

Glory is transitory

SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI. This is how St. Paul defines the human status in one of his epistles: So the glory of the world passes away. Even knowing this, man is always seeking recognition through his work. Why? One of Brazil's greatest poets, Vinícius de Moraes, says in one of his lyrics:

*“And yet, we must sing
more than ever we must sing.”*

Vinícius de Moraes is brilliant in these phrases. Recalling Gertrude Stein, in her poem “A rose is a rose, is a rose”, he just said that we must sing. He neither explains, nor justifies, nor uses metaphors. When I was a candidate for the Brazilian Academy of Letters, when going through the ritual of meeting its members, I heard something similar from member Josué Montello. He told me: “Every person has the duty to take the road that goes through his village.”

Why? What is on that road?

What force is it that impels us far from the comfort of what is familiar and makes us face challenges, even knowing that the glory of the world is transitory?

I believe that impulse is called: the search for the meaning of life.

For many years I looked in books, in art, in science, along the dangerous or comfortable paths I took, for a conclusive answer to that question. I found many, some which convinced me for years, others that did not stand up to a single day's analysis; but none of them was strong enough for me to be able to say now: the meaning of life is this.

Today I am convinced that that answer will never be entrusted to us in this existence, although, in the end, at the moment when we are again before the Creator, we will understand each opportunity that was offered to us – then accepted or rejected.

In an 1890 sermon, clergyman Henry Drummond talks about that meeting with the Creator. He says:

“At this moment, the great question of the human being will not be: “How have I lived?”

Rather, it will be: "How have I loved?"

The final test of every search is the dimension of our Love. What we have done, what we believe in and what we achieved, will not be taken into account.

None of that will be demanded of us, but rather our way of loving our fellow human. The errors we have committed will not even be remembered. We will not be judged by the bad we have done, but rather by the good that we have failed to do. Keeping Love locked up inside oneself is going against the spirit of God; it is proof that we have never known Him, that He has loved us in vain."

The glory of the world is transitory and it is not that which gives us the dimension of our life – but the choice we make of pursuing our personal myth, of believing in our Utopias, and fighting for them. We are all protagonists of our existences and very often it is the anonymous heroes that leave the most lasting marks.

A Japanese legend says that a certain monk, filled with enthusiasm by the Chinese book Tao Te King, decided to raise funds to translate and publish those verses into his mother tongue. He took ten years to collect enough.

In the meantime, a plague afflicted his country and the monk decided to use the money to relieve the suffering of the sick. As soon as the situation returned to normal, again he began to raise the money needed for publishing the Tao; more than ten years went by and when he was ready to print the book, a seaquake left hundreds of people homeless.

The monk again spent the money on rebuilding houses for those that had lost everything. A further ten years went by, he began to raise money and, finally, the Japanese people were able to read the Tao Te King.

Wise men say that, in fact, the monk made three editions of the Tao: two invisible and one printed. He believed in his Utopia, fought the good fight, remained true to his objective, but did not stop paying attention to his similar. I hope it will be like that with all of us: sometimes invisible books, emerging from generosity shown to one's fellow human, are as important as those that fill our libraries.