

Notre Dame de Sion
“SAINT JOHN IN MONTANA”
Congregational Novitiate Jerusalem

Ein Karem, Friday, 29 July 2016

The month of July was an intensive one for us. In the middle of June, Sr. Juliana had left for Brazil to participate in the 26th General Chapter of the Congregation, as an elected delegate of the Mediterranean Region. In her absence, Sr. Ivone assumed additional responsibility in the Novitiate, and throughout the month Sr. Elizabeth Losinsky led the novices in a study on the Origins of Sion, taking both the mornings and afternoons, for that. This gave the novices an opportunity for the deeper reflection on our Sion History that many of us sisters would only dream of doing.

Before the departure of Elizabeth later in July, the four Novices shared the projects they had created in relation to their study with her. The projects were a combination of research and reflection, presented in power point. Andrea's project was on the life of prayer that we find in the accounts about Fr. Theodore, Fr. Alphonse and the first sisters. She also included what the Constitution tells us today about the life of prayer at Sion. Theodore could see, discern, interpret, hear, do and breathe God's will! He said that we can read the signs of God's leading, in relations with people (P), in events (E), in nature (N), and in Scripture (S), if we are attentive to them.

Lucia presented her project on the theme of the spirituality that Fr. Theodore and Fr. Alphonse lived, and with which they guided the first sisters. She also explored the question: what is our spirituality today? Through Ms. Louise Human, Theodore was influenced by the spirituality of the Rhineland Mystics, which was based on *“to know more in order to love more.”* To know more and to have knowledge about many things, as the means to assist others, led Theodore to undertake medical studies in order to help the children. The Rhineland spirituality is biblical, and because Scripture is full of references to nature, this spirituality can be also creational. Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si* *“The story of creation, in Genesis, is central to reflection on the relationship between human beings and other creatures. The Genesis story suggests that human existence is based on three fundamental relationships: a relationship with God, with others, and with the earth”*. As Theodore said about 150 years ago, *“We have three ways to find God: through the Bible, the human heart, and nature”*. For Theodore it is essential that one wants to hear God, recognizes God's voice, and listens to it. The *Sh'ma Israel* includes the command for Israel to love God with all their heart, soul, etc., as well as Israel's commitment to hear and do God's will. We too as religious, need to hear and do God's will. Theodore reminded the sisters that *“in religious life we are called to give who we are, not only what we have.”*

Nancy's project became a way of deepening her understanding of the Charism of Sion, using the words of Fr. Theodore as they were understood in his time and today. She also explored how Alphonse would explain it. Even though Theodore was already living biblical values in his family and in his priestly ministry, his interior desire to seek God's will persisted, and eventually found responses in significant events such as the founding of the catechumenate. Signs were given to him; two by the Virgin: one on January 20, 1842 in her apparition to Alphonse at Sant Andrea Delle Fratte in Rome, and the other on August 8, 1842, when the Church, in the person of Gregory XVI, confirmed Theodore's mission. In his interpretation of these events, far from trusting his own discernment, he gave equal importance to the reactions of others” (Theodore Ratisbonne, *Correspondence and documents*, p.57). The seed of Theodore's spirituality became a tree of love. The love he had lived in the depths of his heart was to be poured out for God's people (the Jewish people), but how could this happen? Alphonse had an influence in this. *“It was the Blessed Virgin who inspired Mary Alphonse with the idea of founding a house for the conversion of young Jewesses, but our work must not be limited to this special task, it must be broad and embrace all spiritual works”* (Theodore Ratisbonne, *Correspondence and Documents*, p. 296).



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By means of her project, Maria launched us into reflection on Apostolic Commitment, Ministry, and Mission in the eyes of Fr. Theodore and Fr. Alphonse. She also included what the Constitution tells us about ministry today. Theodore was commissioned by Pope Gregory XVI to work for the sick and the poor, with Protestants and Catholics, and when possible in a Jewish milieu; this took shape with the help of Sophie Stouhlen, who arrived in Paris in 1843. The first foundation of Our Lady of Sion was a house for the neophytes, in Paris.

She presented the development of the foundations and ministries by looking at the foundations and ministries within the context of its place and time. Therefore, as we can see the spirit of the charism is expressed in different ways today, our vocation leads us to greater awareness of the Jewish roots in the Church and the understanding of Judaism itself.

Being aware of the spirit and the inspiration of our Constitution, we are also aware of the call of the Chapter, it encourage us as Church and Religious Congregation to grow in promoting an attitude of justice with regard to the Jewish people and to all people. We have the responsibility to fight against all forms of exclusion, racism and anti-Semitism in particular as our commitments are in diversity/varying: in our commitment on education, catechetical, pastoral, etc.

This approach made us see how the Congregation respond to the need or the call of the world and the Church until today. With this, she included what the Constitution tells us about ministry today and even the call and the priority of the Chapter in the Congregation wherever we are in the different parts of the world.

These projects, which involved not only research but personal reflection as well, keep the novices alert, during the whole session with Elizabeth, to whatever they might learn about their particular themes from the Origins of Sion.

We had good moments of celebration for the birthdays of Elisabeth and Colette, and a little farewell party with the Jerusalem community for Sr. Elisabeth, who so generously gave the Novitiate six weeks of her time, on the Origins of Sion.

Juliana returned from Brazil overjoyed and energized by her experience at the Chapter. She shared some moments of it with us and brought us the Chapter's spirit of commitment for our future in Sion.

We are taking the last week of July as a time for some relaxation, with some visits in Jerusalem. On Sunday, the 31st of July, we will begin a one-week session of the Elijah Seminar on the theme of “Religious Leadership” which looks very promising.

Juliana for the St. John in Montana community