

The New Normal

In the aftermath of the great silence which fell upon our cities because of the Covid-19 lockdown, we have begun to hear voices being raised once again. There are many and frequently they are discordant. With the risk of a Babel of reflections, solicitations, government edicts, recommendations ... there is a strangely current and unusual secular echo of the Sequence of Pentecost – “Come, Holy Spirit ..., come, father of the poor ..., heal our wounds, bend the stubborn, warm the chill, guide the steps that go astray”, because “without your spirit, nothing in man shall be”.

“Nothing in man” and equally “in woman”. While we have experienced our personal frailty and the fragility of our model of society and that of the Church, all of us would like to escape this situation as soon as possible but realise this cannot come about simply by words or wishful thinking. Without doubt, we look for facts as we eagerly await better treatments, a vaccine that can eradicate the virus, economic subsidies. But these will not be enough. In order to face what awaits us, with all the uncertainties, it has been suggested that what we need is “the anti-virus of fraternity”, a new, more decisive and more real fraternity. A fraternity not just within our own circle and nation but one which is worldwide. However, even this may not be enough. It is unlikely that we will suddenly all be good. Instead...

At the Easter Vigil, Pope Francis considered the setback and fears aroused by the pandemic against the background of the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection. We can see ourselves - he observed - in the feelings of the women who go to Jesus' tomb early in the morning. “They had seen death and had death in their hearts. Pain was accompanied by fear [...] fears for the future, everything would have to be rebuilt”. And he spoke of the hope that is not only that “everything will be fine”, important and touching as that might be, but also of “a new, living hope that comes from God. [...] A gift from Heaven which we could not procure by ourselves”; a different hope because “it instils in our heart the certainty that God knows how to turn everything to good, because even from the grave he brings out life”.

As never before, all of us, in one way or another, have lived an experience which parallels the events which the liturgical year proposes to us: a prolonged Lent / quarantine; a Good Friday silence in the streets and squares, and even more in the hearts of those who live in anguish for the future of their family, their work, their business; the announcement of the resurrection which also sees us incredulous and fearful, like the disciples, locked up indoors and with their own uncertainties.

Francis goes on: “But in this situation the women do not allow themselves to be paralyzed. They do not give in to the dark forces of lamentation and regret, they do not lock

themselves up in pessimism, they do not flee from reality. They accomplish something simple and extraordinary: in their homes they prepare perfumes for the body of Jesus. They do not renounce love: in the darkness of their hearts they light up mercy. [...] These women, without knowing it, prepared in the darkness of that Saturday “the dawn of the first day of the week”, the day that would change history”.

We long for facts, even simple ones, which will have an immediate impact in the here and now. Ultimately, though we know that it is not we, with our own strength, who change history. All of us, Christians of various Churches and faithful of different religions, have given witness together with the Day of Prayer, Fasting and Charitable Works of the 14th May which was promoted by the Interreligious Higher Committee for Human Fraternity which was established after the signing of the Abu Dhabi document.

As Christians, then, we cannot remain silent or hide or overlook what the root of hope is for us. We are called, all together, to be witnesses of an event that has made an irreversible change in the journey of humanity; witnesses who recount it not as a fact from the past but something which is lived, suffered, discovered and experienced in their own flesh.

We are invited to start afresh from the shocking experience of Easter – that of Jesus and ours in these times -, like those first disciples, aware that we ourselves are not the saviours. However, we can prepare the way for the great things that God who goes before us accomplishes. Galilee, Francis pointed out: “the region furthest from where they were, from Jerusalem [...] the most distant place from the sacredness of the Holy City. [...] is where Jesus tells the disciples to go, to start again from there”. “What does this tell us?” - he continued - “It tells us that the announcement of hope should not be confined to our sacred enclosures but should be brought to everyone. [...] In every Galilee, in every region of that humanity to which we belong and which belongs to us, because we are all brothers and sisters”.

What awaits us? What will life be like - and how will ecclesial life be reconfigured - after this experience? Better not to know and let it come as a surprise! “The goal is Heaven”, Chiara Lubich loved to repeat: we must not go ahead of God but follow him, guided step by step by his Gospel, by his words that spur us to welcome one another and to meet challenges with a tenacious and ever more burning commitment. If we do this then afterwards - yes - we will know what it was we experienced and be able to recount it.

This issue of *Ekklesia* intends to place itself at the service of this adventure: to narrate the Gospel today, in a new way, unprecedented in some respects, in a way which is concrete and even secular, one proven by facts and experiences. For humanity at this time of suffering and unknowns, and contradictions there are also resources and potential, even if we are now a little less self-confident and distracted, but we are still engaged in the search.

Hubertus Blaumeiser