

WALKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THIS PANDEMIC TIME

"We live in times of uncertainty". Along with others and as well the youth of today, this word has become part of our vocabulary, our desire, our searches. It is common to hear in different spaces that people feel traversed by "abnormality". There are changes in daily practices, habits, schedules. It seems that our cities, the world and home, have changed. The pandemic is such a particular situation that it mobilizes our emotions, feeling strange to ourselves. That is why these notes can be a portrait of something of what happens to us and guidelines on how to go through this time as best as possible. How to accompany young people, boys and girls, who suddenly found themselves with their few resources and their many questions immersed in a new world, a world with many questions.

On the way it can be dark at times

We can consider an image: living in uncertainty is like crossing a bridge where the path emerges as we walk. Imagine a lake that you must cross and the path is not marked. The way emerges at every step. Think for a moment about all the emotions and feelings that this generates. I like this image, because it supposes a beginning and an end, but we don't even know what the next step is or what stage of the journey we are at. We only know that the uncertainty generates insecurity, it is blurred, unknown and it worries us. And this raises many questions, fundamentally questions about life, about how to live your own life. The pandemic confronts us with the possibility of losing, among so many losses, our own life or that of our loved ones. That is why I am encouraged to say that what concerns us more today is to care for life.

From a psychological perspective, I would like to distinguish three concepts that represent part of what we feel and what young people feel, or have felt, in this time of pandemic: **fright, fear and anguish**. **Fright** is a state caused by a danger that we did not expect. And this is why it is a state that we could rate as irrational and our reactions are unpredictable. **Fear**, generally is spoken very badly, has to do with a predicted situation, but from which we can defend ourselves. That is why it is very important to take care of ourselves from fear. **Anguish** is a little more complex and deeply human, it is our own, it is existential and ontological, it has to do with our deepest identity. We can define it by saying that it is a more or less intense displeasure affect that is manifested in a subject waiting for something instead of an unconscious feeling that cannot be named. But anguish, being existential, is also enabling. With this we can say that feeling distressed does not always make us impossible. As the French psychoanalyst and philosopher Anne Dufourmantelle says in *Praise of the Risk* (2019) "Anguish is like snow in a devastated landscape; at first glance everything looks white, intact, almost unreal. Only later, with the snow break, do the terrain accidents appear." (p.97) This is the landscape of the life of young people in a pandemic. In part it was already so. Perhaps some are released from fear, others know how to face fear in different ways, but it is undeniable that the situation of the pandemic has faced their own anguish. And like the image of the snow, as it thaws, the wounds, the loneliness, the helplessness in which many have had to be and are beginning to be seen. It is the image of a difficult road, at times desolate. But anxiety allows us to face our discomfort with questions and to elaborate something about what happened to us and what happens to us. Not everything, but something is possible. We are all on that path.

Following some authors, we can say that the Coronavirus, Covid19 or however you want to identify it, has had and has the peculiarity of producing fear and anguish. Fear because it is something dangerous, anticipated, a contractable disease from which we must take care of ourselves, protect ourselves, following the indications that many doctors and specialists give: wash our hands well; keep a safe

distance from other people; leave the house as little as possible; take better care if we are at risk and many more. Waiting for a vaccine! But this virus also generates anguish, because it is invisible and we do not know exactly where it is, they called it the "invisible enemy", and that is why it distresses us. From what I explain, we can say that it is scary, but it doesn't have to be that way and it is not suitable to despair.

Let us return to the idea that anxiety is possible, being associated with many stages and vital situations, it can be a carrier of creativity and transformation. If we calm down and we can think and make the other think. We know that the pandemic situation is not permanent, that we will not be in this situation forever. But with it, many symptoms appeared, some were already there, but they became visible in the lives of our young people: anxiety, disorganization of personal times and spaces, over-information, anguish crisis, feeling of confinement, sleep disorders, self-medication, substance use, excesses, loneliness, and isolation. We could identify many more symptoms. Some of us have lived. But how can we intervene?

Walk with the other

As a poet says, in this "we share the thirst and the glass." We live in part the same fate as young people, but we have other resources that allow us to share the path, reach out, go out to meet without leaving the person who needs us alone.

The first thing that emerges as response is the priority of taking care of ourselves, and thus taking care of others. This had not happened to us, at least in this way and that it was an experience of so many people at the same time: Today's priority is that you take care of yourself! The priority of taking care of life! Taking care of life should be a no-brainer, but often we don't do. I dare say that we often neglect something. Because we live in a hurry, with many important things to solve always. It seems that we are always out of time. We live in the future, with many projects and dreams to fulfill and today they invite us, actually order us, stop and focus on us even to the smallest detail. Today taking care of oneself is very demanding, we must pay attention to the smallest detail. Today taking care of ourselves is essential and requires a lot of energy. Taking care of ourselves is taking care of the other. Life in itself is supportive, you cannot live without others or hurting the other.

The second is to give a place to the other. There is no possibility of being without another to give us place. We exist because others have sustained us with words and looks. Many young people search online for a place to be welcomed, to have asylum, to be protected. This is a space adults to intervene, like those who do not solve all the questions by reaching out but walk beside the other, giving them a place in their own self. When young people cannot find a place in one, they look elsewhere and unfortunately there are other "offers" that occupy a place of authority for them. But mostly these make them helpless, de-subjectivize, depersonalize. As Ganem says, We must recognize networks as new places of connection (2013):

Technology, enters into this logic as a tool of culture. Currently, it has an important impact on the social link. New forms of bonding between the subjects have appeared, among them are the virtual one through the internet and the "instant personal" communication through mobile or cellular phones. Technology establishes different ways of linking the society. However, these new forms of communication, when used excessively, without measure, carry the illusion that it is possible to be with everyone and at all times. (pp. 88-89).

We will as well see how technology and networks generate spaces of solitude.

But what can we offer? The first thing to remember is that listening is intervening. Give place to the word. Accept what the other has to say. And that listening offers times: A time to think about yourself, to listen to oneself. There are good companionships: music, reading, meeting someone else. All human experiences, some spiritual. But we can offer total encounter with the Other. There is nothing more healing than knowing that there is always Another who offers us a place. The same French psychoanalyst, Anne Dufourmantelle, whom I quoted earlier speaks from a secular perspective of prayer, very beautifully that I want to share with you (2019):

"Prayer is a state of waiting for a word that it will not come, but at the same time it is in us, deposited at all times. The word is linked to the lack of the other, that absent other does not respond, will not respond, that it does not know and nevertheless, it welcomes our voice like no other, in the absolute openness to the unexpected. What other similar space exists? We only have to believe that other can hear us, the more intense hope on a night background, what a paradox ... "(p.64)

These beautiful words are written by a philosopher and psychoanalyst. What can you add to this experience? With one word, with the willingness to listen and welcome the other, we weave the networks of spiritual and psychological healing. I say this as a psychologist, but also as a man of faith.

Third, it is very important to put into words what happens in us. Although we have to accept that not everything cannot be put into words, at least you have to try what you can. Our emotions are more supported by words. They allow us to listen and be heard. It is good to say "I have the same questions as you, but also some answers." Young people need that security. We have to be in the networks, send a small audio asking how you are, taking care of yourself, among many other things. It does not mean that we have to lose our place as adults, as leaders, as guides, even as professionals. The place of authority is a nearby place.

A youth told me during consultation: "It is good to listen to the voice of one who cares for you, that helps to sustain us. It is not a detail, it is a beautiful way of being close, of living love. The word cures. In a world of images, young people need a word. The word has a healing power that makes us travel through unexpected paths. I share what Anne Dufourmantelle says beautifully (2019):

Words register our alibis, our demand that this be so, our need for meaning, fidelity, sharing, our belief that we speak the same language, that words alone could change something; and the latter is true because the immense power of words comes from that first, definite emotion that binds them to our body. Our body that thinks, waits, our bodies are mad and tearful, and sometimes it is free of words as well. (p.129)

We came into the world and were greeted by words. It is the most wonderful and hospitable childhood experience of the human being. It is an experience to be repeated and made possible in the other. Put life into words. Put what you can, what you understand about life in words.

Another point that I do not want to leave out is the experience of loneliness, which needs an accompaniment. Many young people felt and feel alone. Suddenly, from one day to the next, they were connected to a world in the solitude of their rooms, their spaces, opening the privacy of their home to the world, but sometimes not receiving anyone. If you will allow me to use the literary metaphor, Alone in the woods, like "little red riding hood". But the problem was no longer the wolf, because the forest changed them. Many young people feel that "everything has changed". Those who know themselves as "generational insiders" of this current world, feel disoriented and are in helplessness loneliness. In one session a young woman told me: "talking by zoom or by meet is like talking to the mountains, only an echo responds you, I have never felt so alone as there." Our challenge is to offer a place for the solitude of the encounter. Not all loneliness forsakes. We are the

revolutionaries of the meeting. And we can offer this as a resource from our experience of life, psychological, spiritual and pedagogical. Live and revive the culture of the meeting as a space for humanization. Solitude as a human and meeting space.

Linking with the other

How do we do this? linking with the other. Making a bond with the young people. Remembering that we are referents of the adult world and therefore we play a place of authority that enables, Karlen (2013) says:

It is necessary that the authorities demonstrate the place of authority with their movements and thus they can intervene effectively, to protect, teach and enable to transmit values of respect, modesty by this bond that the adolescent can identify with. You have to give a speech that helps to place them as subject. (p.45)

The author talks about a teenager, we about young people. But the quote is applicable to our challenge. To bond is to enable the other to be a subject, a person. That one identifies with certain values that give him the possibility to face the challenging world with questions, queries, on a path that he has to travel, which is none other than the path of life. And that he is not alone or alone in this.

Conclusions

Finally, it is good to prepare ourselves for what is coming after the pandemic. The world will not be the same. Maybe it's better than the world we lived in! firstly, it will be a world where physical distances will be noticed, because we will continue to take care of ourselves for a long time. But that will not prevent being closer. We must take care of each other without a pandemic. We will have to live from day to day. Our plans will be short-term, taking care of the most valuable thing we have, which is life. And life is taken care of in a very simple way these days: *doing well what we must do*. It is a wise rule that I once heard from a monk. I would say that we must do well and *with passion* what we must do.

Finally, I share these words that I wrote for the UCA-Actualidad magazine of the Argentine Catholic University, although it was addressed to the adolescent reality, can help us understand the world of youth and the need to intervene in it as adults:

We must recognize that today's teenage world is not simple at all. It is complex. Because of many of the issues we have mentioned, because of the stage of development, but also because it is a stage that culture has idealized and presents as a "model" and as an object of consumption. That is why in dialogue we first need to listen to interpose criteria, establish differences, get out of the categorical and absolute truths that they try to present, maintaining an asymmetric relationship, because we are in another place. It is essential to question, problematize, present options, denature, warn about risks, to enable one's own judgment, common sense, the function of anticipation. This allows us to prevent, make them known, know them and take care of them. (p.50)

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