



Lessons Learned from the Pandemic: Ten Key Words

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The pandemic has questioned the paradigm of self-sufficiency upon which our civilization is based and it has demonstrated the great limitations which our economic system has in order to guarantee the basic rights of all people, especially of those who find themselves in a situation of vulnerability. The human and economic cost requires us to work personally, communally and institutionally in order to contribute to the change that might allow us to reverse the contemporary logic on which are based the false visions of the human person and winds up taking us to an unsustainable future. Flipping through pages in order to forget about this serious nightmare, in our opinion, is an error. Therefore, we propose ten lessons, ten key words that are signs of this time and which we should work at and examine, in a personal and communitarian way, so that all that we

have lived during this last year and a half will not have been in vain.

1. Wounds

The pandemic has made us recognize anew our human condition: wounded and vulnerable. The pandemic has socialized suffering, but it is certainly true that not every one of us has suffered in the same way. If the suffering has not affected us personally, then perhaps we should keep silent and listen. To take on the anthropology of vulnerability means “to accept oneself” as a fragile and interdependent being. In a self-sufficient society, revealing yourself as vulnerable calls into question success, status and social value. There is a verb that can inspire us: to embody. To embody suffering or to incarnate it in ourselves and see what it

requires of us. From the point of view of Christian spirituality, the experience of the fragility and vulnerability of Jesus on the Cross invites us to accept our own.

2. Inequality

The pandemic has caused us to take a step backward in the struggle for the diminution of poverty and against the increase of inequality. We should understand that inequality has many different forms that crisscross each other and they continue creating a complex and dynamic reality (precariousness of work, weakness of fundamental public services like health and education, climatic crisis and forced displacements, migrations, institutional racism, etc.). These inequalities, in the plural, represent truncated life goals and wounds in fraternity. From the Christian perspective, this precariousness also means a sickness in the plan of God. The distribution of wealth explains, in an evident way, the effects of the virus and its unequal impact on the various geographic zones. We see it in the same way in the distribution of vaccines throughout the world.

3. Complexity

The pandemic caused a sudden breaking open of complexity and of great paradoxes, as, for example, public health, or economic recovery, social controls or individual freedoms, where might we reduce expenditures, or where should they be increased. We are facing the lived difficulties of guaranteeing food sufficiency. Protectionism is promoted where once there was favoring of free trade. We

don't have any thoughts prepared for understanding these paradoxes. It obliges us to resort to interdisciplinary analyses in which theology also helps us to clarify that sins can hide the social reality, paradoxical and opaque, in which we now are moving.

4. Paradigm of interconnectedness

The eco-interdependence that provides our cohesiveness makes all of us responsible for the rest of humanity and the planet. "A feeling of intimate union with the rest of the beings in nature cannot be real if at the same time there is no tenderness, compassion and concern for other human beings in the heart (*Laudato si'*, #91). Along with this threatening situation, there is a growing dynamic of individualism, egotism and isolation. Suspicion with respect to "the other" is on the rise. Emotions come first ahead of knowledge and there is a diminishment of the communal sense of belonging, a key to participation and to democracy. In the realm of politics, a dynamic of "constant excitement" is being promoted which contributes to and gives power to social alarm and fear.

Facing a paradoxical desire for individual survival, we advocate for building, despite our intrinsic vulnerability, a restoration of the dignity that interrelates everything. There are distinct options for reading reality and for responding to it to which the Church and its institutions can bring social values. Facing fear, it brings the security that comes from a community, facing bewilderment it brings the creative search for solutions, to the cry of "Every person save himself!", the promotion of a culture of solidarity.

5. The Common Good

The lack of equipment and public health infrastructures in many places in the world, or the impossibility of guaranteeing universal vaccination in the context of a global pandemic are some of the examples which have made clear the risks that go with both impeding the development of health services and guaranteeing the rights of the dynamics of a free market. It is necessary to be able to count on a State capable of guaranteeing basic universal human rights to the whole population. In order to do that, it is urgent to begin a fiscal reform that contributes to the redistribution of wealth and to the revision of public policy with the participation of the different social agents in order to guarantee that the policies are oriented toward the common good. That will only be possible if there is an increase in the controlling role of the citizenry.

6. Rupture

Uncertainty is the sign of the times of today, since security seems to be the great value emerging out of the pandemic. In contrast with a certain dynamic of acceleration of the global processes that had been falling upon us, we have felt, to a greater or lesser degree, interrupted. We have seen how small social alternatives grew, like wild possibilities become viable, and definitely like small communities are converted into places of salvation and welcome for those who are suffering and excluded. The Gospel promise of the Kingdom of God has broken surprisingly into unimaginable places. Like a tool that inspires imagination, a culture can offer new frameworks of comprehension and thought.

7. Challenges for faith

The pandemic has posed many questions for faith. How is it possible to speak from the midst of the pandemic without getting some distance? We reflect out of experience, mixing reflections that go from the head to the body and vice versa. We need to confront it with the voice of people who are sick, of the diverse ways that the pandemic was lived during confinement, of sorrow, etc. The sustenance of the faith is a Christian activity that is much more costly than just doing theology. Probably, the Church has not been up to the moment as a voice that rose clearly above others because of its orientation towards feeling with and accompanying others in these times. Although during the pandemic, in a silent way the religious associations have demonstrated that they have a great capacity to accompany people and to get close to the most vulnerable.

8. Spirituality

Spirituality is not something about which you can theorize or speculate. It is lived. That spiritual life should exist within us, a constant connection with the Lord, in prayer, in the Examen, in the frequent reading of the Gospel, in sacramental life, etc. The experience of St. Ignatius comes out of something lived. We have to allow ourselves to be moved by Christ Crucified and ask ourselves: "What have I done? What am I doing? What should I do for Christ?" That compassion with all those crucified in our own time imposes on us a real pre-theological commitment which afterwards should lead us to follow the Lord in the role of consoler. But

it should also place our spirituality at the service of social and ecclesial reality, seen from a point of view of a discernment that confirms the understanding of the Church as communion.

9. Resurrection hope

We can agree that the Resurrection is the paradigm from which, as believers, we should approach reality, and even more so now after the crisis brought on by COVID-19. What does the Resurrection appear to be in the context of the pandemic? The resurrection is what allows us to hope. We cannot just look at the Cross. We should look at the Cross from the viewpoint of the handing over of himself by Jesus, of a resurrected Jesus. The disciples on the road to Emmaus can only experience and confirm that they have met up with the Risen One when they return to the community. Meanwhile they believe and hope. That call to the communitarian dimension can be a point of departure for recovering hope and an opportunity for that hope not to remain a chimera, a utopia, but rather something which is a part of everyday life.

What are we hoping for as a community or a society? How can we open ourselves to hope for what is unexpected and in what way can we live with that hope without falling into pessimism?

10. Paradigm of caregivers

Faced with the danger of becoming caught up in the diagnosis, and also faced

with the challenge of being a protagonist in the writing of the signs of the times, there arises the necessity of a structural change based on a new model of care giving, recognizing our vulnerabilities, placing the good life in the center of our actions and of our public policies. Looking at the world from our vulnerability and interdependence is a potent turn that cannot be resolved only by changing and adjusting the current model. It is necessary to dig deeper and broaden the new ecological anthropology which invites us to a caring for life, the protection of weakness, the restraining of desires and consumption, and self-limitation. This new focus enormously questions the culture of success and status that predominates in the greater part of the activities in the public sphere. The pandemic invites us to initiate vectors of personal and social change that we cannot postpone.

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The ten lessons, with their respective key words, are an open narration, woven by many people over a year. The ending of the story is the task of each individual or group of readers. For that purpose, it can help, either for each word or for the whole text, to ask ourselves these three questions: What has caught my attention? And precisely for each thing that has caught my attention, what does that have to do with my life? The next step is evident enough, because it deals with motivating us and committing ourselves in a concrete way. Where does what I have discovered take me?

Faith-based Social Reflection Groups¹

1. The Faith-based Social Reflection Groups are an initiative of the Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus in Spain. Concretely, groups have participated in Barcelona, Bilbao, Donostia, Granada, Zaragoza and Valencia..