

10th anniversary of the first World Meeting of Popular Movements

'Planting a flag in the face of dehumanisation'

20 September 2024

Introduction of Card. Michael Czerny S.J.

"Be the voice of the voiceless," the Bible says, "speak up for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9). And Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).

As is often the case, the message of Jesus is more radical. Justice cannot be an intellectual matter, or even a legal one. It has to be rooted deep within us, as urgent and impossible to ignore as hunger and thirst. One such satisfaction are the Popular Movements we are celebrating today.

Hearing the voiceless is certainly the first step, not to block our ears like the passers-by in the famous Parable of the Good Samaritan who averted their eyes from the man beaten by robbers and left half-dead by the side of the road. Moreover, it does little good to look at the injustices from above and from the outside. Human life and our common home are increasingly insecure because of the abuse, neglect and violence that both increasingly suffer, and they will begin to become more secure only when justice begins to be upheld.

The expression "the voice of the voiceless" is VERY true. There are many in society who have no voice, who have no say, whose viewpoints, interests, rights and aspirations count for nothing, while far fewer decide and benefit. The voiceless need to be heard, and their hunger and thirst need to be satisfied. For this to happen, it helps when those who can speak, who do have a voice, cry out against injustice.

Voices of the voiceless speak truth to power. When the poor are repressed and persecuted for expressing themselves, God sends prophetic voices who, with great clarity and courage, speak up for them. I am thinking of San Oscar Romero and of Berta Cáceres, who participated in the first World Meeting of Popular Movements.

However, "the voice of the voiceless" is NOT true if it implies that many people indeed have nothing to say, or cannot express what they want and deserve. It is NOT the self-appointed spokespeople who, often without even listening, claim to know and promote the real interests of the poor. It is also NOT true when the voiceless are finally given a hearing, only to be told by those in power what they are permitted to talk about and what words they must use.

Ultimately, the real problem is not the voicelessness of the many, but the deafness of privilege.

To hunger and thirst for justice, to raise our voice for the voiceless, Jesus shows us how we should be: humble, not taken up with pride, success, money and fame; in solidarity with those who suffer, able to weep with them and to comfort them; meek, acting without violence or boasting but with a deep thirst for justice, fighting firmly for the common good and for the rights of the oppressed. This is the consistent teaching of Pope Francis, which is based on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). We must be merciful, showing compassion and forgiveness towards others, avoiding finger-pointing and understanding the circumstances that befall each person. We must live with a pure heart, seeking the good with sincerity and honesty. We must be peacemakers, promoting reconciliation in a world torn by fratricidal wars. We must be willing to face persecution for the sake of justice, remaining steadfast in our faith and commitment to social justice, even in the midst of terrible defamation, willing even to lay down our own lives.

Jesus requires us to meet the basic needs of others, as Pope Francis constantly teaches, based on the final judgment (Matthew 25): to feed the hungry by ensuring that no one lacks a plate of food; to give drink to the thirsty by ensuring that all people have access to water; to clothe the naked so that no family is left out in the cold; to welcome foreigners by avoiding any form of discrimination against migrants; to accompany the sick by ensuring that they are properly cared for in their suffering; and to visit prisoners, whether good or bad, so that all may live in dignity and grow in human fullness.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice,” Jesus says, “for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6). “Be the voice of the voiceless,” the Bible says, “speak up for the rights of all who are destitute” (Proverbs 31:8-9).

May God abundantly bless the Popular Movements in the years to come, and let me welcome you warmly, online and in presence, to our 10th anniversary celebration.