

# Evil and the love that saves

The tragic story of Riccardo, the 17-year-old who killed his parents and brother for no apparent reason, shocks and challenges us.<sup>1</sup> From what we know, he gave no other motive other than a personal unease he wanted to get rid of. There is such unfathomable mystery in the manifestation of such an inhuman evil that the first reaction is silence full of heartbreak. Pain for the victims (and for the culprit, who now faces a lifetime marked by what he has done) is amplified by turning our gaze to the many young people who feel a similar unease and often communicate it in various ways, but just as often hide it inside. This unease takes the form of an inner emptiness and a radical isolation that is not limited to particular cases. In fact, no one is really exempt from it.

The first need we feel, beyond the cases reported in the news, is to question ourselves and attempt to understand what lies at the origin of certain phenomena, aware that it ultimately remains an unattainable mystery. Many intellectuals, journalists, and experts have spoken on the subject; some in particular have seen fit to remind, to “a society that refuses to see the abyss before it,” that “in the world the active presence of evil instead exists” (Susanna Tamaro, *Corriere della Sera*, September 4). “An unfathomable evil, therefore close and possible even in us” (Maurizio Crippa, *Il Foglio*, September 4).

Although we are overcome, like everyone, by a sense of bewilderment, we should ask ourselves whether this unease finds fertile ground in the conception of freedom we are immersed in. Freedom understood as total autonomy, as the claim that I am enough for myself, where the only permissible horizon of fulfillment is the realization of my own desires and plans, often derived from expectations imposed by society. According to this view, the other not only has no right to help me understand who I am but tends even to become an enemy. The dramatic outcome, regardless of age, is the breaking of ties: we may not isolate ourselves physically, but we lose the sense of these connections, with

the risk of finding ourselves bored or even depressed, increasingly empty and lonely because we are unable to recognize that the relationship with the other defines us as people.

In this context, to say education is the current emergency is to care about the destiny of us all. Listening to young people and taking their questions seriously is crucial, but it is not enough if there is no one to point out a path and share it with them, as Riccardo’s grandparents, who have not abandoned him, simply testify to us. Nothing is more necessary than parents and teachers offering young people a hypothesis of meaning for life. At school, in particular, this involvement should be fostered so that boys and girls can really verify the educational proposals. Instead, the tendency seems to be to silence these voices, in the name of a misunderstood conception of secularism as neutrality. The problem is not to educate them in a way of life, but to educate them to ask why we live and what we live for. This need for meaning that we try to mask in so many ways is in fact an ineradicable aspiration, even in its insensitive or even tragic expressions. What we long for, more or less consciously, is someone to love us, to recognize our worth, to free us from evil.

Such a love seems impossible. Yet there was a moment in history when it presented itself and claimed to be such in the features of a face with a specific name: Jesus of Nazareth. As happened to the Samaritan woman in the Gospel: Jesus decided to take the most arduous route, through the desert, and got to the well at a time of day when no one went there, specifically to speak to that woman. That encounter saved her: God Himself was inconvenienced for her. It is the beginning of a new life, the possibility of a gaze on oneself and on reality that is full of hope. So it is for us too. Fragile and limited like everyone else, faced with the inexplicable abyss of evil, we have nothing to offer the world but this love we receive in turn and a friendship where to experience it.

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<sup>1</sup>The reference is to a recent news report on an event in Paderno Dugnano, a town in the province of Milan, where a 17-year-old killed his parents and his 12-year-old younger brother. A young man with apparently no particular problems, living in a normal family like many, but who carried out a massacre that even he cannot explain.