

THE MORAL ACTION OF THE JOURNALIST



Human experience in the Bible teaches us that only those who know things interiorly are able to see. To see without knowing is simply to impose one's personal point of view on others; it is the experience of those who use their power without converting it into service. To know without seeing is to live walled up behind one's certitudes, believing that life does not change and that it will not change us. That is why when we don't know the people who live alongside us we risk not seeing them anymore. I am able to see if I am connected to others, otherwise I live in deep blindness.

Scripture recounts the stories of people who radically changed their lives because they decided to know God in his Son Jesus by means of a journey that St. Ignatius calls "from creature to Creator," "from friend to Friend." It is in this intimacy with the Lord, who became a human being like us, that we begin to see the world in which we are immersed and to recognize the things that challenge our humanity: the meaning of forgiveness, love, tolerance, suffering, justice.... This authentic dynamism also applies to journalists, who are called above all to see. What you see and above all how you see it: in this, the human quality of communication comes into play.

Because of this, the last miracle of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is the healing of a blind man. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks the blind man. "Let me see again," the man replies. The blind man's cries brought Jesus to a halt and his faith "converted" Jesus, who healed him. It is the miracle of discipleship, not of healing, that transformed the blind man into a follower of Jesus and enabled him to see what the Lord would do for him on the cross.

But there is more. Journalism is called to understand, to allow what happens to penetrate the realm of knowledge. Understanding (from the Latin *comprehensio-onis*) is the abil-

ity to comprehend someone or something. It is not by chance that a person says to someone else: "I understand you." This verb too should give impetus to the moral action of journalism. Understanding includes not only reason but also the affections. If a person understands the depth of the suffering or joy that he/she is trying to recount, then that person is no longer the same as before. When a journalist is able to understand the deep roots of the story he/she is telling, it means that he/she understands its hidden truth. But on one condition: if I am talking about reconciliation, it is important that I myself am reconciled so as to understand the situation I am recounting. If I talk about dialogue, I myself have to know how to dialogue. If I talk about peace, I myself have to know how to build it....

One never comes to understand something on his/her own; a companion is always needed on this journey. The great King David needed Nathan; Paul needed Ananias; Nathaniel needed Philip; Francis Xavier needed Ignatius of Loyola, etc. In the same way, understanding what takes place in the world of journalism requires the ability to relate to others and the humility to learn.

Finally, there is narration. The vocation of journalism is nothing other than that of telling a story: life, death, tragedies, histories, anthropological and moral changes.... And this must always be done with great respect toward others. In just a few decades, the language of journalism has changed. It has moved from the rational and geometric language of the 1970's to the emotional language of the 1990's, and from there to the narrative language of recent years. This last language might not be true if it claims to be exhaustive and if it is arrogant. The Gospels teach us that often the truth about existence cannot be grasped. One must follow the example of Jesus, who used metaphors: "The kingdom of God is like..." "The kingdom of God can be compared to..." A narrator is a journalist who is spiritually free, who is not corrupt and who does not descend to compromises. Otherwise his/her stories are deformed and become a kind of self-justification.

Narration requires first of all responsibility: Moral philosopher E. Levinas says: "A responsible person always takes others into account. Of course we can ignore them but the truth of the matter is that we are responsible for what happens to the person alongside us." This teaching could help to improve the quality of Italian journalism.

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