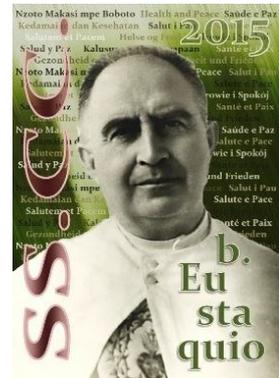


Violence

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In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which (...) makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters. So, be men and women of communion! Have the courage to be present in the midst of conflict and tension...

Pope Francis, Letter to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (November 21, 2014)

A violent world

Last month I participated in the provincial Chapter of Mexico. The point of departure for the reflection was the situation of violence through which their country is passing. "Mexico is in mourning," they said, "already 100,000 dead, 30,000 disappeared, hundreds displaced, so many others kidnapped, thousands bowed and millions transfixed by fear." How striking!

Throughout the world examples of extreme violence are innumerable. Some reverberate in the media (acts of terror in rich countries, wars in Europe) while others surface less in public media (ongoing massacres in places like Africa and the Middle East.)

There is violence all over, not only where guns are involved. It takes many forms: domestic violence, aggressive speech, xenophobic insults, indifference in face of others' sufferings.

What is central to violence is **the desire to eliminate the other**. The person who is violent looks at the one who is disturbing him or her and considers that person an enemy, a nuisance whose disappearance would improve his or her life. Getting rid of them provokes a hidden but distinct pleasure.

In all of us there palpitates a latent violence. Its multiple manifestations lead to the assumption that in the interior of human beings there is a brute that awaits the right moment to attack. We are not as good as we would ingenuously like to think we are. Goodness will always be an interior victory over the violence which lives within us and

spontaneously erupts.

"From extortion and violence he redeems us" (Psalm 72: 14)

If we speak of healing and reconciliation, if we seek reparation and redemption we cannot avoid confronting violence: the violence of others and our own violence.

Getting rid of violence doesn't mean eliminating **anger**. There is good, necessary and urgent anger. Jesus was not violent but he was no quietist, neither phlegmatic nor immune to provocation. In the gospel we see him burning with a holy rage, when all that people showed was a hardness of heart, when people -manipulating religious practice- showed a lack of compassion for those who suffer, a contempt for persons who are sinners.

"Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart..." (Mark 3:5). I like this heart of Jesus, full of anger, pain, sadness, indignation when people are put down harshly. I do not know how to heal the bad if the hurt that the badness provokes does not scorch me.

This pain of Jesus reminds me of the invitation to cry which Pope Francis gave us recently when he was in Manila: *Only when Christ wept, and he was capable of weeping, did he understand our troubles.... The marginalized weep, those who are neglected weep, the scorned weep, but those of us who have relatively comfortable life, we don't know how to weep. Certain realities of life are seen only with eyes that are cleansed by tears. ...If you don't learn how to weep, you are not a good Christian... Be brave. Don't be afraid to cry!* (Manila, January 18 2015)

Jesus saves us from violence because **evil pained him**. He cries with rage and pain. Jesus breaks down in tears when faced with people who did not grasp his message of peace (Luke 19: 41-44).

Thus his anger is not transmuted into a desire to destroy his enemy. On the contrary, the gospel of Jesus is always a hand extended to an adversary. Loving does not consist in shutting down on the person thought to be evil. Love is disposed to walk and work with the one who is against me, the person who pushes me to the edge. Love looks out for his salvation, even to the point of giving my life for him or her.

"Be angry but do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26)

If the pain of those who suffer and the hurts inflicted on the poor do not provoke our anger, the Kingdom of God is not being promoted in us. Furthermore, if our anger is transmuted into destructive violence we would certainly not be collaborating in the mission, doing what Jesus wants.

The reparative charism of the Congregation invites us to channel our rage for the Reign of justice, peace and joy. Neither a conformist "just fitting in" nor a passive "putting up with" helps. Neither response creates new energy. Nothing is renewed. The truth is that the energy of anger can serve to combat evil and transform reality.

A lot of energy is needed **to resist violence**. One has to be brave to prevent the violent person from trampling on the meek and little. Often in our own communities, in the church itself, in society, in the world the menacing voice of the more arrogant

suffocates in fear the aspirations of the less strong. To resist the violent one, the tactic to follow is that of Jesus: to place myself so that the blows fall on me and not on the others, to pay with my own person the price of peace and reconciliation.

We must -above all else- resist the violence that we all carry within us. The strategy of the violent person is to ridicule his enemy. He reduces the other person to a caricature. This permits him then to destroy his victim without remorse. This approach is habitual among politicians, fanatical racists and nationalists. Now let's own up. It happens in religious circles too, yes, in the church and even among brothers living in community.

To overcome our interior violence, we need to transform the way we look at each other. We need neither to approach another fearing a threat nor to await catching him in his defects. Rather, let's come with a desire to get involved with him, to understand, to serve. **This conversion of the way we look at each other** brings us to see him more truthfully, doing justice to his inalienable dignity and the meaning that he puts into what he says and does. The conversion of the way we look at each other discovers in the other a brother, securely diverse and at times adverse but never an enemy to be beaten up.

The conversion of the way we look at each other is not possible without a decision of the heart in favor of the other, a decision to love. We can only come to know each other if we love each other. In reality the conversion is impossible without the interior action of the Holy Spirit. Only the gift in grace of the Risen Lord can overcome violence and give true peace.



Cover PHOTO: Jesus tied to the column.
Sagrada Familia (Barcelona, Spain), The Passion façade.