

**Interview with Sr. Alice Jurugo Drajea,
Superior General of the Sisters Sacred Heart of Jesus**

Sister Alice, can you share with us how you resonate with the theme of the UISG plenary for this year which is *EMBRACING VULNERABILITY* in a synodal journey?

As a woman religious I resonate with this theme very well. In Africa, as a woman



religious we live in a world of fragility, where there is a lot of violence that is difficult to understand the suffering of the people. There is poverty and then we experience different faces of vulnerability in terms of financial poverty within the congregation and also in the society economic difficulties and even ideological issues how people understand us as religious is completely out of their understanding it's like a religions i have taken a path less travelled by many in the society and at the level of the church I realized as a woman religious I don't have firm foot in the dioceses for example my

congregation is of diocesan right but you find that your voice is not really well heard. The clergy in the parishes do not include you in decision making there is always constant battling with having our voices heard as if we are not part of the catholic church so this is how I resonate with the with this aspect of the theme.

We have a keyword which is *VULNERABILITY* and you mentioned something but I would like to ask you how and when do you experience *VULNERABILITY* at the personal level?

At the personal level I feel vulnerable in various ways when I am not **LISTENED** to for example you as a congregation you take certain decision at your top leadership level and when you hand it over to the church hierarchy the bishop and then he doesn't take any action. I feel **VULNERABLE, IGNORED** in matters that are constitutional it's like an open rejection of you as a part of this church.

We are also vulnerable at the congregation when we are unable to help as we would like to help the poor with whom we live who come to our doors for help. This is our vulnerability. Then the other one is the situation of insecurity in South Sudan that is beyond our control and as you might have heard last year on the August 16 two of our sisters who were returning home from a good celebration were shot dead. As a superior general as a member of the congregation it was beyond my control and they died for **nothing**. Lastly the situation of refugees, some of my sisters are working among the refugees it is beyond our control so I feel vulnerable even as a superior general that is what I cannot respond to and fix it up.

Yes we remember when the sisters were shot dead last year I understand that it is very difficult to deal with this situation when you are a leader so sister Alice actually we have been experiencing during this covid time a bigger weakness and vulnerability for leaders dealing with this new situation also after covid we will have a new situation in religious life and society so how do you feel and how do you cope with this *VULNERABILITY* of a leader?

As a leader the only way of coping with this situation is keeping in touch through the technology, now that we have the phones to call the sisters may be the sister is not well may be the community is deeply affected we keep in touch. So far within the congregation we have not been able to set zoom meetings and things like that but we were able to call them by phone and talk to them. Definitely they covered the situation that knows no boundary has accelerated vulnerability at every facet to the point of death and then insecurity, in south Sudan it remains a very poignant point of feeling insecure and the insecurity gives rise to poverty because when there is insecurity people cannot move to look for what they can for their families even us we cannot reach out to the peripheries as we should to meet the poor people we are not able to go especially after physically experiencing the killing of our sisters we find ourselves vulnerable and the other aspect is the imposed policy by government which overrules the congregational rules. It becomes very difficult especially in our province of Uganda where policies from education and health. The sisters once they are placed in a certain place you cannot transfer them so it is very difficult for us.

Sister which is the main challenge for the religious life from your point of view in Africa at this time?

At this moment the biggest challenge is the financial insecurity because without money you cannot help even your own sisters in the case of sickness when they expect the superiors to go and visit them we don't have the right vehicles to reach them because most of our roads are not good and it requires a good cars which we are not able to afford so sisters are starving and longing for us to reach them. Then the system of the country last two years I have not been able to go to Sudan because I am an Ugandan passport holder and a visa for me to go to Sudan has not been easy and the sisters there really are expecting me so these are really the most important issues. Financial insecurity, insecurity at large and then the bigger political system.

Thank you sister for your sharing because actually listening to you we became aware of the variety of needs and also the differences within religious life throughout the world and the UISG for all the congregations with their specific needs. Now I would like now to move on to your experience of SYNODALITY in your congregation or in the church when do you experience?

I experience **SYNODALITY** in the Archdiocese of Juba, as the many religious congregations and the local clergy many times came together to celebrate joyful events like the **centenary of the faith** in 2019. Our sisters joyfully got involved in all these preparations even in the moments of sadness when we lose our sisters or a diocesan priest we all come together to pray and support each other. Then when the youth of Juba after Christmas organized Christmas carol in the local treaters to raise money for building their church we supported them by participating in it even though it was outside of Christmas. But we were there to listen to these young people who were delighted that we came to support them and we had a good traditional dance together so I feel that is really a part of the **SYNODALITY**. This also gave us opportunity to meet these young people who long to have some direction from us because in Juba we have a certain terrible culture of young people who call themselves *Toronto youth* I am sure the people in Canada will not be happy to hear this because these are young people who have gone out of hand they take drugs they sniff stuff and they live very reckless life stealing, beating and even raping women. I saw with my own eyes on the 26th of December when I took for a walk from my generalate to go to see the postulants there were hundreds of them all streaming towards the airport and then the police were after them. This is a big problem especially in Juba city. The government and we still don't know how to handle these young people who have gone out of the way to live a certain culture which does not resemble any culture in Africa.

This is really a challenge for you as sisters and also for the church to accompany these young people to find the sense and meaning in their life. Sister which is your dream for the upcoming synod 2023 on SYNODALITY what would you like to envision of a Synodal church?

My dream is to have a greater collaboration which is already happening at the **UISG** level and also in our association of consecrated women in the central and eastern Africa in terms of offering courses for superiors and leaders. It so good because sometimes you are elected as a leader and you are not prepared like the political leadership when have to campaign you will have prepared. Sometimes this a vote fall on you when you are ill-prepared but now the association of sisters have realized this and they are giving out courses that can help people in leadership to give the skills and also other topics like interculturality which help the younger sisters and the senior sisters to live amicably without rubbing shoulders. It is so important for us even though outside people may say in Africa all the cultures are same. It is not true Africa is so much fragmented that in one country like in south Sudan there are 64 different tribes and each tribe has its own culture sometimes I don't understand the culture of the other and the other don't understand my culture so there is a real need preparing our religious in Africa to understand these differences that the differences are not against you but the differences are meant to make things better and for the glory of God

Thank you sister highlighting the intercultural challenges for the continent because in Europe it is very easy to say that all Africa is same and when we actually see they many different countries like French, Portuguese, Spain or England. So thank you very much for underlining this. Sister Alice, before ending this interview could you please share with us a story were from a situation of vulnerability you were able to let life come up?

I love that story because it is the story of my congregation of the **Sisters of the sacred heart of Jesus** founded in south Sudan in 1954 and in 1963 all our founders were expelled by the Islamic government of Sudan so the young congregation less than 10 years old was left unguided. So the sisters fled into Uganda they reunited with some of the animators of the company of the missionaries. The sisters were resistant and they did not give up they remained firm and grew up both in number and in apostolate. My congregation now has the bigger number of sisters and postulates more in the land of exile than in the mother country of the foundation for me this was a very strong situation of fragility and vulnerability but it turned out to be a joyful a very pleasant story and our founder himself **Bishop Sixtus Mazzoldi**, a Comboni missionary who did not give up while in Uganda as a refugee he went ahead and founded another congregations the **Apostles of Jesus** and the **Evangelizing Sisters of Mary** and they are now working all over the world so this has given us also the insite that whatever bad things has happened don't give up the lord is with you and use the whatever is in

the situation and make it a joyful moment and the lord will always guide you so the story of my congregation is like the phoenix bird rising from the ashes and flying again.

Thank you sister for this inspiring and interesting interview. We know that you are coming to Rome in May to participate in the plenary but now can you give a message to all the religious sisters would be listening to your interview.

To all my dear sisters consecrated in the service of God ,this Synodal journey is an opportunity for us to tell our stories and share our stories and the different stories that we have it is really meant to build us up in carrying on the faith in our lord Jesus Christ and whatever opportunity that is offered like on webinars we need to open up. I know technology gap is big like today is my first time to do this but with a little help and encouragement I have been helped to communicate with Patricia on this theme of the plenary so let us not be afraid we can risk a little but knowing that there will always be rescue for us so let us open up and I look forward to this plenary that we will come and perhaps talk more about the post covid issues how we can pick up the pieces where we left there is so much we can do thank you.

Thank you sister and thank you for inviting and encouraging sisters to tell the story which is the goal of this interview that we are we have been taking with superior general until the assembly thank very much sister Alice and we wish you the best.

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