

Connecting in multivocality

Beloved person,

During the festival *The new power of song* in Bussum, composer Merlijn Twaalfhoven gave a lecture. He told us that until the eighteenth century it was not customary to perform music for a quiet, watching audience. Making music had to be 'done' and you did that together. In the past two hundred years that has changed greatly. We have become used to concerts where musicians play and the public listens. We buy a ticket, take a seat in the hall and 'consume' the music, in the hope we will be touched. And there is a very good chance that, afterwards, we will be asked to give our opinion online.

Twaalfhoven related how he as a composer turned around at a certain point. Literally and figuratively. He wanted to involve the public in his work once again and make music together with them. Many seemed to be quite uncomfortable with this because this was not why they bought their ticket. Nowadays he goes one step further. He invites those present to start and finish themselves and present their own sounds; without a conductor, without written music, without certainty but still making music together *and* connected. During the festival I noticed how much discomfort I felt and which new skills this asked of me, such as tolerating uncertainty. What precisely did I have to do? In any case it meant an intense and attentive way of listening, staying close to myself without holding myself back and without dominating anyone else *and* taking responsibility for the whole thing. Without someone showing me the way.

We live in a time of change, uncertainty and chaos. What became so tangible in my musical experience, is not exceptional but a mirror of these times. Increasingly we are invited to live without firm frameworks, without certainty of progress and without that *one* person indicating the right direction. These times thus require the development of new skills, not only as musicians but as people in this world, also within the Apostolic Society.

Living on this earth together lovingly – without a score in which each bar is fixed – means searching for and being able to tolerate uncertainty. Not knowing when something begins or ends and not knowing if you are doing it 'right'. In everyday life we are quick to try to reduce uncertainty with rules, opinions and decisions. However, these times require progressively more of us all, to not solve uncertainties but to live with and to endure them. That requires courage and faith: faith that something can arise without the result being fixed beforehand and in the realisation that not-knowing is not a shortcoming, but can be an opening for something new.

Closely related to this is enduring your inability to act. That moment where you feel it is your turn but not knowing what you will do. We are experienced in doing and solving, but less in waiting, sensing and coordinating. This skill asks that you don't force yourself to act straightaway but gives space to see what presents itself.

Truly listening is also asked of us. Not listening so as to react or to make judgment, but to observe. What are you really hearing? What is happening inside the other and what does that evoke in me? A type of delayed listening, feeling your way past the initial reflex. That asks you to be present, having the patience and the ability to not have to understand everything immediately or to agree. This type of listening can also be very confronting: you feel your muscles tensing, your face reddens, from irritation or from enthusiasm. This skill is not one of suppressing those feelings, but also to not be led by them.

Whenever we want to live together *and* in connection, then perhaps the most exciting thing is that no *one* person determines the direction. All voices count, no matter how different they may be. This asks a sense of shared responsibility of us: my attitude influences the whole. If we want to experience the power of connection, for us that means to learn to have faith that the ability to be human together resides in us *and* expresses itself through us.

With a warm-hearted greeting, gladly your brother,
Marten van der Wal



We remember those who have gone before us