

Migrant Spirituality

Acts 9:26-31; I John 3:18-24; John 15:1-8

May 14, 2006

Life is richer and more complex than it seems... This is a commonplace, perhaps, but it is also the experience of those who believe and who, like the branches of a tree with its trunk, seek to maintain a vital unity with the reality that gives meaning to life.

Those of us who live the Christian life don't have a monopoly on the Spirit. Many diverse paths crossing the horizon of the religions are authentic proposals to live what we Christians call "spirituality."

We ourselves try to express with the word "spirituality" those vital elements that allow a human, Christian maturity to grow and flourish in us. These elements depend greatly on ourselves, but even more on that other reality that surpasses and sustains us.

The men and women in the Gospel were certain that the energy driving them bloomed from the mission and person of Jesus. Taking Jesus' path as one's own is what identifies a Christian. To walk in the Spirit is an experience that unfolds from the person's interior—it is not something that comes from outside. Yes, it is clear that we come to faith through trusted witnesses. We all remember friends, dads, moms, grandpas, teachers, etc. who led us, through their own example, to him who is the way, the truth, and the life. Nevertheless, it is not until people exercise their own option for faith that they can live from the deepest part of their vital sap. From this inner experience originates the disciple's life adventure.

Outside influences play a role at this point. For every historical situation demands a concrete and particular expression of that inner "spirituality," an appropriate way of connecting to Jesus' path.

Migrant spirituality has its own special features:

a) Migrant spirituality is **subterranean**: Personal identity and cultural values survive in the roots. Migrants find themselves forced to learn the values and practices of the dominant culture where they seek to live. Their children, growing up immersed in that dominant culture, become strangers to their parents. Over the years, this tension (involved in learning the new language, in responding appropriately to the demands of work and relationships) forces migrants to displace their cultural and personal identities. Their identities aren't lost, they go underground. It just takes a certain gesture, or encounter, or song to awaken them, bring the buried identities to the surface. They should never be given up for lost. They go under the surface for survival's sake.

b) Migrant spirituality is **provisional**: Migrants cultivate an attitude of openness to whatever comes. If you're stopped by "la migra" (= "ICE," Immigration and Customs Enforcement) because you don't have "papers," you know you can be deported and so you have to be ready to leave everything behind at a moment's notice. You have to live the present moment as profoundly as you can. If you have work, you take the fullest possible advantage of it. Everything else becomes irrelevant, because you're not certain you'll be working tomorrow. Your own fragility—without bank account, health insurance, credit card—makes you free.

c) Migrant spirituality is **transgressive**: Every formal legality that has to do with the country that receives you—and every moral normativity too—becomes relative. Life itself is your only value. Measured against all legal and cultural benchmarks of the country where you are trying to work and survive, you seem naïve, foolhardy, ignorant,

rootless, without values...but in the fearlessness of your life it is possible to recognize the radical honesty of your behavior and also to surmise that there is a powerful current that drives you. The future would not be possible for you if you did not pass beyond the narrow bounds of the "legality/illegality" mindset imposed upon you..

"Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."