

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS - "WHO ARE YOU, THAT YOU FILL MY HEART WITH YOUR ABSENCE?"

"Thanks to the crack in your heart, you can find true friends who are able to live up to what you feel as most problematic, most incomprehensible, most mysterious, most unresolved in your life. A friend is the one who knows you better than you know yourself. [...] True friendship finally allows you to look with sympathy at your broken heart" (GS Triduum—Introduction 2). How many of these cracks open up when facing the struggle of these last days of school! They can be the occasion to discover who our true friends are, who looks at us like this teacher looked at her student: "Beyond immediate appearances, he showed a greater desire, even if it was sometimes suffocated."

In these last days of school, have we found a friend like this?

This year, I started teaching in a public school, a technical and professional institute. One of my classes, the first, is a really difficult group: there are so many kids, all of them are boys; there are many immigrants and kids repeating a grade, and some of them have quite complex situations. From the start of the year, our work in class revealed itself to be so hard that some colleagues thought it impossible, and often complaining and discouragement dominated our comments and judgments. I even found myself many times determined by a sense of defeat with respect to the outcome of my work and flattened by the struggle.

Still, precisely in the most difficult moments, and more and more throughout the year, this question opened up in me, as a hypothesis: if, instead of expecting something from them, what if these kids and these colleagues were given to me so that I could discover something? What if they were given so that I could change? In this way, not a day goes by when I don't have the opportunity to begin again! The wound I feel because of my powerlessness and the desire for these kids to meet something great remain, but the measure of my task is limitless: what is in play and what can happen are greater than the idea with which I enter the class, an idea which quickly crumbles anyway.

I will recount an episode when it was evident that what was happening was greater than what I could imagine. For a while, I noticed that one of the more difficult kids, who often dictates the climate in class, who is repeating this year, started to assume an attitude almost of docility with me: in some way, he had understood my care for him, so he expected something from me, expected me to look at him. Beyond immediate appearances, he showed a greater desire, even if it was sometimes suffocated. In January, though, I was able to meet his parents during a private talk, and in tears they told me: "Professor, our child is doing the same thing as last year, it is going terribly; he is behaving awfully and we don't know what to do with him!" In truth, even at school he was not doing well and probably would be failing again; but that could not be the whole truth about him! Even if he was going to be held back, how could we know what was going to happen to him in the next months? There was so much more at stake than just his promotion to the next grade. If only he could discover a passion or decide to start studying something, this would be a great step on the path of his life! Thus, along with some practical help on the subject of study, I found myself sharing this hope with them, because we can bet on his heart and because there is something good and beautiful in reality that can help us start again. »

» I have to say that I could never have imagined that those parents, who were so upset, would have trusted me and accept the challenge to such a point that they spoke with their son and encouraged him to start up again. So they let him sign up for a center to get help with his work in the afternoons. Neither could I have imagined that he would accept. Now when I go to their class, he waits for me in the hall to show me his notebook: "Prof, look! I did the outline like you told us and I did my homework!" (which is a novelty for him!).

Many colleagues did not know about this fact, but when it came out in a meeting and in a few conversations, the general reaction floored me: it seemed like all that was happening with this student's situation in general, and in terms of his progress in school, was nothing, as if it were too small and fragile. They couldn't see... This incomprehension hurt me, but above all I understand that if one does not see facts like this, only the frustration of a such challenging circumstances, circumstances that never live up to our projects, will remain.

Provoked by them, I had to ask myself again what had happened... What did I see? A kid who got moving and started to do something great: free from a measure, he started to have esteem for himself, because he started to feel himself esteemed.