

THE COURAGE AND JOY OF EDUCATING

"Let us pray today for the students, the young people who are studying, and the teachers who have to find new ways to move forward in teaching: may the Lord help them on this journey, give them courage, joy and also good success."

Pope Francis

- by Giovanni Perrone*

"Leaving the nets, they followed him". The apostles, in responding to Jesus' invitation, had courage, hope and foresight. They readily left the daily grind to which they were accustomed, and which gave them certainty, to go towards an uncertain tomorrow. Jesus, in fact, did not open a training school, with a detailed and well laid-out programme, but invited untrained people to set out with him.

He, however, had clear ideas!

Pope Francis repeatedly urged educators to have courage, to know how to take risks, to look high and far, to "go beyond"[1] to embark on the adventure of educating, of walking towards the future.

Abraham was also told: "Get out of your land and go!" The same happened to Mary.

Courage is the strength of mind that enables one to face new, uncertain and often difficult situations. It is knowing how to look beyond the horizon and set out. Courage is therefore a positive trait, as it helps us take new decisions and new paths, pushing us out of our comfort zone. "The comfort zone is a disaster for humanity" [2].

In the face of the numerous and unexpected turbulences and anxieties that oppress today, in the face of the emptiness of values that disorientates the younger generations in particular, in the face of drugs and violence that humiliate the everyday, in the face of the storms of information (often contradictory) that obnubilate the ability to see well and far, what can a teacher (and the school institution) do if he or she does not have the courage and the ability to step out of the static and safe everyday life and to take risks in order to find new and more appropriate ways for the full formation of each person, for overcoming situations of fragility and difficulty, in the face of changing emotions and the thousands of uncertain 'certainties' that even artificial intelligence can offer us?

It is appropriate, then, to rethink our 'normal' and everyday way of being teachers or managers of educational institutions.

The same initial and ongoing training of teachers cannot be limited to providing content, but it would be good to develop new teaching styles, to promote courage, lucidity, farsightedness, the art of discerning and accompanying on paths that are not always easy. The style of Jesus and the values of the Gospel are an example and guide.

Anthropological change.

The great backdrop against which the educational task is projected today is anthropological change; restlessness is the educational motor. Not a restlessness made up of passivity and a sense of powerlessness, but the restlessness of those who know they are on a journey, with others and for others, with a light and useful baggage, to orient, direct and reorient. Therefore, it is also necessary to know how to welcome one's own frailties and abandonments, the weight of a sometimes excruciating loneliness, the anguish and bitterness of moments of disorientation and exhaustion. Not to stop, however, but to start again towards salvation, the smile, the hope encountered and stirred, Easter.

Educational service is not just about helping people to build a future together. It is a shared history that helps pupils, but also teachers, not only to do, but mainly to be: "One educates with what one says, even more with what one does, but much more with what one is"[3].

So, from the ethics of security, of the programme, of contents, of strategies, of 'this is how it has always been done', it is opportune to move on to the ethics of the wayfarer, of wandering, of continually challenging oneself, seeking and exploring, of questioning oneself and acting.

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We must have the courage to go out, to risk, Pope Francis tells us. To go out, concretely and metaphorically, from our cosy and safe classrooms to confront the world, to always regenerate, with courage and wisdom, our way of being and making being.

The ethics of the wayfarer

"The ethics of the wayfarer initiates these thoughts. They are thoughts yet to be thought, but the landscape unfolded by them is already our unstable, provisional and unfinished dwelling". The ethics of the wayfarer is opposed to the anthropological ethics of earth domination. It denounces our civilisation model and points out that its spread across the planet is equivalent to the end of the biosphere. The humanism of domination is a humanism without a future. Instead, the wayfarer walks the earth without owning it, because he knows that life belongs to the Creator.[4]

The journey interrogates, challenges and teaches; it encourages continuous regeneration and overcoming of obstacles; it provokes an encounter at every step with oneself and the world; it gratifies and "allows one to rediscover the pure feeling of being, to rediscover the simple joy of existing" [5]. [5] and, at the same time, stimulates one to do better and better. The common journey enriches and rejuvenates the entire community.

Christian educators on the road

Pope Francis tells us that "the lively presence of Christian educators in the school world is of vital importance. The style he or she adopts is decisive. The Christian educator, in fact, is called to be both fully human and fully Christian. There is no humanism without Christianity. And there is no Christianity without humanism. It must not be spiritualist, in orbit, 'out of the world'. It must be rooted in the present, in its time, in its culture. It is important that his personality is rich, open, capable of establishing sincere relationships with students, of understanding their deepest needs, their questions, their fears, their dreams. And that he is also capable of testifying - first of all with his life and also with words - that the Christian faith embraces the whole human being, everything, that it brings light and truth to every sphere of existence, without excluding anything, without clipping the wings of young people's dreams, without impoverishing their aspirations.

In the tradition of the Church, in fact, the education of young people has always had as its objective the complete formation of the human person, not just the instruction of concepts, formation in all human dimensions (cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 48)..... [6].

"The Holy Spirit guides us in the best paths to take. He invites us never to lose faith and always to begin again, making us put ourselves at stake and leading us to encounter hope and joy" [7].

Have a good journey.

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[1] Pope Francis, Encyclical "Brothers all"

[2] Paolo Crepet

[3] St. Ignatius of Antioch

[4] Galimberti, *L'etica del viandante*, ed. Feltrinelli, 2023

[5] Frédéric Gros

[6] Pope Francis, Address to the participants at the UMEC Congress, Rome, 12 November 2022

[7] Pope Francis, Homily for the Solemnity of Pentecost 2022.