

6.1

“I Recommend to you My Beloved Poor ...”

Magdalene of Canossa

☪ Which better future ... ?

^ The absence of family

For many people crisis begins and coincides mainly with **a family that does not exist, that has never existed or in any case do not function anymore.** It is the deterioration of family relationships that forces many people onto the roads. This is certainly the main reason that those without a fixed abode give when they explain how they ended up on the road: the family represents a basic element, even if not the only one, that explains the mystery of so many stories.

Stories of misunderstanding and of separation leave palpable signs in life, but even more so in the lives of people without a home. The remembering of the family is linked to the memory of a more or less stable life well regulated. In people's accounts, however, the **wound of lost affections** is so alive and even a minimum of well being no longer exists. Very often situations of grave tension are resolved by the **voluntary or forced abandonment** of a member of the family. What are the alternatives? In general, it is the beginning of a journey with no return.

^ Solitude makes one become made

Solitude, which is the common state of all the homeless, is lived as a reality to be endured and which **not all people get used to.**

Certainly, the condition of the homeless is inserted, often, in a human equilibrium which is already fragile. **The certainty of the future, solitude and isolation, shame, difficult life conditions, are trials that not everyone is able to sustain.**

It is not a rarity to meet men and women who **talk to themselves**; sometimes with **an imaginary character** who is real for them. Let's think what it means to spend whole days without talking with anyone: thus it is necessary to invent someone. With this “imaginary person” it is possible to discuss things that are not interesting to anyone or even give vent to one's feelings about wrongs suffered. **Some people do not know how to speak without shouting:** they are not always shouting at someone; sometimes it is simply a higher tone of voice than usual or a way of expressing self that is initially aggressive: it is a mixture of the desire to attract attention and a way of defending oneself against a hostile world. All this increases their isolation, as if they are in a vicious circle. But often the person, full of fear, hides himself behind this habit of shouting, a victim of the fear of others, of the world and solitude..

Every strange form of behaviour often has a story of suffering behind it.

^ The struggle for personal dignity

The difficulty or impossibility to perform **certain habitual gestures of the life** of everyday have a repercussion on the equilibrium of the person who is forced to live on the street; changing clothes or washing oneself become a great problem. In reality, everyone is the symbol of the dignity of the person: to be dirty or dishevelled is like saying that one has lost one's dignity.

There are those who everyday engage in a battle to try and maintain a dignified aspect; the free access to a shower or the timetable of centres that distribute clothes. Some give up in this obstacle race and let themselves go. **The stronger one feels isolation, the more one loses the motivation to take care of oneself.** Behind the external aspect of these apparently dehumanized people, who do not take care of their appearance which for us is un-renounceable, transpires the reality of humiliated dignity and unsatisfied desires.

^ A storm in life

Among homeless people alcoholism is very widespread. The number of people who drink wine and get drunk is very high. If it is not always easy to re-trace the human experiences of these alcoholics, it is certain that the condition of being without a home works as a stimulus to get into this habit.

What urges these people to drink so much wine so as to be practically always drunk?

The reason for beginning to drink is often accidental and distant in time. In other cases it is a stage in the long and complicated itinerary of marginalization.

Alcohol transforms the lives of people not only from an objective point of view but changes one's character, one's state of being and conditions their actions in such a way to make them seem no longer their own masters and this is not felt without suffering because it is **a vicious circle** which continues to turn on itself.

Often they are elderly people who have gone through periods of crisis in life which, perhaps could have been overcome if they had had the necessary support. Instead it became the beginning of a gradual itinerary which excludes the person in an irreversible way from society. **One does not become an alcoholic in one day.** What use is it to stop drinking if life continues as before, with no house and no work? Why should one start again? The longer the habit of drinking is prolonged, the more difficult it is to free oneself.

^ The paradox of being young without a future

The **presence of drug addicts** among the homeless is a recent phenomenon in many countries and tends to be on the increase. It is the most relevant sociological transformation in the world of street dwellers that has taken place over the last few years, more incisive than what the statistics reveal because of the difficulty of "investigating this reality. Often you meet on the streets **young** seropositive drug addicts or those affected by AIDS who have not found a welcoming place in an adequate structure, not even when they left hospital and this fact can only increase their difficult condition.

^ Small life sentences

Many have made an experience of time in prison. Besides, for them **prison was the step before living on the streets:** on leaving prison, since there was no alternative (support from the family or other people) they found themselves with no point of reference.

In fact, these cases of prison experience are inserted into personal and family situations where there is deprivation from an economic and cultural point of view: this situation of disadvantage, together with the lack of resources in the social security situation, means that **the person who "makes a mistake" once has to pay a double price:** detention and the repeated exclusion from the social and work context. Those who have a criminal record have little hope of finding a job

which is regularly paid. To make the situation worse there is the fact of being **with no fixed abode**: looking for **a job** is almost impossible unless one can find, at the same time, a place to live which is unthinkable for someone without a secure income.

^ Without work

Being without a job is a problem that is characteristic of life on the streets but there are people who are not alcoholics or drug addicts, neither do they have a criminal record or physical/mental impediments. They are simply but dramatically unemployed..

They are people who have landed on the streets because they have lost a job. Many of them recount how they did not have the help of their family in the moment of need, neither the minimum of economic security or a login, both necessary for surviving until succeeding to find a new job. Unfortunately it is **an itinerary from which it is difficult to escape**: to have a job, even if only temporary, is one of the guarantees that permits one to maintain a house, and on the contrary, not having a house makes it more or less impossible to find a job and keep it.

^ Without a house

There even those who live on the streets because they have lost a place. Sometimes the **lack, even temporary, of a job or a low pension** does not allow them to pay the rent and eviction, if no relative can offer accommodation, becomes the beginning of the road to exclusion from which it is difficult to escape. Finding **another lodging** becomes **impossible** and the only hope that remains is to find a place in a **short-stay hostel**.

Sometimes you can find people on the streets who have come from abroad. Often in countries in the southern hemisphere it is common to meet **whole families of ex-refugees** who, when they return to their countries find absolutely nothing. The reinsertion of those who have been absent from their countries for some time is not easy: one has to begin from scratch, looking for a house and a job. **Obstacles are many especially if one is no longer young.**

^ Being foreigners

Among the homeless there are many foreigners. Usually they are **young people who have just arrived**, in search of a job. During the first stage on insertion into a new environment they have no where to stay because there are not enough hostels for temporary accommodation, or because property owners who have accommodation to rent are very diffident towards foreigners. These people **emigrate with the hope** of finding a job quickly and send home money for the family. Others are refugees waiting to be united with their families who are in other countries. Their experience of the street becomes the first hurdle to overcome so as to insert themselves into a new situation.

From a cultural point of view, contrary to what one would think, foreigners find it very hard to accept, without suffering, living on the streets, even temporarily. For them this way of living is the source of shame and a great sense of humiliation, but in reality it is a compulsory phase.

Some of them, even if they find a job, are forced to continue living on the streets.

The nostalgia of family ties and their distant homeland, common to all foreigners of whatever condition, becomes for the person who lives on the streets a deep feeling that is added to so many other difficulties of daily life and to the **uncertainty for the future which sometimes generates anger**.

Foreigners without a home are more **exposed to the dangers of life on the streets**: they have fewer possibilities of being accepted in the hostels available because they are young and perhaps do not have valid documents. They take refuge for the night in hidden places through fear of being controlled or sent away.

^ Hoping for a Better Future

Life on the streets, contrary to what one normally thinks, is hardly ever a choice. It is usually a "compulsory path" determined by a difficult, personal story in which different elements are summed together: "misfortunes", mistakes, illnesses and disappointments; above all, leaving the surrounding social ambit. In many cases it is precisely this negligence that permits the sad end to one's story which may have only had a "bad start". The burden of this abandonment is lived by these people as social condemnation and the fear of being deluded once again by life stops many of them from finding a way out even when they desperately search for it.

The apparent refusal of some people to accept help often hides the fear of being deceived once again: to this must be added the difficulty of accepting the promiscuity of certain hostels or the strict opening times, the fear of violence or quarrels, the fear of being robbed, the inability to live with others caused by the long years live in isolation.

All this is not a sign of the desire for independence but it is a symptom of great unhappiness and of a profound sense of resignation.

There is a great demand for a different future which does not find an answer and which cannot be restored to each one together with respect, under standing, material help which everyone deserves precisely because of their difficult situation.

^ Who will save us?

It is important that each of us answers the question: "Who will save us?".

Over the last two centuries modernity has put forth the claim that human progress is the inevitable outcome of applying human reason and modern sciences, the means by which "the fissures of the world could be repaired and the whole world could be healed." (Wolf)

What the myth of human progress ignores is that evil lies at the bottom of these fissures and evil bends human reason to other ends. Modernity sets its hopes "in the twin strategies of social control and rational thought= neither of which has power over evil.

It is a crisis because of the manner in which the dominant modern mentality unfolds in its relationships with nature, in the relation to human beings with one another, with things and with the transcendent. It is the crisis of instrumental rationality carried to the ultimate expression. It is modern human beings who are in crisis, since their relation between themselves and with the eco system is in crisis. Human beings are splitting, have sundered, their original harmony.

The wisdom of the Cross offers a different basis for hope. The Cross teaches that salvation does not come from right thinking or the right techniques, but by divine action making right what we cannot make right ourselves.

We are told that

"The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

1 Cor 1:25

The foolishness and weakness is the message of the Cross, "the power of God.

1 Cor 1:18

Eyes in the Storm

The rain clouds are forming
 There are birds in the air / for they have started roaming.
 This is what they do, like a fair, / every season has a night and a morning.
 The rain is coming, about to fall, / many of the birds make their last calls
 For in the rain, in the storm / everything must be still, stalled!
 There is need, need for might, / there is need for sight, for eyes in the storm.

The sun has accepted the cover, / clouds veil her face off, from sight.
 The sun withdraws like a lover / overcome by a partner's caress.
 The weight of the clouds is felt, / casting cold and need for caress.
 Goats and cows call, kid and calves, / to be weary of wandering in the cold
 Before everything stalls.
 For when it pours / no eyes will see clearly in the storm.

It rains, some things get maimed, / our gaiety, our freedom curtailed.
 To our shelters we withdraw, cuddling / like defeated giants or beaten ogres.
 Oh, in the storms of life, what order / who can have a clear sight?
 It rains in everyone's life, / husband and wife, man and woman,
 Stumbling over unforeseen dangers, / without sight, needing eyes in the storm,
Open our eyes O God, to see in the storm.

**It rains, tender hearts are broken / blooming lives, more than once, affected
 But life's insight and respite, with God / are like light eyes sighting storm.
 God I believe, I really do, that You , / only You can give us eyes in this storm.
 It rains, the Sudanese can only see blood,
 hunger and famine are the dry parts in their lives.
 Disease and affliction are the lot in our life. / God, what eyes do we use in this storm,
 If not Your eyes, whose eyes do we use in this life?**

It rains, showers of tears down our cheeks, / Oh, God, when life is hard, really hard,
 How do You see us, shield us, care as we seek / shelter, protection and refuge in a hut?
 God we blink and blight, for sight / it has rained in the lives of the Sudanese.
**We know, every life has seasons unbound, / bright moments and darkness rebounding,
 Whose eyes then do we use in this storm?**

"Another Song", Abe Enosa

I will bless Yahweh at all times, his praise shall be on my lips continually;
my soul glories in Yahweh, let the humble hear and rejoice.

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, together let us extol his name.
I seek Yahweh, and He answers me and frees me from all my fears.

Every face turned to him grows brighter and is never ashamed.
A cry goes up from the poor man, and Yahweh hears, and helps him in all his troubles.

The angel of Yahweh pitches camp round those who fear him; and he keeps them safe.
How good Yahweh is, only taste and see! Happy the man who takes shelter in him.

Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones: those who fear him want for nothing.
The young lion may go empty and hungry, but those who seek Yahweh lack nothing good.

Come my sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of Yahweh.
Which of you wants to live to the full, who loves long life and enjoyment of prosperity?

Malice must be banished from your tongue, deceitful conversation from your lips;
never yield to evil, practice good, seek peace, pursue it.

The face of Yahweh frowns on evil men, to wipe their memory from the earth;
the eyes of Yahweh are turned towards the virtuous, his ears to their cry.

They cry for help and Yahweh hears and rescues them from all their troubles;
Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted, He helps those whose spirit is crushed.

Hardships in plenty beset the virtuous man; but Yahweh rescues him from them all;
taking care of every bone, Yahweh will not let one be broken.

Evil will bring death to the wicked, those who hate the virtuous will have to pay:
while Yahweh himself ransoms the souls of his servants,
and those who take shelter in him have nothing to pay.

Psalm 34

*No real peace can be found
if we do not trust God completely.*

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