

# Socially true and meaningful

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Our existence in the digital and global era has frequently been characterized by the fact that we have often found ourselves distracted and, at times, torn between contacts competing for our attention, being confronted with different sources of information and being swamped by a deluge of opportunities and pressing demands. Then lockdown happened. We have now come to realize that life cannot be lived with only fleeting encounters with others, but we need the precious depth which comes from relationships which are true and sincere: ones which are filled with dialogue, with understanding, where there is a warm and effective sharing of joys and sorrows.

There is another way we can face this challenge. In the garden next to our house a family appeared who are very inventive when it comes to having fun together: lots of games, picnics, parents playing together with children among whom are – I do not know how – young foreigners. Other families have gone haywire because of a lack of space, of peace and quiet, of enough IT gadgets to stay in contact with either work or school.

After the temporary halt to everything which gave us back silence and the chance to be calm and collected, the level of communication has exploded again and this time it is almost always virtual. Between Zoom calls and working from home, webinars and online courses, we have discovered new opportunities that will accompany us into the future. However, we have already begun to get a bit fed up and tired with it all. Somehow, we now find ourselves in a worse state than before.

We are certainly not made to live locked up all the time but it is also not congenial to only meet virtually with who knows who. A friend observed, half seriously, half in jest, that what he missed most in this boom of digital communication were the breaks: the informal moments when we greet one another, when we chat, when we have a coffee or a sandwich together, when we have a stroll.

With lockdown there is an increased awareness that while it is a gift to be able to communicate far and wide, this cannot must not replace true and meaningful socializing: whether it is in the value of the family, often at risk from the circumstances of daily life, sometimes from insecurity and poverty; or the welcome encounter on the sidewalk or in the town park where men and women – and especially children – can gather; or the importance of good neighborliness and community spirit which often foster real, concrete solidarity.

It is not good for us to live a stateless existence, roaming about like nomads who do not belong anywhere. We need deep relationships. These are like the air we breathe and the fertile ground in which we can put our roots to receive nourishment and grow. We need a "home"! However, we also need that openness which today's means of communication can offer us. We need the unity of those with whom we are close and universal horizons at the same time!

2,000 years ago – and echoed in new ways throughout history – there was the experience of Pentecost. Leaving the house in which they had locked themselves up out of fear, the disciples of Jesus opened themselves up to the universe of languages and cultures. Wherever they arrived at, though, they created "community". The original format the Church took on was that of the domestic church which was characterized by fraternity, a fraternity which was not without suffering or difficulty, but which was, nonetheless, indispensable. Before there were churches made of bricks, there were living cells, filled with a communion that was not only spiritual. These were living cells that – despite persecutions and other difficulties (even internal!) – reproduced and spread and were networked together.

There were no basilicas or cathedrals at that time. These would arise later with the coming of religious freedom and the first Councils. There was not the multitude of churches and oratories built during centuries which followed and which make such an impression on me when I walk through the streets of central Rome. These are extraordinary artistic achievements, a testimony to the innate sense that the Church is alive as they multiply. But in today's world it is not so much a question of building more churches of stone but of multiplying those living Churches which originate from relationships built on love and mutual help, of real sharing, and which carry within them the potential to reinvigorate the society, the family, the neighborhood, the city, and thereby contribute to providing a home for the many "nomads" of our time.

It is against this background that the focus of this issue of *Ekklesia* is exploring the theme of "the virtual and the real" through insights by experts but also through experiences in the field: a YouTuber priest, a psychotherapist, a diocese and an ecclesial movement. There is a basic conviction: digital tools and social networks can also contribute to creating the sense of "home". It depends on how you use them. In the other sections of the magazine, we have collected examples of good practice, profiles of witnesses and ecclesial news, which also share a basic theme: relationships, real and concrete, freely woven together, which contribute to ensuring that today's world can advance towards an ultimate goal: the "Common Home".

