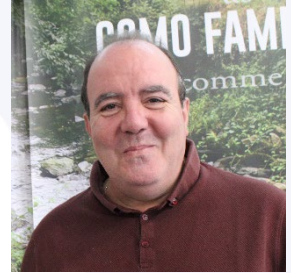


KINTSUGI

A reflection written by Br. Óscar Martín Vicario, General Councillor

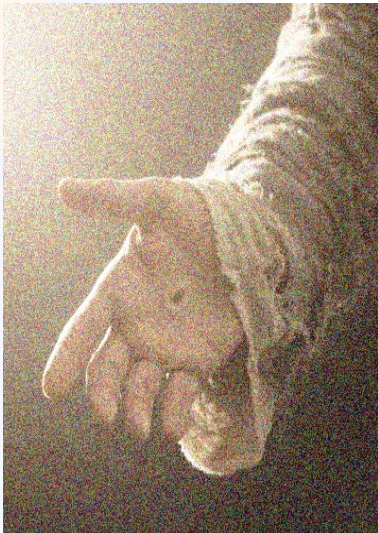
Something I was not told when I started my time as Provincial, a few years ago, was that I would have to accompany many brothers in hospital, through their crises, in their moments of weakness, and even in preparing for death (I had to say goodbye to forty-eight brothers in six years). I must admit that it was a tough experience. More than once, to my surprise, I was filled with a feeling of powerlessness and tears flowed.



Yet, at the same time, it was a privilege and a grace. The names of many of those brothers will stay with me forever, especially those whose loss was most painful, such as Miguel, César, Antonio, Augustine, Carmelo... Sharing their pain and suffering, their fear and farewells was an exercise in presence, patience, compassion, listening and a lot of learning. I thank God today for the privilege of these encounters.

"HE SHOWED THEM HIS WOUNDS"

These memories have come flooding back these days, as I read the beautiful post-Easter stories, in which the question of the identity of the risen one is repeatedly asked, and which underscore the desire of Jesus' followers to demonstrate that the person they met face to face was really Jesus. One of the means used to describe their experience was that Jesus "showed them his wounds" (John 20:20), to dispel any disbelief.



The phrase, I admit, has made me wince when I meditated on it these days: "He showed them his wounds". How beautiful is this paradox, speaking of the risen triumphant One! He did not first show them his miracles, or his strength, or his might. He did not summon them to a mystical and magical place, or to the temple, but to the everyday life of Galilee. He did not reveal his identity to them with rational arguments... He only "showed them his wounds".

In times of bewilderment, of feeling vulnerable, this scene gets to me and raises questions. I, who am a person of strong character, with a tendency to be rather sure of myself and determined (at least "on the outside"), feel invited, at this stage of my life, to show my wounds, to let others see where and in what ways I am weak, to not hide my failures or hide my limits as I have sometimes done. It is there, more than in my pride or my arrogance, where I hide (and yet show) who I really am, my real identity. To express our contemporary fragility, how inspiring and evocative is the image of a home

or a house "without walls", which is where I and all of us live these days (and about which an acquaintance from Valladolid, the biblical scholar Víctor Herrero, has recently written beautifully).

Yes, I have wounds. Yes, I have been afraid in the pandemic. Yes, my heart has been torn with the loss of people I know. Yes, I have been afraid of what would happen if I were infected. Yes, I live in worry for those I love. Yes, my faith is not strong enough to cope with all this. Yes, in this context, living in fraternity has become more difficult. Yes, I find it difficult to ask for help and say, "I'm in bad shape", "I don't understand", "I'm in pain"... And, I must admit, I'm even surprised when I hear some people, in times like these, say "I'm very well", "Everything's fine for me", "I'm doing great". Well, I'm not.

Today I prefer the Jesus who "bares his wounds": in him, human and bruised, I feel more understood. A few years ago, I heard Jon Sobrino, a Jesuit theologian based in El Salvador, say: "Let us not forget that the risen one is the crucified one... but also the other way round, that the crucified one is the risen one. And there is no other place of encounter with God than in each of the crucified, crushed, suffering people of the earth."

That is why, as I have been ruminating over recent months, I identify more and more with the Champagnat who went crying to the chapel of Our Lady of Pity because he was fearful at the prospect of his foundation faltering without vocations; with the man who got up limply from his bed of illness to support his brothers; with the man who wondered, sitting by the Gier, if his lifework was the work of God or if it was better to give up; or with the man who fell down in the snow, his strength slipping away, and raised his eyes looking for a light (which he was only to find outside when faith kindled it from within).

I find it hard to let my feet be washed. And for others to see my poverty and limitations. But showing my wounds is the invitation of the Risen One. Because, as Pope Francis wisely said this last Palm Sunday, "God is with us in every wound, in every fear".

KINTSUGI

In this vein, I was fascinated by the message from a brother and friend telling me about "*kinti*". I had no idea what it was, and maybe that makes me ignorant because it is a centuries-old art... But, with its Easter overtones, it sounded to me like something new and provocative: it is a Japanese technique for repairing broken vessels, which consists of joining the pieces together and refashioning the vessels from the various bits (including some precious ones), into an artistic whole, but with the cracks remaining visible. In this way, the flaws, blemishes, and fracture lines become the most beautiful features of the renovated vessel. Not only are they not hidden, they are embellished with gold.

A magnificent art, *kintsugi*. How I would like to learn to master it in my own life and in times of grief! To learn to look at everyone with the eyes of those Japanese artisans who see brokenness as a grace and fractures as opportunities to mend.

At a recent symposium of the "St Marcellin Champagnat Association" of Australia, Dominican Timothy Radcliffe proposed the same thing when he made a surprising invitation to us to be "gardeners of life", that is, to help to heal, to survive failures, to provide vital oxygen, as did the incarnate God, healer, and liberator, always close to the wounded and the poor.

My humble prayer this Easter: Teach me, Lord, to let my wounds be seen. I need to unashamedly dare to challenge propriety and be like those (Nicodemus, the haemorrhaging woman, Zacchaeus, the adulteress...) who came near you fearful and weak, trembling, yet ready to stand before you and before the people "showing their wounds", their fears and their pain. Give me and give us, Lord, the strength of weakness. The smile of a sick child. The provocation of Sister Ann Un Twang who disarmed the Myanmar soldiers only by kneeling and crying. The wise theology of slowness, spoken of by Cardinal Tolentino. The prophecy of the small. The power of dung.

The Risen One showed them and shows us his wounds. "It's Him!", they said in recognition. That's Who I want to be.

Alleluia, brothers.

Kintsugi.

