

A community of fate

Community becomes deeper when we share something painful. With whom would I even be prepared to die?

Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples: "Then let us also go, that we may die with him."

John 11,16

What did Ignacio Ellacuria think and feel when he, in that November night of the year 1989, was pulled out of his room and pushed face down into the grass? The projectile should have penetrated him and silenced him forever. But we can surmise at some of the reasons he was prepared to face such a death. Why he was not satisfied to talk about the crucified Jesus, but had to speak about the "crucified people" of El Salvador. These ideas did not first appear during his work as a professor of philosophy at the Central American University. They were founded in the experience that he had made during his training as a Jesuit. Already at the age of sixteen he had practised the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. In this time of silence a fantasy of Jesus accompanied him in his suffering on Good Friday. Soon afterwards Ignacio was sent to El Salvador, where he felt with the suffering of the people under poverty and exploitation. Intellectually Ellacuria was influenced by Karl Rahner in Innsbruck, in Madrid by the Basque philosopher Xavier Zubiri. Ellacuria realised his emphasis on a „compassionate intelligence“ by connecting his compassion with suffering people with his university education and formulated the political dimension of faith: "Freedom which has become flesh: the sending of Christ and his Church" is the title of one of his books. Such ideas are poison for dictators and military regimes. At the same time they contain the courage to sacrifice one's own life.

Ellacurias' ability for courageous and aware compassion connects him to the apostel Thomas, known to us as the "doubter". "Let us go with him in order to die with him," he encourages the other disciples, fully conscious that Jesus' hour had come – his most horrible and his last. Thomas is also called Didymus, "twin" . From the first moment of his awareness he had the privilege – as did all twins – of a fateful intimacy to the other with whom he shared his growth in the womb, as well as his childhood, the playmates of his youth, developmental crises, many character traits and thoughts. As a twin Thomas had won the strength of relationship, to trust in Jesus and his concerns completely. He became like a twin brother for Jesus. For him it was beyond question: if Jesus had to die for his way of giving himself to the people, then he wanted to die with him.

Not only in Christianity, but in each authentic relationship, it matters how much room one or the "other" takes in my experience. With whom do I share the spaces of my life so that we can come closer to each other? With whom do I experience such a strong community of fate, that her joy makes me happy, her pain makes me suffer? With whom would I be prepared to die?