

Another perspective

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Painting by Bill Moore ssc, from the exhibition "My Last Art Beats"

Dear brothers,

Many times in human and community relationships the point of view we have, our sensitivities and understandings, can be focused more on ourselves than on others. Making the effort to de-centre ourselves as much as possible – in order to see things from the perspective of the other - can help us to live our relationships in a different way. Whilst it is good to try to understand that which bothers us, it is better to start not from our annoyance, but from what the other, our brother, our sister, may feel, see and think. Such a change in our way at looking at things, in our perspective, is already a change in reality. We can then approach our brother and sister, with a different attitude and ~~with~~ a different sensitivity. These are elements that we can adjust later in the encounters and dialogues we have with our brothers and sisters.

A new understanding of biblical texts also ensues when we enter into a relationship with the text and situate ourselves, not so much on the outside or alone, but from within the text, assuming the perspective of one of the characters. Well-known texts about which we have preached a lot, can open us up to new insights. I propose two parables: that of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 29-37) and that of the Workers in the Vineyard (Mt. 20: 1-16). In the first parable I invite you to place yourself in the shoes of the person left for half dead at the side of the road. In the second parable imagine yourself as one of the workers hired at the eleventh hour.

A school of mercy

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we tend to identify ourselves with the one who is compassionate, active and generous. In fact, Jesus invites us to see the parable from the perspective of the teacher of the law, highlighting the importance of becoming a neighbour. But if we place ourselves in the position of the one who is left at the wayside, this parable takes on another dimension. Becoming a victim of an assault has caused the person to lose not only his property but even the ability to ask for help. He is completely dependent on someone seeing him, noticing where he is, and doing something for him. Here showing mercy to the one lying on the roadside is not a question of choice - as the Levite and the priest believe - but a matter of life and death.

In addition to the active form of being merciful practiced by the Samaritan, there is another way of learning mercy that shows itself when one has been the object of unexpected yet necessary mercy from others. Imagine, then, the surprise of the man when he wakes up in the inn, healed of his wounds with a roof over his head and slowly regaining his strength.

As to the questions about who did this for me, and why, there emerges in the person a more fundamental sense of gratitude to the one who did all this for him and to God who did not abandon him. From the perspective of the person who was lifted from the side of the road and who is now on the way to recovery, we discover other elements of mercy: grace, gratitude, justice in the midst of violence, abandoning oneself into the hands of others in order to be cared for and the presence of God.

The school of justice

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard who are hired at different times of the day, it is often difficult for us to understand this passage. A certain sense of justice tunes us in to the legitimate complaints to the landowner about the workers who have been at the vineyard from the first hour. These have endured the work and the heat of the day and yet receive the same salary as those who have worked for only a couple of hours. It's not fair! However, if we try to look at the story from the perspective of those who are called at the eleventh hour, the text reveals a new understanding. These workers have been unemployed all day, without anyone coming to offer them a job. The day is ending and they have nothing to bring to their homes, not even the minimum to be able to feed themselves and those belonging to them. Added to the anguish of unemployment is the feeling of not counting in the sight of anyone, because no one sees them, as well as the poverty of not even having the basics to live. At the end of the day, they will have spoken to each other about yet another day without work, and how at this late point in the day no one is going to come and call them. And even if someone did, they would receive a very low salary.

The workers who arrived at the beginning of the day, seeing the latecomers arrive will have asked: "And these, what are they coming to do?" Their surprise is even greater when they

discover that these 11th hour workers have received the same salary as those who worked all day. The landowner has fulfilled the contract agreed with the workers who arrived first. This was fair. However, with these last arrivals, he has shown a generosity that makes the other workers uncomfortable. First, because he comes looking for them realising that they have spent hours unoccupied. Then he calls them to work, does not send them away and finally provides them with what they need to live for that day. For this landowner, all the hours count, not only the hours worked, but also the hours of anguish caused by unemployment, the hours spent feeling insignificant because nobody seems to be aware that they are there, precarious hours where no miracle is expected. And then the miracle happens! The landowner comes to look for them to share with them what is his. The sense of justice of the workers who were the first to arrive and our sense of justice can be enriched when we try to see things from the perspective of the workers who arrived late and from the perspective of the generosity of the landowner who employed them. Perhaps, next time, the workers who were the first to turn up, will come hoping to be called later by this generous employer or maybe they will simply not turn up because in their eyes it is unfair. On the other hand, the workers of the eleventh hour will never forget the employer, nor his generosity towards them.

Where Christ awaits us

This change of perspective in the understanding of the parables, whereby we look at them from the perspectives of the one who has been the object of mercy and the workers who have been favoured by the generosity of the landowner, can help us to see, with new eyes, those today who, because of the pandemic, have lost their jobs, are living overcrowded in their homes, do not have what they need to eat, are in our streets asking for alms, food and who remain unseen. From our perspective, we can go by without seeing or stopping and our life can continue the same, unchanged. To see them from their perspective, to deviate from our paths, to be generous with what we are and have, is vital.

Simone Weil, a French philosopher (1909-1943) wrote in *God and Misfortune* (1942) about love, which is not a state of the soul but "an orientation", a form of attention to the contradictions of our world, to those who find themselves in misfortune and to God visiting them. If we remain deaf or inattentive, God may one day come to visit us as a beggar and also as a beggar may not come back. If we are attentive and consent to God's visit then God can plant a seed in us that grows, not without pain, in the midst of our tensions and the destructive forces that inhabit us. However, this growing seed helps to stop us from being self-centred and provides more and more space for God to love through us. What if God is visiting us in the beggar, in the migrant, in the unemployed, in the one who come to our houses and parishes for food, so that we might love him with the love that God has sown in us?

Etty Hillesum, was a young Dutch intellectual (1914-1943) who spent her last two years in the Westerbork concentration camp in the Netherlands. From there she was taken to Auschwitz where she was exterminated. During her time in prison, God came to visit her in

her life, as a discreet, weak, but invincible presence. That hidden presence of God in her and in each person, brought out the best in them and was a source of strength in the midst of adversity. As she made more room for this presence in her life, so Etty committed to helping God, first by ensuring that this presence remained in each person's heart. And then, seeing life from the perspective of those who suffer, of those who no longer wait for either others or God to come to their aid, Etty became closeness, dedication, balm for wounds, a shared embrace.

She writes in her Diary, in one of her last notes (December 13, 1942):

"When I suffer for defenceless people, am I not suffering for the defenceless side of myself? I have torn my body to pieces like bread and have distributed it to others. Why not? They were so hungry and for so long.

One should be a balm for many wounds".

Both Simone Weil and Etty Hillesum learned to discover God's visiting, by placing themselves into the perspective of the hapless and the hungry. Each in their own way and in their own context, did not remain indifferent to those who were on the side of the road. Rather, by seeing life from their perspective, they became in their own bodies, close to God.

In a recent piece of news that you will read in this edition of INFO, how our brother **Bill Moore** of the province of the United States, an artist, presented a retrospective exhibition of his work, which will, most probably, be his last: *"My Latest Art Beats: is still touching and feeding the souls."* Among his latest works, Bill has ventured into small 5"x5" paintings. With these smaller works, Bill hopes that they can become more available to more people. His belief is that just as the small host can feed the faith of the believers, so these small paintings "can feed people spiritually and emotionally stir their souls".

Through such change, could not our seeing things from the perspective of the hungry and those who beg for work, meaning, hope, affection ... open the door for God to visit them through us?

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