



WORDS OF FAREWELL AND TRANSMISSION OF RESPONSIBILITY TO MERCEDES AND ALBERTO

Dearest friends in faith, Mercedes GOMEZ-FERRER and Alberto PEREZ BUENO, Father Augusto GARCIA, dear family of the Teams of Our Lady, team members and spiritual counsellors coming from all over the world, spiritual advisors, ecclesiastical and civil authorities, special guests, speakers, translators, logistic team and volunteers of this XIII INTERNATIONAL GATHERING which is coming to an end, dear couples members of the new ERI, dear Father Ricardo LONDOÑO, friend and international spiritual counsellor, dear Paola and Giovanni, inseparable companions and international secretaries, Mariola and Elizeu, Bernadette and Sylvestre, Thérèse and Antoine and Faye and Kevin, our spiritual family and road companions of these six years of responsibility in the ERI 2018-2024 that today, like us, conclude their responsibility.

In a few moments, for the International Responsible Team that we have led since the now distant Fatima 2018 and for us as international responsible, will end an adventure that with many fears and doubts, with great insecurity and much bewilderment, began on 11 March 2017. At the end of an ERI meeting in Munich, Germany, we were unexpectedly approached by To and Zé, previous international responsible couple, who without any prior preparation or any sedative to cushion the news, told us a brief phrase that would change our lives: *Clarita and Edgardo, in the collegiality of the ERI, the Spirit has set its eyes on you to appoint you as the next international responsible couple of our Movement, assuming your service next year at the end of the Fatima 2018 meeting.*

Without going into details, as we were really in a state of shock, we can only tell you that this news takes a long time and a lot of reflection to be internalised, assimilated and confronted, and it is a shock for the most serene of mortals.

Our life in the Teams of Our Lady movement, since we joined in 1997, became a revelation where the experience of encountering Christ in the conjugality of our relationship changed forever the perspective of our spirituality and made us aware, not of the need to assume a mission, but to understand that our life was a mission, as our dear Marina Marcolini noted in this morning's reflection when she quoted Pope Francis in GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE (27), who in turn quoted Xavier de Zubiri, that wonderful Spanish philosopher and theologian, who said: "life does not have a mission, but is a mission".

However, despite this certainty that governed our lives, this call caused us much anxiety, took away our peace and generated a deep doubt that we were not capable of taking on this unimaginable service. We were afraid of being inferior to the expectations of those who had set their eyes on us, simply because we were very mistaken and with a wavering faith, which made us focus our discernment on our ability : ability to control what we believed was necessary to take on this immeasurable mission, instead of concentrating on the docility, abandonment and renunciation that is sustained by the absolute trust that the Lord is with us and in the conviction that he does not call us because we are capable but to make us capable in spite of our frailties.

As Pope Francis says in the same quote from GE 27, "Could the Holy Spirit urge us to carry out a mission and then ask us to abandon it, or not fully engage in it, so as to preserve our inner peace? Yet there are times when we are tempted to relegate pastoral engagement or commitment in the world to second place, as if these were "distractions" along the path to growth in holiness and interior peace." Where were all our convictions, our certainties?

It was then that we decided to withdraw to a retreat house that was opened just for us, and where we had the presence of the Blessed Sacrament for three days, during which we could talk aloud, pray, express our innermost feelings, interrupted only by a discreet and distant bell with which the nuns



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announced to us that the table was served. At the end of those three days of intimate encounter with the Lord, we realised the seriousness of our mistake and we were ashamed of our lack of faith. With tears we asked Our Lord for forgiveness for our arrogance and decided to abandon ourselves to Him and trust. It was only at that moment that we were invaded by a feeling of peace where the uncertainties that kept going through our heads no longer worried us, but accumulated as challenges to overcome in which we had the certainty that we were not alone because we would only be docile instruments in the hands of the Lord, so that He could do with us what He wanted, including all that we did not understand and that was revealed only with the passing of time. That was the preamble to our FIAT.

Never before had we understood so clearly the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians when he said: "And He said to me: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will most gladly rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." When we gave our YES, after that discernment that took us more than a month, we did so with a calmness so great, of which we ourselves were in awe and which could only come from the Spirit who is peace-giving.

This same story that we have just shared with you was shared with our dear Mercedes and Alberto, when in Lomé, Togo, in March last year, we made the call that, in the collegiality of the ERI, the Spirit had inspired us.

History was repeating itself, only this time, we were able not only to make the call, but also to bear witness to the "Grace of State" that comes with a call such as the one we were making to them and which we had received without the slightest doubt and which we wanted them, above and beyond any recommendation, to always bear in mind.

We said to Alberto and Mercedes that in our weakness, we looked back and could only marvel at the wonders that the Lord had worked in us during these years of service, which were an impossible challenge to overcome as we had initially thought, until we decided to abandon ourselves to Him. In addition, these years were accompanied by an unprecedented pandemic that not even the most qualified pessimist could have imagined. The Lord does not promise us a carpeted path to follow, but He does guarantee that He is at our side to sustain us, even in the face of an avalanche such as a pandemic.

In spite of all this, here we are today, as in the parable of the talents, handing over to the Lord the talents, positive and negative, that we received, multiplied by his grace and with the awareness of having been not only useless servants, but of having decided with this ERI to give all that we had, to the limit of our own weaknesses.

Today, with our hearts overflowing with joy and gratitude, we stand before you, thanking the Lord for sustaining us along the way, allowing us to move forward, not in spite of our weaknesses but with them, with the intercession of Our Mother and with the inestimable treasure of friendship, charisms and the diversity of a support team in which we learned to love each other, allowing ourselves to be strengthened in our weaknesses and helping each other from our strengths. With a team that consolidated itself as a true family, always seeking to work in search of the truth, celebrating successes and recovering from falls, in the encounter and even in the differences that may arise along the way, for it is in them that true fraternity emerges.

This is the end of this six-year journey which, under the general orientation "Don't be afraid, let's go out", has allowed us to make a journey in a missionary perspective, taking a sequential route which, after several stages, has brought us to the last one in which we can understand the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life.



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We thank the international College and the whole Movement for having travelled this road together, for the affection, solidarity and support received in all these years and especially in those of the pandemic that forced each one of us to be more essential, stronger, more creative and resilient in all the Christian sense of the word.

Thank you, Father Ricardo, who was simply Ricardo, a true friend and guide for each one of us, thank you, Mercedes and Alberto for your affection and permanent support, thank you Paola and Giovanni, Mariola and Elizeu, Bernadette and Sylvestre, Thérèse and Antoine and Faye and Kevin, for being who you are and for having accepted us as we are, helping us to grow and to improve ourselves and also thanks to Hermelinda and Arturo, to Dora and João and to Marcia and Paulo for having been part of this story.

Dear Mercedes and Alberto, to pass the baton to you is to hand over the future and hope to a movement that today more than ever needs new blood to face new challenges. Do have the firm conviction that from the very moment you accepted this call, the Lord, through His Spirit, has invested you and conferred on you that GRACE OF STATE to which we referred, to support you in your mission, helping you to overcome the challenges you encounter along the way. He will surround you with instruments of His grace as will undoubtedly be our dear friend Father Augusto Garcia and all his teammates who have also been called to be co-responsible for your mission.

Go ahead, dear friends, continue to build the future, and continue to preserve and disseminate this treasure of conjugal spirituality of which we are only custodians, with the fresh air of a new orientation of life that will allow us to continue building the solid spiritual tower of the Movement, always anchored to the imperishable and solid charism of conjugal spirituality, fidelity to the principles that inspire us and to all that has been built in these 85 years of life with the breath that the Spirit inspired in all those who preceded you. Never lose humility and let go of your own securities, resting only on the unique certainty of knowing that it is always the Lord who acts in you as long as he has room in your hearts and you invite him to guide your every step.

Congratulations, friends in faith, our prayers and those of the whole family of Teams of Our Lady will accompany you on your journey, which is the same as that of the whole Movement, because, taking the liberty of paraphrasing our dear and appreciated Gabriella Gambino in her talk before the Eucharist, "Only a movement that lives communion within itself, as ours does, can be the object of effective evangelisation".

We welcome you with great emotion and joy.

Farewell,

CLARITA AND EDGARDO BERNAL FANDIÑO, International Responsible Couple 2018-2024

