



SIEBENQUELL

Fasting from Superficiality



SOURCE: FEDERICO GUTIERREZ ON WWW.UNSPLASH.COM

In the Book of Proverbs it is written: »Without a prophetic vision the people will perish« (Proverbs 29, 18). People of God go through a crisis, God sends them a vision. For where a crisis lingers too long there the temptation comes strong to simply grow accustomed to it and to sink into superficiality that comes with accommodation.

Thus it was for Isaiah when he noticed during the Babylonian Exile that the people who once suffered under the crisis of exile at some point are starting to get used to it. At that point he receives a vision for the people of God. He sees a new Jerusalem, not just superficially restored, but also transformed from the inside. In this city, the temple will take on a new role. »My house will be a house of prayer for all peoples« (Is 56,7).

In the Book of Revelation John describes the crisis situation of the People of God in his day. They are persecuted from every side. Yet, from sides come the temptations to adapt and to sink into the ordinary superficiality with the rest of the citizens of the Roman Empire. At that point, John receives a vision for the People of God. He sees a new Jerusalem, but also a new heaven and a new earth.

Everywhere we are surrounded by crises. Our talk is dominated by what we no longer are able to do, no longer able to provide. In the Church we speak of the vocations that are no longer coming and the faithful no longer go to church. Before the crises of environmental disaster and global warming we daily hear how we can no longer live as before. The warnings are clear, stark and vivid. But that does not answer the question. From what shall we live? If we do not answer these questions, if no vision of God is awakened in us here, then we are superficiality.

Lent can even become part of the problem. We quickly turn to talk of abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, sweets and beloved preoccupations. By doing so, we almost always remain on the surface. A fasting is surely called for, but it should be a fasting from superficiality. It is time to speak once again of the great issues. It is time to return to the great conversations.

In 2001 Yann Martel wrote his masterpiece »The Life of Pi« (2001). The novel recounts the story of Piscine Patel), the son of a zoo director. His family decides to immigrate to Canada, together with all their animals. They shipwreck and Pi saves himself in a lifeboat with a zebra, a hyena, an orangutan and a Bengal tiger. In that boat, conversations ensue about the essential questions. They speak of peace, life, reconciliation, love and even of fears that are otherwise spoken of, of prejudices that otherwise remain beautiful wrapped and of all other mannerisms of interiority that normally drown under the waves of superficiality.

A fasting is surely called for, but it should be a fasting from superficiality. It is time to speak once again of the great issues. The journey into the desert should create for us what the shipwreck created for Pi: a life that has been stripped down to the essentials. When the distractions are stripped away, then time and space is created for the essentials. In the film »Lawrence of Arabia« this is revealed in a short exchange.

Jackson Bentley: »What is it that attracts you personally to the desert?«

T.E. Lawrence: »It's clean.«

May a Lenten springtime of fasting grant us this, a clean space in which to speak to God and one another about the great issues.

Erik Riechers SAC

Vallendar, February 27th, 2020