

And where are we looking?

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In August of this year, during one of the sessions of the Provincial Chapter of the Province of Chile, the brothers listened to the story of an adult person who, as a youngster, was abused by a brother of the Congregation. At that time, this young person was one of many young people taking part in youth ministry. The pastoral ministry was animated and accompanied by brothers of the Congregation. At one point in the story, the person speaking asked the brothers gathered in Chapter: "Where were you looking that you did not see that young people were being abused?" This question, that is on the lips of many other people who have been abused, reveals our personal myopia or institutional blindness: serious situations happening before our eyes that we did not see or did not want to see. It is a question that also points to what we do with what we see, what changes occur in each one of us, or in our family or in the institutional Church. The investigations of the media have helped us to see more clearly these instances of abuse, some of which have lasted for years, and have revealed to us the cover-up practices we have used to avoid seeing them.

The reality of abuse is experienced at another level when the person who has been abused, whom we have known for years in our pastoral work, states very clearly that one of our brothers, with whom we may live or have lived, has abused him or her and then asks us face to face: "And where were you looking at that time that you didn't see anything?" Such a question stirs us out of our drowsiness and blindness to things that are happening before our eyes today. We are given information and yet do not see it, remain insensitive, unaffected. I present a brief list of things that you are all able to add to: climate change, forced migration, absence of credible and proactive leaders, changes in our consumption practices, weakening of societal bonds, loneliness at a times of

hyperconnectivity, etc. In the Church, too, there are things that are happening that perhaps we still do not see and so are unaffected: ranging from the discourse on the role

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of the laity and the importance of women, to different practices and forms of ministry, to generating more participation at all levels in the journeys and directions that the churches are making. Many times I ask myself: What else has to happen to us in our societies - which are increasingly similar - or in our churches - with shared and deep longings - for us to see and act differently?

Where does Jesus look?

To learn how Jesus looks, it is good for us to situate ourselves among the disciples and the crowds that accompany him. Like them, we know that Jesus is walking with us. His gaze is directed, for example, at a procession that is taking a dead person to be buried. He stops and focuses his gaze on the mother and is moved. Jesus sees and is affected by what he sees. What guides his actions is his gaze full of mercy, a look which draws him into the drama whereby he can see and take in what is happening. He does not keep his distance from what he is seeing, nor does he make speeches so that others may see and act. He acts in the first person. Approaching the woman he says: "Do not cry" (Lk 7:13). As he approaches the stretcher, he touches it and says to the deceased young man: "Young man, I tell you, get up" (Lk 7:14). The text tells us how all those who accompanied Jesus as well as those who accompanied the widowed woman were seized by fear and gave glory to God. Jesus' gesture opened their eyes and they saw what they had not seen before. He brings them closer and makes them witnesses to the desolation of the woman at the loss of her only child, putting before them the question of the death of a young man. Seeing the authority vested in the actions and words of Jesus, the disciples and the multitudes also see, more and more, who Jesus is: "A great prophet has raised up among us" (Lk 7:17).

What are we discussing as we walk along? (Cf. Lk. 24:17)

In the second week of September, in the brothers' Generalate, we hosted a meeting of the General Commission of Initial Formation, together with the formators of the fourth stage. During the meeting, there was a time set aside to speak about formation and the vows. Addressing this central issue, Derek proposed as a framework the importance of being able to have conversations about our experience of God and about our sexuality. It could be argued that these subjects have already been addressed in sessions of Initial Formation or spiritual renewal! However, it was felt that we lack adequate, trustworthy spaces where we can talk about what happens to us in our relationship with God and our sexuality. These are two vital dimensions of our life that permeate our feelings, our way of relating to God and others, our identity, our choices. In this way, we can see the importance of creating spaces where brothers of all ages can talk about their relationship with God, about what opens them up to encountering God, their struggles, at times their moments of darkness or experiences of the desert, their questions and searches. God never stops surprising us when God is present or when we feel God is absent. Sometimes we don't have the words to articulate to ourselves what is happening to us with God. At other times, it is hard for us to be open at this level with the brothers in the community

or even among brothers of a similar age. It is not more easy to speak of God to others in preaching, and it not less difficult to speak of God in front of the brothers.

Regarding sexuality something similar can happen to us. We have information, we can even guide others in matters of sexuality, personal accompaniment or confession. But for each one of us to share about how we are living our sexuality today, the history that each one of us carries with us in this regard, is another thing. Are we able to present our needs and wants, to celebrate the delights and joy of a well-assumed sexuality that is lived in a choice of celibacy for Jesus. Are we able to recognize the fears, wounds and insecurities that can surface in us? Sometimes it may be that we fear the judgment of others, or we distrust opening ourselves at this level on account of bad experiences in the past. Perhaps we do not have the words to say what is happening to us or it may be that we simply are not creating the conditions of trust that enable us to address this subject among ourselves in community or personally.

Jesus asks us...

Once again, it is good for us to turn our gaze to Jesus and see ourselves in a simple way with his disciples, walking with him - like the disciples of Emmaus. Jesus takes the initiative and walks with them.

Through a simple question he creates a space of trust, so that the disciples can continue the conversation they had been engaging in along the way, but now he is in their midst. Jesus takes time, respects the rhythm of inner processes and listens patiently. Everything that happens to the disciples matters to him. His wisdom is revealed, but only after having taken on board the story of the disciples. He does this to help them understand in depth what they had undergone with him and to bring them to a point where they were able to recognize in their hearts what they had been unable to see.

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Can we envisage a time when we are able to talk about how we are living our relationship with God today and how we live our sexuality? To do this, it would help to create an environment of trust between the brothers. The community superior could prepare a meeting using simple and direct questions such as Jesus posed. What might help is when either the youngest or the oldest breaks the silence and opens their hearts in a deep and simple way to share on how they live their relationship with God, their sexuality and affective life. Brothers would be expected to listen to each other with attention and respect, asking only what is necessary simply to better understand the brother. All this could make our life in common more human and appetising. Let's dare to talk about these issues.

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