



Of Sandals, Symbols and Similar Subjects

Introduction

In June, 2022, I gave a talk about St. Maravillas of Jesus as part of the series The Daughters of St. Teresa organized by our Carmelite Friars in Oxford, England. I have been asked by a Sister to elaborate on some points that I made in that talk, and so I want to look more closely at the purification journey from rigid adherence to the externals of religious observance, to the "arrival" at the spirit behind the observances. We do not have many letters concerning Madre Maravillas's spiritual journey, but what we do have focuses on an important moment in that journey that illustrates very well the process of spiritual transformation. I will consider that moment in the light of the Church's traditional teaching on the spiritual life and growth.

Unfortunately, there exists very little in English about St. Maravillas. Obviously, there is more in Spanish. I will try to include a Bibliography at the end of this article.

In order to describe her spiritual journey, we will need to get some idea of where she began, how the journey unfolded, and where it brought her. One point that we need to make clear: there is no spiritual journey if the person undertaking that journey does not change during the process. This is important, because the lives of saint frequently fall into two categories, depending on the kind of saint whose life is described. There are the saints that experienced a serious conversion experience, like St. Mary Magdalen and St. Margaret of Cortona. This is one category, and the biography usually focuses on the

conversion experience, with the implication that, once the saint had the experience, they were totally changed for the rest of their life.

The other kind of biography describes saints that did not experience any tremendous conversion from sin to a life of discipleship. Biographies of this type, for example, books about St. Therese of Lisieux and St. Thomas Aquinas, leave the reader with the impression that they were born with incipient halos that only got larger and brighter as they grew older! The main biography of St. Maravillas that exists in English, "Let Him Do It", produced by the Carmels of Cerro de los Angeles and La Aldehuela, falls into this category. The other, shorter English biography, "Saint Maravillas of Jesus" by Baldomero Jimenez Duque, is more balanced, though unfortunately it is very short and gives very few quotes of the Saint's words and writings. Still, the general impression of her spiritual journey is that, early in her religious life, she already experienced advanced stages of prayer and that this progressed to the point where she experienced spiritual darkness in much of her later life.

She was born on Nov. 4th, 1891, in Madrid, the youngest child of Luis Pidal y Mon and Cristina Chico de Guzman y Munoz, the Marques and Marquesa de Pidal. The baby was baptized on Nov. 12th and given the names María de las Maravillas Cristina Ildefonso Patricia Josefa. Of all of them, only María de las Maravillas remained as her distinctive name, alluding to Nuestra Señora de las Maravillas, Our Lady of the Marvels of God, patron saint of Cehegín (Murcia).ⁱ

At the time of Maravillas's birth, her Father was the Spanish Ambassador to the Vatican. He was very devout and had considered the priesthood as a young man. With his brother Alejandro Pidal, he had created the "Catholic Union" political party to protect the interest of the Church and of religious Orders. Besides his tenure of Ambassador to the Vatican, Don Luis at one period was also President of the Council of State.ⁱⁱ

Dona Cristina, Maravillas's mother, was a deeply spiritual woman. In the family chapel, with the domestic employees, the family members participated every day at Mass and prayed the rosary. Doña Cristina's mother, Doña Patricia Muñoz, a widow, lived with them; she had taken a vow of poverty, and had a great influence on the spiritual formation of her granddaughter Maravillas, reading to her the lives of the saints, teaching her to pray and to love poverty and the poor.ⁱⁱⁱ

Maravillas had an older sister, Maria, and an older brother, Alfonso. From a very early age, she knew that she wanted to be a nun, and when she was 5 years old, she made a vow of chastity in the family attic, with a maid acting as witness. (Maravillas thought that a witness was necessary.)^{iv} From the age of 12 she had a spiritual director, Fr. Juan Francisco Lopez, a Jesuit. He put her in contact with the Daughters of Charity so that she

could work with the poor.^v Accompanied by a maid, from the time she was 15 until she entered the convent, she visited the poor and gave catechetical instruction.^{vi}

We see here how much her early life was influenced by the thought of poverty. She learned the importance of poverty from her grandmother. She worked with the poor, helping them and catechizing them on a regular basis for 14 years. It is not surprising that living a poor life figures so largely in the monasteries that she founded. We will return to this point later.

Maravillas had never lost sight of her religious vocation. One day she accompanied a friend, the Baroness del Castillo de Chirel, to the Carmelite monastery of El Escorial. In the parlor she spoke with Mother Maria Josefa del Corazon de Jesus, an acquaintance of her family, and decided to enter that same convent and not another.^{vii} Fr. Lopez told her not to speak of it for a year. At the end of the year, she told him, "Father, I want you to know that I am still of the same mind."

In 1913, her father died after a long illness. By this time, all her older siblings had married, and she and her mother were alone. She again asked Fr. Lopez for permission to enter the convent, but he replied, "You will go when your mother tells you to."^{viii} Her mother feared to lose her daughter and refused to give permission for her to enter until, during an epidemic of the Spanish influenza, Maravillas, who had been caring for family members who were sick, caught the illness and nearly died. At this her mother realized that if her daughter were to die, she would lose her much more than if she entered a convent, and she at last gave permission.^{ix}

On Oct. 12th, 1919, Maravillas entered the Carmel of the Escorial. She was clothed on April 21, 1920 and made her first profession the following year.^x She had a bad knee, and this prevented her from kneeling and doing heavy work.^{xi} She had always had a quick temper, and had been struggling with it since she was a child.^{xii} In the convent, she found she had to struggle against vanity, a fault from which she was freed by hearing Our Lord say to her inwardly, "And they took me for a fool."^{xiii}

This was not the only time Our Lord spoke to her. During the years of her novitiate, she frequently received inspirations to found a Carmel at Cerro de los Angeles. She finally consulted several people about her inspiration: first of all, she informed her Prioress, then later the Jesuit Father Juan Francisco López, and Mother María Josefa del Corazón de Jesús, who would be one of the foundresses, to Father Torres, also a Jesuit, who would become, as we shall see, her spiritual director.^{xiv}

We see here that, by her early 30s, Maravillas was already in an advanced level of prayer. She not only experienced a substantial locution that cured her of her vanity^{xv}; the inspirations to found the Carmel at Cerro seems to have been an insistent experience.^{xvi} This high level of prayer is not surprising, given the formation she had before she entered

the Carmel of the Escorial. Moreover, she is very careful to submit her experiences to qualified judges: her Prioress, her spiritual director, and a well-known Jesuit. There seems to be little doubt that she had reached what is called the unitive stage of the spiritual life, the state where she is careful about avoiding venial sins and where she has sincerely given her will to God. In St. Teresa's "Interior Castle", this corresponds to the 5th Dwelling Places. The unitive stage has several levels, from simple union, through ecstatic union to the transforming union, also called the spiritual marriage. We will see later indications that, during the first years of the Carmel of Cerro, Maravillas had not yet reached the transforming union.

In establishing the Carmel of Cerro, it seems safe to assume that Madre Maravillas continued the way of life that she had learned at the Carmel of the Escorial. That was the only form of Carmelite life that she knew, for she doesn't seem to have visited other Carmels. Certainly, as far as living as a Carmelite, she had only experienced the life and practices of the Escorial Carmel.

In her book, "Madre Maravillas de Jesus - Con Amor y Dolor", Mother Magdalena of Jesus, OCD, says that Mother Maravillas told her that she had been taught at the Escorial that "the most important thing is to follow the observance exactly as we learned it."^{xvii} The word "observance" in religious life has various meanings, but it usually refers to the external practices established in religious communities. This love of Carmelite practices was a noticeable mark of St. Maravillas's foundations. As Fr. Iraburu writes, describing the changes in footgear effected in 1947: "Saint Maravillas, inflamed by the Holy Spirit with love for holiness and love for Carmel, always tried to grow with her daughters in all that she saw of greater fidelity to the original Carmel. That is why in 1947 she enthusiastically welcomed the Father General's idea that they should be more 'barefoot' Carmelites for greater penance."

For this reason, in writing to Father Silverio, the Father General, she says, "On the very day of the Reform we took off our shoes with great joy."

A few weeks later, she wrote to Mother Magdalena whether it would not be better to take off her shoes, giving her some news that the nuns of Burgos had sent her about the alpargata of St. Teresa:

"They say that the alpargata they have [in Burgos] of the Holy Mother did not have a toe cap, but they do, because the Chronicles say that they do not know which General ordered them to be worn barefoot; and since we are barefoot, would it not be better to copy everything from the Holy Mother?"

Shortly afterward, she again wrote to the Father General, "We are very happy, Our Father, with our bare feet. Before it was a disgrace, and it is very beautiful to see the

enthusiasm with which all our communities have received it. We have an order for alpargatas.”^{xviii}

What is involved here? Certainly, and obviously, there is question of religious obedience, since she refers to a decision of the Father General. Is it simply a matter of living as St. Teresa did? Is it a matter of living in greater poverty, since she writes to the Father General: "We are very happy, Our Father, with our bare feet. Before it was a disgrace, and it is very beautiful with the enthusiasm with which all our communities have received it.”^{xix} Both explanations are valid, but neither is adequate. To understand her choices, we need to ask why she wants to practice a greater poverty? What was Teresa’s goal in establishing the practices commonly followed in her monasteries?

The Imitation of Christ

The answer to both questions is the same: both women wanted to follow Jesus Christ more closely. Every Christian vocation consists in the call to follow Jesus, to imitate Him in their life. They hear His voice saying to them: “Come, follow Me.” But religious hear His call in a more radical way. “Come, follow Me. Follow in My footsteps. Live the way I live. Love the way I love. Show the world that you are My disciples.” Every founder or foundress hears this call and realizes that he or she is summoned to establish a way of life in which other men and women can live out this vocation in an explicitly visible way. Religious are called to visibly incarnate the life of the Son of God made man. This demands various practices, both external and internal, both physical, psychological, and spiritual. The external practices are the most easily perceived: religious dress in a certain way, they eat, speak, work, relate to one another and to others in specifically perceptible ways. This is part of being a witness.

We see therefore that the exterior practices of religious life are a necessary part of witnessing to Jesus in the manner suitable for religious. Are they enough to provide a valid witness? Yes, but there are deeper levels of witnessing. The ultimate level of witnessing is when a person can truly say with St. Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”^{xx} With this goal in view, we can understand that exterior practices are a beginning of this total identification with Christ, but only a beginning. We will see how this beginning develops and leads to the final goal.

External practices are not only a witness to others; they are a way to witness to oneself. A practice that I take on from outside of myself, is, obviously, not an action that comes from within me, though the willingness to take on the practice does come from within me. To hold my hands in a specific way to which I am not accustomed, is a confrontation between what is outside of myself and what is within myself. It puts my normal reactions to the test. I must re-conform my habitual reactions to conform to these new, externally imposed actions. Some practices will be more confrontational than others.

Some will be easy for one person, while the same practice will be very difficult for another. How to sit, how to walk, what to do when I get out of bed in the morning, these can be more or less challenging. When it comes to talking, what to say, how and when to say it, this can be very, very challenging. So much so, that the Letter of James states: "Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect."^{xxi} The practices are not merely actions to be performed in order to be perfect. They are challenges to reveal myself to myself. As one novice mistress asked her novices: "How does this practice affect you?" If I find it easy, that is good, but I can be sure that there will be another practice that I find challenging. When I find a practice uncomfortable, or challenging in any way, I need to ask myself: Why? Why is this practice difficult or disturbing? What is it in me that runs counter to this practice? This can lead me to an ever-deepening knowledge of my own reactions, and beyond that to my even deeper defense mechanisms, those well-hidden ways of thinking and acting by which I protect myself from anything that seems threatening.

External practices that run counter to my inclinations, such as fasting, for example, are often thought of as "taking up the cross". Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."^{xxii} For someone who feels called to enter religious life, there is often an eagerness to do what Jesus commands: a desire to imitate Him in His struggles and sufferings. John of the Cross writes: "It should be known, then, that God nurtures and caresses the soul, after it has been resolutely converted to his service, like a loving mother who warms her child with the heat of her bosom, nurses it with good milk and tender food, and carries and caresses it in her arms. ...The grace of God acts just as a loving mother by re-engendering in the soul new enthusiasm and fervor in the service of God. With no effort on the soul's part, this grace causes it to taste sweet and delectable milk and to experience intense satisfaction in the performance of spiritual exercises, because God is handing the breast of his tender love to the soul, just as if it were a delicate child [1 Pt. 2:2-3].^[1]

"The soul finds its joy, therefore, in spending lengthy periods at prayer, perhaps even entire nights; its penances are pleasures; its fasts, happiness; and the sacraments and spiritual conversations are its consolations."^{xxiii}

The service of God, either in the lay and religious sphere, or as a priest, is demanding and needs a serious training in the virtues. The practice of prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude, on both the natural and the supernatural levels must be deeply rooted if I am truly to take up my cross and follow Him. Being crucified with Christ demands heroic virtue. The Greek word for "witness" is "martus", "martyr", and the martyrs are the greatest and most perfect witnesses to God's life in us. Unfortunately, we easily make the mistake of thinking that good will is all that is needed to be a martyr. Or maybe good-will and courage. After all, won't God give me the strength I need when

the time comes? St. Peter and the other apostles made this mistake. "Peter said to him, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And so said all the disciples."^{xxiv} There is no doubt about Peter's good will, but his lack of self-knowledge caused him to promise what he could not deliver: faithfulness unto death.

This is why practicing the various external observances of religious life is not enough. I can wear alpargatas, wool tunics, double veils and a religious habit and mantle; I can kiss the floor as soon as I wake up; I can walk in procession with my hands tucked under my - excuse me: our - scapular and my eyes cast down so that I only see the Sister in front of me. I can make all the genuflections and inclinations that I am taught to do. I can do absolutely everything that I am told to do, but that does not mean that I am practicing the virtues. I may well be practicing extreme fortitude, but am I practicing supernatural or even natural temperance? I may be ignoring my feelings of irritation, of disorientation, of whatever upsetting emotional turmoil I have, and I continue to practice the observances, but am I practicing justice toward my neighbor? I may be absolutely obedient and doing everything exactly as commanded so that I don't need to think for myself, but in that case how am I practicing prudence, either natural or even more important, supernatural prudence?

To practice a virtue, I need to make a choice to act according to the virtue, and then I need to put my choice in action. I can choose to obey, and this is excellent, but obedience is not the only virtue I will need to have in order to go forward in the spiritual life. A virtue, like a vice, is a habit. It is an action embedded in my memory so deeply that the appropriate trigger sets it off. I can train myself to incline my head at the names of Jesus and Mary, and that is an excellent witness to piety, but it is only a training. An animal can be trained in the same way. Many external practices are matters of training to the point where the actions become, as the phrase is, "second nature", but they are still a matter of training. These actions are only a preparation for the foundational virtues, the virtues that demand more than just the decision to perform an action.

Acquiring the Mind of Christ

It is here that I need to pass beyond external practices to the internal practices. The external practices are necessary, and I need to continue practicing them, for several reasons. One of these reasons is that when they have become second nature, I will continue practicing them even when I am not thinking consciously about it, just as, when I drive, I don't think at each movement what I need to do now. With the practices embedded in my memory, I will continue to give witness without thinking about it, and at this point I can't think about that because I need to think about something else. This something else is the challenge of acquiring the mind of Christ.

St. Paul says that “we have the mind of Christ”.^{xxv} How does this come about? Faith, hope and love are infused in us at Baptism. Does this mean that we acquire the mind of Christ at that moment, that it is an integral part of the theological virtues?

In speaking of the mind of Christ, Paul is speaking of the wisdom given by the Holy Spirit, a wisdom that belongs to the “spiritually mature”.^{xxvi} This wisdom is “God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory ... as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.”^{xxvii}

This spiritual wisdom is not infused at Baptism, for Paul says “Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”^{xxviii} Paul then goes on to tell the Corinthians to whom he is writing that they are not spiritually mature, for they do not show the signs of spiritual maturity but of spiritual immaturity: “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4 For when one says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not merely human?”^{xxix}

Here are some of the signs of spiritual immaturity: factionalism, quarrelling, and jealousy. All of these wound the communion that should exist between Catholics, members of the one Mystical Body of Christ. This, then is the next stage in my growth into Christ: I must “put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). ...get rid of all such things – anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.”^{xxx}

For one who has acquired the habit of religious practices, this first step is not hard. The next, however, is more demanding: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”^{xxxi} The last two, meekness and patience, I can acquire, at least in my exterior behavior, by a deep self-control. The third virtue, humility, will come slowly, as I struggle to practice the other

four. But it is the first two virtues, compassion and kindness, that will place before me a new challenge, the challenge of prudence, both natural and supernatural, prudence.

Until now, we have focused on exterior practices. These are acquired over time by repeated actions, and this is true of all the virtues. Prudence is no different, in the sense that I acquire it by repeated practice of it. What is different is that now I need to practice the virtue, not by repeating a physical action, but by repeating an intelligent and faithfilled evaluation. Each time I genuflect, I do not need to think much about how I do it, unless for some reason I have a knee injury or some similar complication. This is valid for most exterior practices

However, in trying to act compassionately, with kindness, I will soon discover that this can never be an automatic action. Compassion and kindness are qualities directed toward people (though those who possess them often extend them to all living beings). But treating people with compassion and kindness can only be done in a way that suits each person. There is no one way to be compassionate or kind because compassion and kindness need to be recognized as such by the person with whom I am interacting. I can want to act kindly toward someone, and I will try to do so, but does the other person recognize my actions as being kind? This is where I will need to learn the hard way, by trial and error, with a hopefully ever-growing prudence, how to compassionate someone so that they recognize that I truly compassionate them.

No amount of obedience to rubrics or customs can fully bring this about, though many religious customs, like silence, can greatly help me to grow in compassion. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who guides us in loving, but He will not do so unless He sees that I want to be guided and that I am trying to do what I can to love others as I myself am loved.^{xxxii}

It is here, facing the challenge of compassion and kindness, that many people choose to stop. There are many ways to avoid the challenge. I can go ahead and love as I decide is the best way to love someone, but without letting myself be changed by those on whom I inflict my love. This will keep me from being hurt, but it will do little to help others.

Another way to avoid the challenge is to equate loving with suffering. Compassion, as the word itself shows, does involve suffering, but it must be life-giving suffering, a suffering that actually gives life to the other. One definition of love is that love is that gift of oneself that makes the other more perfectly themselves. I need to find out if I am truly helping the one I love. It would be a great pity if my suffering did nothing except make me suffer. Even worse, I could fool myself that just by suffering I am giving life to others. It takes a deep self-knowledge to know if I am loving for others, or if I am loving for what I get out of it.

There are many ways to avoid the challenge of compassion and kindness, but there is one that has unfortunately been far too common in religious life in the past, and which can still be found today. This is the illusion that obedience is all that is needed to learn to love. Obedience is absolutely necessary to love as Jesus loves, but the practice of obedience cannot replace the practice of the other virtues, and absolutely never replaces the practice of prudence. Supernatural prudence is an infused virtue, while natural prudence is an acquired virtue. Prudence both supernatural and natural, is a cardinal virtue, and is therefore less than the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Yet prudence, being “the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it”^{xxxiii}, guides the action of even the theological virtues. In specific situations, it directs us how to put our faith into action, how to love and what to hope for.

Because prudence is necessary in the practical aspects of faith, love and charity, a failure to grow in prudence will inevitably cause a failure to grow spiritually. This is why it is very regrettable that a misunderstanding of the importance of obedience has caused, in some religious communities, a formation that not only neglected the practice of prudence, but put such an emphasis on obedience that any possibility of the religious growing in prudence was effectively blocked. We see this in communities with an over emphasis on external practices, vocal prayers and a form of spiritual direction that caused the superior’s will and intellect to replace those of the subject. This is a form of spiritual abuse that is finally coming to be recognized and addressed by the competent authorities.

For those who want to do the will of God, it is very tempting to remain at this level of “sola obediencia”. It presents God’s will as something clear and uncomplicated, that only asks for my compliance without any need for me to take responsibility for the action itself. I do not need to wonder if what I am told to do is prudent in this situation. I do not need to seek to grow in any virtue but can assume that this will happen automatically through my compliance. Instead of being “like a little child”^{xxxiv} I surrender my conscience and give up the responsibility for my spiritual growth to the point of being less than human.

From Imitation to Identification

Yet this beginner’s stage of identifying God’s will with literal commands and specific practices, both internal and external, is so attractive, that it endures through most of the spiritual journey. Only God can free me from it and St. John of the Cross explains how He does this in the dark night of the senses and then in the dark night of the spirit. The purification effected in the two nights are “like the difference between pulling up roots or cutting off a branch, rubbing out a fresh stain or an old, deeply embedded one.”^{xxxv} The imperfections of the soul can only be healed by being led beyond our natural ways of knowing and willing, and this is only finally done when “I departed from my

low manner of understanding, and my feeble way of loving, and my poor and limited method of finding satisfaction in God.”^{xxxvi} “That is: My intellect departed from itself, changing from human and natural to divine. For united with God through this purgation, it no longer understands by means of its natural vigor and light, but by means of the divine wisdom to which it was united. And my will departed from itself and became divine. United with the divine love, it no longer loves in a lowly manner, with its natural strength, but with the strength and purity of the Holy Spirit; and thus the will does not operate humanly in relation to God.

“The memory, too, was changed into presentiments of eternal glory.

“And finally, all the strength and affections of the soul, by means of this night and purgation of the old self, are renewed with divine qualities and delights.”^{xxxvii}

We see this purification and transformation beautifully illustrated in the life of St. Maravillas of Jesus. During the Spanish Civil War, she and her nuns were finally able to escape from the war zone and find a peaceful shelter in the valley of Las Batuecas, arriving there on September 28, 1937. With them was the Carmelite Provincial, Fr. Florencio of the Child Jesus, who became her spiritual director during the 14 months that she remained in Las Batuecas. This period was of supreme importance in the spiritual life of Mother Maravillas, and we are deeply indebted to Fr. Florencio who insisted that she write him accounts of her spiritual experiences. A study of these letters, which Fr. Florencio dated as he received them, show that Mother Maravillas experienced a deeply anguished and at the same time exalting change in her relationship with God.

For example, she writes: “I want nothing more than that God's will be fulfilled in me in everything, in the great and in the small, and in that I found my greatest happiness, With all my heart I said and say to the Lord that he take EVERYTHING from me, everything I want, exterior and interior, corporal and spiritual, because what I only want and desire is HIM; but there it is, FATHER, that I have truly lost him and I cannot live like this. He justly rejects me and forsakes me... I cannot explain to myself what I have lost. that I suffer, and without hope of remedy.... This afternoon I am about to prostrate myself at the feet of Your Reverence and ask you, just as you place souls in the grace of God, to see what you could do with me so that I would not be so far from Him”.^{xxxviii}

On Epiphany, 1938, a special solemnity in Carmel, she wrote to Fr. Florencio: “As it is always impossible for me to write in words, I wish to write, overcoming the repugnance I always have when I think I must manifest something to assure myself or to seek a remedy, and as I now see clearly that there is no remedy for me, I have no need or desire to do so, and I can only, and this is the only thing I can do, put my forehead in the dust (even if only interiorly, when I cannot exteriorly), and thus remain in the presence of the Lord, manifesting without words all the bitterness of my soul for having lost Him,

and my immense desire to love Him. It is in this that I sometimes seem to receive a little strength to be able to go on living, otherwise I truly believe, Father, that I would not be able to bear so much bitterness..."^{xxxix}

On January 15, 1938, she writes: "Our Father, today my bitterness is so horrible that I can't go on any longer, and I'm afraid I won't be able to control myself in front of the sisters... I don't know what to do with myself. Everything is all the same to me, Father, and I would only like not to displease the Lord... I wanted to tell you something this afternoon, but I could not, and as I was afraid of bursting into tears, I kept silent. The fact is that I ardently desire to suffer, but I am afraid that this suffering is my fault. Pray a little for me, Father, out of charity. I also wanted to tell you about the night prayer, not to do it, but to know how to fix myself - as I do not sleep - and I do not know if I disobey, which I would not want for anything."^{xl}

Writing of these experiences, Fr. Matias of the Child Jesus, O.C.D. says explicitly "It is a moment of her passive night of the spirit."^{xli} Fr. Baldomero Jimenez Duque writes, "We are dealing here with that sublime abandonment which souls experience in this passive night of the spirit, in which...God purifies them to the core of their being."^{xlii} Fr. Jose Maria Iraburu writes of the time spent in Las Batuecas: "The Carmelite Father Florencio del Niño Jesús, prior of Madrid, also in exile, serves them at this time as chaplain. The Mother, who in the silence and peace of that desert is entering more and more, in the dark night, for the mystical life, finds in this good father a safe guide."^{xliii} In the biography published by the Nuns of the Carmels of Cerro and La Aldehuela, the nuns do not use the phrase "night of the spirit". However, they write of Fr. Florencio as Maravillas's director at this time: "Father Florencio knows well the paths of mysticism and the mysterious purifications to which God submits the souls He has chosen to realize the union of love. He knows that this is the path of the Saints."^{xliv}

There is little doubt that during the time at Las Batuecas Mother Maravillas was led by God from the state of simple union of will to the transforming union with God. What this involved is strikingly presented in the biography written by the nuns from her own Carmels of El Cerro de los Angeles and La Aldehuela. There we read: "Father Florencio cuts the nightly hours which she used to spend almost entirely in prayer. He does the same with her penance and makes her seek detailed permission for these. This is certainly a strain on her! For a time he prohibits her to do penance and she submits entirely. If she wishes the Lord to 'leave her in the hands of her own counsel' Father Florencio says harshly, she may silence the great blessings that God bestows on her soul. For many years she has done this out of humility, for fear that she may be taken for what she is not, but now that Father Florencio orders her to behave differently, she is ready to obey, even if she finds it difficult."^{xlv}

There is much to be studied here, given that in this article we are dealing primarily with external practices. First of all, we see that Fr. Florencio eliminates much if not most of her external penances, and demands that she ask “detailed permission” for any practices. We see here that she has been following her own decisions concerning what practices she has been performing. This is both a privilege and a danger for a superior, for a person in authority who has no one in authority over them. It is dangerously easy for someone in that position to follow their own inclinations either in leniency or in severity. Mother Maravillas is blessed to have a director who saves her from doing her own will. He says so explicitly when he writes to her “If she wishes the Lord to ‘leave her in the hands of her own counsel’ ... she may silence the great blessings that God bestows on her soul.” God has allowed her to follow “her own counsel” until then, but now she must choose whose will she will obey, His or her own?

This is a difficult choice for her, as the biography makes clear, when it states that “This is a strain on her!” and “she finds it difficult” to obey. Clearly her attachment to her practices is deeply embedded in her soul. Apparently, the biographers do not realize this point, or at least, they seem not to take it up but simply state that out of humility, Mother Maravillas said little or nothing of the favors she had been receiving. This humility is striking and admirable, but what shows the greatness of her holiness is her willingness to obey in spite of “the strain” and of finding it “difficult” to do so.

It seems that the experiences of anguish and of exaltation that she describes in her letters of 1937 to Fr. Florencio continued at intermittent periods throughout her life, though a thorough study would need to be made of this point. However, the authors that we have quoted believe without a doubt that the transformation that took place during the time at Las Batuecas was an irreversible one that led her to a deep union with God. Her holiness was on a firm footing.

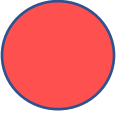
So what can we say about her opinion of external practices after the experience of being deprived of them by Fr. Florencio?

A Public Witness

We said at the beginning of his article that external practices are necessary in the spiritual life. We are incarnate beings. We are not angels. We need to express our interior beliefs by our outward behavior. Moreover, we need to do this in a credible way if we are to give a public witness to those beliefs. We showed that religious are called to give public witnesses to the truths of our Faith and to the hope to which we are to be called. For that reason, we need to express our beliefs not only to one another but also to the world. And to do so, we need to understand clearly what is involved in giving witness.

In order to do that, we need to take a look at symbols. Most human communication is made through symbols. I am sharing my thoughts through words, which are symbols,

and I am using more symbols, letters, in order to make those words available to you. Words change meaning over time, which is why dictionaries are continually updating their definitions. For example, the word “silly” originally meant “happy or blessed”.^{xlvi} The word “gay” originally meant “full of joy, merry”, but also “wanton, lascivious”.^{xlvii} Even in the same period of time, a word can have different meanings to different people, often depending on geographical development.

This is true also of visual symbols. A red dot  has one meaning in American traffic and a very different meaning in the culture of Japan, where, as an image of the Rising Sun, it is a symbol of national identity.

Like words, images can change meaning over time, depending on the experiences of the people who use them. In the Bible, blood is a symbol of life. “Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”^{xlviii} Blood is thrown on the Israelites as a sign of the Covenant between God and the people. This shows that they share the same life. Yet is blood still seen as a sign of life in our present culture? Or has it become a symbol of violence and death?

Another example of the changing meaning of symbols is the swastika. The original meaning, which goes back some 7000 years, is “well-being”.^{xliv} It took approximately 25 years for this meaning to be totally overwritten through its adoption by Hitler’s National Socialists. It has now become a symbol of hatred and racial bias.¹

In the same way, a gesture can vary in meaning from one culture to another. A gesture that is innocuous in one culture can have sexual overtones in another.

There is a myth that John F. Kennedy mistakenly described himself as a jelly doughnut when he made his famous “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech, for the word “Berliner” can describe a jelly doughnut, though not in Berlin itself^{li}. However, the myth does illustrate the care needed in communicating with someone from another language or culture.

All this shows how delicate human communications can be and how careful one must be to learn how my interlocutor understands my words, images and gestures. This applies just as much to religious symbols. Let us consider the alpargatas that St. Maravillas adopted for her communities in 1947.

As we saw above, she adopted them to live more deeply her Teresian vocation. Alpargatas, rope soled sandals, had been adopted by St. Teresa of Jesus as the distinctive mark of her Reform. Teresa’s branch of the Carmelite Order were known as the “Discalced” Carmelites to distinguish them from the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance who were called the Calced Carmelites. [The words “Calced” and “Discalced” both come from the Latin “calceus”, that is “shoe”. “Calced” means those

who wear shoes, and “Disclaced” those who don’t wear shoes. There were a number of Discalced reformed religious Orders arising in the mid-16 century: the Camaldolese monks (1522), the Augustinians of St. Thomas of Jesus (1532), the Servites (1593), the Discalced Carmelites (1568), the Feuillants (1575), the Trinitarians (1594)].

Alpargatas were the footwear of the poor. Teresa adopted them for her Reform as a sign of poverty, but also as a sign of insignificance. In urging her daughters to avoid concern about money, she writes, “In my opinion honor and money almost always go together; anyone who wants honor doesn't despise money, and anyone who despises money doesn't care much about honor. Let this be clearly understood, for it seems to me that the desire for honor always brings with it some interest in money or income. It would be a wonder if any poor person were honored in the world.”^{lii} I Teresa’s mind, to identify with the poor was to identify in the disdain they experienced. She had experienced the honor of society in the parlors of the Incarnation, and she chose the contempt that the poor experienced as a way to share in the Cross of Christ. It was only after many years and extraordinary favors from God that Teresa became honored in the eyes of the world, an honor she did not appreciate, still less enjoy.

We hear an echo of this in St. Maravillas’s correspondence. In a letter to the Father General quoted above, she writes, “We are very happy, Our Father, with our bare feet. Before it was a disgrace, and it is very beautiful to see the enthusiasm with which all our communities have received it.” “Before it was a disgrace.” In this she recognizes the meaning of the alpargatas in the culture of her time, and like, Teresa, she embraces both the poverty and the contempt.

That was in 1947, 75 years ago. We have seen that the meaning of a symbol can change over time and geography. Do alpargatas, or espadrilles, as they are also known, still signify poverty and contempt in our culture? This is something that should be considered. Religious garb is a symbol, and like all symbols it expresses something to those who wear it and to those who see it. For a witness to be effective, the meaning that is expressed and the meaning that is perceived need to be similar. If they are not, then I am witnessing to the wrong value, no matter what my intention is.

It is for this reason that the expressions of religious life need to be revised so that what I am expressing truly will convey the meaning I intend. Just as I cannot insist that I am “silly” and assume that those who read this will know that I mean that I am pious and happy, in the same way, I cannot use expressions that in the minds of those who perceive them convey a different meaning from the one I intend. In order to witness, I need to know and understand those to whom I am witnessing.

This does not in the least mean that I have to give up the practices inherent to religious life. I simply need to find how best to express in this culture the values that those

practices were intended to express. The values remain, though the expressions of them may need to change. For this I need to dialogue with those to whom I witness. Do they perceive what I intend them to perceive?

Conclusion

In studying some aspects of the life of St. Maravillas of Jesus, we have focused on the meaning and importance of various practices, mostly external practices, in religious life. As I said, all practices are aimed at imitating Jesus Christ, but we have seen that in the beginning various practices have as their immediate goal to form me from without in this imitation of Christ. The practices act like the scaffolding around a building, supporting the necessary renovations and restructuring of the original. As I grow into a deeper knowledge of Him, the practices gradually lose this value as a support and, hopefully, are relinquished as I cease to rely on them through my attachment to them. As I grow into identification with Him, the scaffolding ceases to be scaffolding and becomes the witness to the interior reality of my union with Him. In this case, what was necessary at the beginning may be found to be unnecessary or even detrimental.

When I reach this identification with Him, I will know from Him how to express Him. I will know what exterior signs, words, symbols, garb, practices are suitable in every situation to reveal Him to the world. St. Maravillas came to understand this as is shown by what she told Mother Magdalena of Jesus in 1950: "She told me that she believed that what was important in our life was not the customs, but to unite ourselves to Jesus Christ and, in Him and with Him, to do the will of the Father. She thought that, depending on circumstances, Our Lord could make different demands."^{liii}

Jesus alone can enable me to reveal Him to others, and He will guide me to do it as He wills and how He wills.

Or, to quote St. Maravillas, "let Him do what He wills and blow where He wills."^{liv}

ⁱ P. Angel Peña O.A.R, Maravillas de Jesus, S. Millan, 2019, p.6

ⁱⁱ Baldomero Jimenez Duque, "Saint Maravillas of Jesus", p. 8

ⁱⁱⁱ Jose Maria Iraburu, « Maravillas de Jesus, Carmelita, Descalza Santa », Fundacion Gratis Date, Pampolona 2003, p. 4

^{iv} Duque, p. 10

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid. and Duque, p.13

^{vii} Pena, p. 11

^{viii} Pena, p. 11

^{ix} Pena, p. 11 and Duque, p. 15

^x Duque, p. 18

^{xi} Pena, p.12

-
- xii Duque, p. 11
xiii Duque, p. 19
xiv Iraburu, p. 4
xv Duque, p. 19
xvi Iraburu, p. 4
xvii “Madre Maravillas de Jesus – Con Amor Y Dolor », by Mother Magdalena of Jesus, OCD, p. 7-8
xviii Iraburu, p. 31
xix Ibidem.
xx Gal. 2, 19-20
xxi Jas. 3,2
xxii Matt. 16, 24
xxiii “Dark Night”, I, 1, 2-3
xxiv Matt. 26, 35
xxv 1 Cor. 2, 16
xxvi Cf. 1 Cor. 2, 6
xxvii 1 Cor. 2, 7 & 9-13
xxviii 1 Cor. 2, 14
xxix 1 Cor. 3, 1-4
xxx Col. 3, 5 & 8
xxxi Col. 3, 12
xxxii Cf. Jn 13, 34
xxxiii Catechism of the Catholic Church #1806
xxxiv Cf. Lk 18, 17
xxxv “Dark Night”, II, 2, 1
xxxvi “Dark Night” II, 4, 1
xxxvii “Dark Night” II, 4, 1
xxxviii Ibid. pp. 6-7
xxxix Ibid. p. 9
xl Ibid. p. 9
xli Ibid. p. 7
xlii Duque, p. 114
xliii Iraburu, p. 7
xliv “Let Him Do It”, Carmels of Cerro and La Aldehula,, 1979 ,p. 210
xlv Let Him Do It,” pp. 210-211
xlvi <https://www.etymonline.com/word/silly>
xlvii <https://www.etymonline.com/word/gay>
xlviii Gen. 9, 4
xlix <https://www.britannica.com/topic/swastika>

[li <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-does-everybody-think-jfk-said-im-jelly-donut-180963779/#:~:text=Yes%2C%20President%20John%20Fitzgerald%20Kennedy,never%20said%20anythin%20about%20donuts.>](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-does-everybody-think-jfk-said-im-jelly-donut-180963779/#:~:text=Yes%2C%20President%20John%20Fitzgerald%20Kennedy,never%20said%20anythin%20about%20donuts.)

- lii “Way of Perfection” 2, 6
liii “M. Maravillas de Jesus – Con Amor Y Dolor », p. 82
liv Iraburu, p. 31