
"It is not good for man to be alone"

In a very disturbing report, physician Dr. Vivek Murthy, member of the current U.S. government's advisory circle, addresses the harmful effects of loneliness on health. The doctor, who is also the author of "Together. The healing power of human connection in a sometimes lonely world," raises the alarm in his report about the lethality of loneliness, in the sense of a debilitating inner experience of one's relationships, and isolation, which is instead a more external condition of marginalization and distance.

One dies of solitude, then. Medicine says so, but deep down the heart has always told us so, when it ached because we were lonely.

One dies of solitude, because "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18): man was not made to be alone, and this applies not only to marriage, but to the very source code of human nature. Man is created incomplete, so that he may discover his completion in relationship with his fellow human beings, and in this he may also find his true identity as the image of God, who is the God of relationships, the eternal Trinity.

"It is not good for man to be alone," because he may come to forget that he is not made to think of himself in the singular, and, as he becomes accustomed to his incompleteness, he may fall into the tempting deception of beginning to conceive of himself as a self-sufficient individual, one against all others, thereby developing a calculating mentality that sifts everything according to what can enrich him and what can hinder him in his expansion (which is the way of individual growth). Until he ends up alone, indeed, abandoned by the temptation that had previously seduced him, disillusioned about his own chances of being happy without inconveniencing others, and condemned to despairing emptiness.

"It is not good for man to be alone," and this applies to us priests as well, precisely because, as we were saying, God does not come to this remark only with a view to the nuptial union of man and woman, but to define our destiny as persons shaped in the image of the Persons.

I think of my brethren all over the world who go to the extreme of committing suicide out of loneliness, only to be subsequently concealed by a blanket of silence and shame...how much ideological poison has been inoculated for centuries into the vision of the ideal priest, defined as such because he is capable of "being alone" and therefore invited to isolate himself, to neglect affections, friendships, shared interests... leading most among us to bizarre lifestyles (when not aberrant, bordering on vagrancy) in order to maintain a precarious balance that on the one hand would preserve a shadow of humanity, and on the other prevent them from plunging into the abyss of compensatory vices (often failing to do so).

We have turned celibacy, which is meant to love more and be inclusive in welcoming and fraternity, into a strange form of singletude, and the result is many sad priests.

We must remember: "It is not good for man to be alone." The future of priestly celibacy, which will be able to regenerate and preserve its humanity and fruitfulness, lies in the rediscovery of the fraternal and communal dimension - that is why the early Church always associated the celibate choice with

monastic life, that is, with an abundance of relationships!

A yearning for fraternity is emerging among the priests of my generation, although it faces countless obstacles, dictated by mentalities that are now entrenched in the opposite direction ever since the days of seminary, as well as by the whirlwind of constant and very seldom fulfilling but strangely necessary activities, which over the years extinguish somewhat the desire to go out, to meet others, to do things, to share. Despite all this, there is a need to learn to carry "each other's burdens," to seek and give empathy - in short, to experience friendship. A friendship that will hopefully blossom in the Church of today and tomorrow in experimentation and rediscovery of communal life, such that even the presence of priests in parishes located in a given territory should be rethought; after all, having one dead or depressed or exhausted priest permanently in each parish is not much more convenient than having three or four happily living together, even at the cost of seeing them a little less in the parishes. The primacy of being-with over doing must apply to everyone, if it is a Christian principle.

While I wait to see the first blossoms of this most urgent concern, I would like to share an experience of community life that the Lord gave me to launch in 2015.

I remember very well that a year earlier, while I was praying afflicted by the very concern for my and many people's loneliness, the Lord ignited an intuition in my heart, which a year later began to come to fruition, and thus the first [Koinoikia Houses](#) were born, the proposal of community life addressed to the young people of Rome, aimed at their leaving the family nucleus to emancipate themselves, but also to learn to live a network of equal relationships to cherish, in the spirit and rules of true small fraternal communities. To date there are nine of these Houses in Rome, six for boys and three for girls. One of the Boys' Houses is hosted by my parish, at the request of my superiors, and is aimed more specifically at vocational discernment.

What do young people who enter into this experience discover? That to learn to love one must step into it, it is neither automatic nor innate, and that one can be loved in all one's limitations and needs. One learns to shift the center of gravity from oneself to one's relationships, to care (for other people and for a home), to not conceive of one's time in the singular. And so, at the end of the experience, which lasts one or more years depending on the person's needs, one moves into the next step of one's life having learned the vocabulary of community life and sharing: which is no small thing in view of marriage or any other vocational choice!

The need for community is becoming more and more crucial in a humanity atomized by comfort and pandemics: experiences of supportive condominiums, cohousing, etc. are springing up everywhere. The Church, which has communion in its DNA, cannot fail to respond to this innate human need with proposals for communal living that restore people's zest for life, freeing them from the oppressive burden of loneliness.

The Church of Rome in particular, which exists in a city where the majority of its millions of inhabitants, according to the most recent surveys, are reported to be living alone, is called upon to regard this relational desert as the domain into which to pour creativity, ingenuity, and above all love, in order to build a model of fraternal life, which is both ancient and always new.

