

In Search of a Pedagogy “From Below”

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34

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“And he began to teach them many things.” In this brief statement Mark the evangelist presents Jesus as educator of the people.

It’s certain that Jesus traveled the routes of his community’s wisdom. He knew well the vital methods which simple people follow to learn and to educate others.

His pedagogy didn’t depend on pre-set programs. That’s why he adhered to the occasions and rhythms of the people he was talking with. Jesus did not impose the “right” moment on them. The right moment arose as people came forward to dialogue with him.

Migrant life-rhythms determine the entire existence of real people and communities. In defining pastoral work with such people, there are those who say, on the basis of realities that obtain in other situations, “What’s necessary in migrant ministry is forming leaders from the migrant community.” True enough, leadership formation never stops being a challenge, but only as the outcome of a pedagogical path inspired by the Gospel. We pastoral ministers cannot be the ones who determine either the occasions or the conditions of that path.

Jesus is supremely creative, but his creativity honors the dynamic of people’s lives.

The migrant mothers and fathers I know yearn for a good education for their children. They make every effort to achieve that end, but they are realistic, knowing that they cannot count on their children ever having the time necessary. Those same adults will themselves have wanted a “better education...so as not to have to work so much.” They see their children deprived of opportunity in the same way they were.

It seems to me that Mark the evangelist, by describing Jesus’ way of teaching, sketches the features of an educating community. It is an itinerant pedagogical model with a long-range view yet one which arises out of encounter with people’s concrete life situations. Jesus approaches people openly, on their level, independently of structures or expectations external to them. People for him are far more important than the socio-cultural prejudices that levy their own forms of taxation. An attitude like Jesus’ encourages people to identify alternatives according to their own understandings.

Theologian Fr. Jon Sobrino, SJ, uses the phrase “mercy principle” to describe that constant attitude in Jesus’ life: A profound sensitivity for “listening” to the other person, instead of merely assuming ahead of time how he or she thinks or feels. It is an attitude, a habit of looking at life “from below,” from the situation of the one who has been excluded and then of meeting the person right there, where he or she is.

Jesus teaches this way because he knows there is already a rich dynamism in action within each person and community. He enters into this dynamism fully, yet transforms it through his own complicity with the action of the Spirit.

The Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, author of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was right when he said, “Christ must be for me the great example of the pedagogue. What fascinates me about the Gospel is the indivisibility between its content and the method with which Jesus communicated it...”

The migrant community, like many other sectors of the church, still awaits a pedagogical initiative for enriching its faith life that responds to the community’s real expectations and that enables the community to discover the road to its own liberation.

