



The root of the acceptance of John Paul II's teachings was that he knew how to make virtue sympathetic. When I spoke to them, I exposed truth and kindness using the gripping plot of authentically human life. And he did so by showing the beauty of values, the universal appeal of the good.

The meeting, as always festive, rich in ideas and multitudinous, was over. This time we were in Blonie Park in Krakow. John Paul II was leaving the box. And while I also left the place, I saw a girl, 18 or 19 years old, who cried while sitting. Her crying was evident, without modesty, exposed. The question was almost obvious: Why cry on such a beautiful occasion? The answer, between sobs, was: "Because it is so holy and I am disgusted".

I've thought many times about that answer. There are ways of presenting the possible good, achievable beauty, the ethics of existence, but very often it is not easy to communicate goodness. You don't get to the center of the person. Words seem to touch the thought without "convincing", without something inside prompting the decision to change. Not just to do something new, but to be more and different.

This young woman had grasped the words spoken by John Paul II. These words had confronted her not with abstract concepts, but with everyday existence. They had not provoked a rejection, no justification, nor a movement of absolute self-defense. Her weeping seemed to be an expression of the joy of those who have discovered that the best is possible. Moreover, the best, previously sought in the usual experience of the ephemeral, of the epitome, of the purely epidermal, it was not the best. For this reason, deep down, that cry was the discovery and acceptance of a new route that young woman was about to start. And that joyful beginning, at the end of a meaningful journey, was welcomed with the exquisitely human expressive form of tears.

Why was John Paul II so loved by the youth? The answer is: because they understood. And, as a consequence, they loved him.

I asked the same young people in Toronto, in Buenos Aires, in Rome, in Manila, in Santiago de Compostela... And the answers, with few differences, were often

identical:

"No one, not in my family, not in school, nor society have told me what he says. And he's right." However, the things he said were often in the opposite direction to the cultural budgets of the time. Why did the young men claim so bluntly that "he is right"?

There are "educators" who seem to possess extraordinary clarity in saying what should not be done and what should not be done, but who do not seem to have the same clarity to define and communicate what can be or where to walk if You want to be better. This upside-down ethic leaves the restlessness of ambiguity in the soul, it never excites.

John Paul II claimed, was propositive, did not flatter young people with free flattery. He was demanding, he was talking about an arduous but clear reality. He spoke more about the beauty of human love than the risks of capricious sexuality. He hardly ever talked about selfishness, rather about how great a world full of generosity would be. Listening to him, it seemed obvious that the only possible world would be the one built thinking a little more about the others.

The expression "John Paul II, the great communicator", is true, but it can mislead. He was a great communicator not so much because of how he communicated, certainly splendid, as by the content of the treaty. I communicated content, goals, and that's why young people answered my question by saying "he's right". A beautiful voice, or a magnificent expressive form, is not right. The reason is given to those who declare the truth, to those who affirm the truth.

The root of this magnificent acceptance, among the young people, of the teachings of John Paul II, was that he knew how to make virtue sympathetic, made it alive, exciting, attractive. Moreover, necessary. He never sought to put principles into the making of principles, to prescribe norms, to formulate abstract propositions. When I spoke to them, I exposed truth and kindness using the gripping plot of authentically human life. And he did so by showing the beauty of values, the universal appeal of good.

In his dialogues with young people, the underlying theme was the truth of things. The truth, and, by contrast, the lie, that may or may not be present in one's existence. In two strokes he counteracted the deceptive sophisms with the consistency of true things. Thus, the beautiful, the good and the true appeared in it always united in a proposal that could fill up, until it overflows, the biography. Not only did he say what goodness is, but he taught to be good.

Young people have always wondered about the possible relationship with God. And John Paul II made it clear that God is not a normative code, nor a belief, but a Person to believe in, in which to hope and with whom to live an intense, faithful, reciprocal love, throughout life. God can be entrusted with one's existence, to a moral code, not even a day.

This extraordinary concretion, congenial with his way of being very direct and

immediate, corresponded with the essence of his Christian religiosity, of his sanctity of life. With young people, the alliance between message and life emerged. Young people saw that this way of speaking about God arose from a personal experience matured throughout the life of John Paul II. It was not the reading of the pages of a book written by another. The words they heard captured the truth of their message, even when the subject was arduous, difficult to accept, to digest and to apply to one's existence. That is why young people in Denver, Dakar, Czestochowa, said with conviction: "He is right". The geographical differences did not seem to count: the theme of the youth and the Pope was always the same and always new. Permanently alive and incisive.

Thus, that same youth that had as an imprint of our time, perhaps of all ages, rebellion, the a priori rejection of the legacy of parents and teachers, surrendered voluntarily to a new understanding of God, a God not threatening, but Father, as evidenced by the Pope's words. A God who illuminated one's existence, so that by confronting Him, one could say with serene and sincere conviction: "... And I suck!"

The young men spoke to the Pope without modesty, they knew they could trust him. I still remember the dramatic tale in Kampala of a 14-year-old girl. She had been raped on her way back at dusk to her family's hut. Sometime later, because of the brutal fact, she manifested herself as HIV-positive. Now, I was saying, I don't have much life left. The Pope called her, hugged her, and it was one of the few times that what he said to the girl was not heard from the loudspeakers that he had removed. In the silence of that intimate dialogue between the young woman and the Pope, thousands of young people participated with shock and prayer. Everyone seemed to feel the Pope's embrace, who somehow hugged each other. Best: a hug with the biographical wounds that each had.

This was then, and continues to be today, my conviction about the reason for the extraordinary relationship of young people with John Paul II: in him, they saw the fusion between the strength of the message and the life of the Pope. A conviction and the evidence of full dedication to what he deeply believed was authentic, and that he later said and showed with the facts. That is why he persuaded because in him they warned the best testimony of what he proposed.