," a person created in the image of God with his sinful condition. On the other hand, Zacchaeus himself has the desire to meet Jesus. He is short of stature... but he overcomes the limitation of his height by climbing a sycamore tree! And Jesus enters into dialogue with him, making us understand that each encounter is a discovery of the other person, an interaction.

Another of Jesus' significant encounters is with the sinful woman. Again, He does not see the prostitute; He sees a woman, a person, and values her way of giving freely and her human gestures. Jesus does not label people; He awakens a person to each encounter by proclaiming mercy made evident in forgiveness.

On the road to Emmaus, the two discouraged and hopeless disciples are conversing. Jesus goes out to meet them, mixes with them, walks with them and makes their hearts burn. Every authentic encounter sets hearts on fire and changes lives!

Chapter two of Mark's Gospel speaks of four men with an intelligent and creative faith, who make it possible for a paralyzed man to encounter Jesus by removing the roof of the house. A single man could not satisfy the paralyzed man's desire, but together they succeed. Is not our community life like these four men's way of acting together? We draw strength in community for our mission, and, imbued with the inner fire of charity and creativity, we do everything in our power to enable people who are poor to encounter Jesus even when that seems impossible.

I am very much aware that encountering each other during this long period of Covid was and continues to be very difficult, sometimes even impossible. It's true that technology with its "virtual gatherings" helped us to maintain relationships, but it did not allow us to encounter each other in the deepest sense of the word. It is precisely in this situation that we rediscovered the importance of relationships consisting of listening, fraternity, closeness, understanding looks and hands that touch to heal and show closeness. Indeed, as Pope Francis says, in order to have a real encounter, we need to "*hit the streets... [otherwise], we remain mere spectators... in order to know, we need to encounter, to let the person in front of me speak, to let his or her testimony reach me*" (Message for the 55th World Communications Day, January 23, 2021).

Dear Sisters, I wish for all of you and for myself, wherever we may be, that we might take risks and dare the encounter as Mary did after the Annunciation.

***Mary breaks through the gate in haste...*** it's the haste of encounter and service, the haste of those who want to announce Christ present in them.

***Mary goes out to encounter Elizabeth*** with boldness and courage. A strong woman, she faces a long, dangerous journey alone.

***Mary encounters Elizabeth...*** it's the joy of encounter, not of a chance encounter but one desired by God Himself. It is the encounter of two mothers visited and sent by God to respond to His loving plan.

Let us follow Mary's steps as well in order to encounter and serve each person that the Lord places on our path... then, yes, we will feel our hearts burning within us and we will be a blessing for those who are poor, for the Church and for the Company.

This is my wish for us!

Now, Sister Rochelie, originally from the Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia, will present us her encounter with God in the midst of darkness, in evacuation centers during a war on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines.