



SIEBENQUELL

» Siblings all«



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I recently read an article in the German news magazine »Der Spiegel« with the title »Why we care about the "Titan" - and not about the refugee ship«. This article is introduced with the following sentence: »The submarine drama in the Atlantic and the ship disaster in the Mediterranean show how risky it is if we let ourselves be guided primarily by empathy in humanitarian questions.«

That is a breathtaking impudence. It makes me wonder if the self-occupation in our society knows no bounds at all? These days, the western media have been reporting around the clock about 5 people in 1 submarine. These 5 people paid a quarter of a million dollars each to indulge in this luxury. The search area covered thousands of miles and included agencies such as the US Coast Guard, Canadian Coast Guard, US Navy and other agencies and private entities. 10 ships were deployed and the search will cost several million dollars. In the end, all 5 passengers were pronounced dead. This is truly a tragedy.

In the same week, a refugee boat sank off the coast of Greece. More than 500 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean. The passengers were desperately fleeing danger or economic hardship. But their fate has hardly been reported. Is the death of the poor not a tragedy?

Now Mr Scheuermann, the author of the magazine article, wants to explain to us why it is altogether fine that we should be more interested in the submarine than in the refugee ship. Here are words that only an illiterate of the heart could write. I have no idea what has gone awry with Mr Scheuermann's empathy, but I will never go along with him and his opinion.

In his encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis found apt words for the illiteracy of the heart. In today's world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat. This illusion, unmindful of the great fraternal values, leads to "a sort of cynicism. For that is the temptation we face if we go down the road of disenchantment and disappointment. [...] Isolation and withdrawal into one's own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes'.« (Fratelli tutti, No. 30)

That is why it is not enough for me to criticise this journalist's lack of empathy. I have no expectation that he will contribute to the life of the world or to a more just society following the example of Jesus. However, I do, put a lot of faith in people like the young people who helped create the 2023 Easter retreat in my local community of Haus Wasserburg. They undertook a persistently impressive action with the title: »K(ein) darüber hinweggehen.« (No passing by).

On Holy Saturday, they physically stretched out on the ground between the Pallotti Church, St. Mary's and Haus Wasserburg and had their silhouettes sketched with chalk. This created a count of 385 corpses, which gradually spread out until it covered every free space between the buildings. It was impossible to enter or even walk past our houses or the church without stumbling over these sketched reminders of lost lives. For hours, these young people worked to make a mark of empathy, to remind us that there are layers of humanity that deserve our attention. It was at least as impressive to watch how these people wrote a story of humanity with body and soul. This action marked our Easter days, depressed and impressed the worshippers and flowed into our prayer and liturgy.

Months have passed since the ground was covered with these 385 reminders of human loss and misery. The sun, wind and rain have washed away many of the silhouettes, and those that remain are but pale shadows of their original representation. Yet every day I pause and remember. I pause every day and pray. I remember and pray for the many men and women who have perished on the shores of wealth and prosperity. I also pray for the young men and women who wrote the Gospel story of empathy, love and justice in chalk.

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