



INTERVIEW

Álvaro Martínez: «The Cursillo in Christianity is a search experience»

He is the national president of the Cursillo Movement



El presidente nacional de los cursillos de cristiandad, Álvaro Martínez. -

This week marks the 70th anniversary of the origin of the Cursillos in Christianity, which were born as the preparation for a pilgrimage from Mallorca to Santiago de Compostela in 1949. Currently, about fourteen courses are held in Cordoba every year, with an average of 25 participants each. The average age of the Cursillistas is around 40, but there are participants between 20 and 70 years old. For the national president, Álvaro Martínez, from Cordoba, participating in a Cursillo is "a search experience".

– What is a Cursillo like in the 21st century?

– In the 21st century, as it was in the 20th, Cursillo is still basically an experience of encountering God, in a three-day experience of living together.

– Is this type of experience still attractive nowadays? Are there many people willing to attend these Cursillos?

– In Spain 250 or 300 are celebrated every year. These are not overwhelming numbers, but they do respond to a conscious or unconscious need people feel towards seeking meaning and reason for their lives. We understand that this can be achieved as a result from reflection, internalization and reconsideration of everyday life.

– Does age vary according to the topic that each Cursillo addresses?

– No, it does not, because all the Cursillos are similar. It depends on the dates of the Cursillos scheduled for each year, and the availability of the people who want to attend them. A very important approach of the Cursillos is their heterogeneity. It is interesting to notice how people of different ages, backgrounds, religious or cultural approaches are able to share, get to know each other and reflect together. It is a very enriching human experience.

– Where are they held in Cordoba? There was a centre for spiritual exercises in El Cerrillo.

– Yes, there was, but since the 60's there is also a house in the Sierra, in the area of La Castilleja, a unique building, designed by Rafael de la Hoz. Cursillos have been celebrated there for many years now.

– What does this 70th anniversary mean for you? How are you going to celebrate?

– For us, celebrating 70 years of a journey that has helped so many people, in Cordoba and Spain, to live their lives with more joy and fulfilment, is both a reason for

contentment and commitment, because we believe that we possess something worth it and we are determined to keep it. At a local level, in each city of Spain, we are planning to have a ceremony or at least a memory.

- What sort of people are Cursillos in Christianity aimed at? Practicing Catholics or people who are far away from God and the Church?

- The initial approach was to bring to the Cursillos those far away from God and the Church, in order to offer them a religious experience. In this respect, the Cursillos keep their characteristic of the “first proclamation of the Gospel”. This does not mean Cursillos would exclude anyone. Right now, those invited for the Cursillo experience are precisely the ones “in search”, because Cursillo is, as we have already said, a search experience. This search may arise from a situation of faith, or simply from stopping living a religious life after having had an initial religious formation. Cursillos can well be a gateway, but also a path to reaffirm a life of faith.

- I thought that the Cursillos were like a master's degree for Catholics.

- No, they are not; actually, it is the other way around; it is just the beginning. They are the “first proclamation”, the first contact with what is fundamental to be a Christian, an experience that will point out that being a Christian is something very simple.

- How would you invite an atheist to attend a Cursillo?

- I believe that trying it just with words is very difficult... People are attracted by the knowledge, closeness, witness. It would go like: “Hi, there is something that has made my life meaningful... So, if you are looking for something on those lines, I can offer you the chance to make the same experience...” The attitude, the simplicity, the humbleness of expressing to those who are far away from God that our lives could become much more valuable than we think they can be. We should have, all of us, this attitude of openness, this search for the prime of our lives, the drive to get the best from life. This is the approach able to show that an experience of faith can be meaningful. I do not believe that words convince people; what convinces is always the coherence of life.

- Is it possible to experience the love of God living Cursillos? Would it not be an exaggeration?

- It sounds weird. We are not used to considering these issues in our ordinary lives, and it may sound outdated in many environments, but the actual answer is “Yes, it is”. I can talk about my own experience, and that actual answer applies. The basis for

someone to be Christian is not a doctrine; it is experiencing that God is not something, but someone, and we this love. For me, this is something absolutely true, something I have had the privilege and the fortune of living personally. It is an experience of peace, of depth, of meaning; in a word, an experience of God's love, a surprising realisation that God has a place in our lives. When He enters our lives, we start living and feeling in a different way. It is an experience of faith. It is something that leads us to a non-everyday experience.

– You are a professor of Parasitology at the University of Cordoba. How do you combine science and faith?

– Naturally, with no problems. Science makes me perceive and understand the reality of the measurable, but I am absolutely convinced that this is not the only dimension of reality. There is another dimension that you can not reach through the scientific approaches, which is that of human relationships, of feelings, of experiences. It is in that other dimension that my faith is framed. Each one has its scope of action. Science is science, faith is faith, and science does not condition faith and faith does not condition science.