Columns
Spirituality

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Today, we are all looking for a tent of refuge in the desert in which we as humanity find ourselves. For many, reality is like a vast wasteland where it is hard to know where the next bomb may drop, whether real, as we are experiencing personally in Europe, or symbolic, as with realities retreating because the next one is "even more difficult."

We are in the midst of a struggle to awaken to the reality of the irreversible damage we have caused the planet and — seemingly to distract us from it — a pandemic was unleashed, causing the loss of more than 6 million people, as in the Holocaust, and it has transformed us,

Adding to the fear and pressure, while the pandemic is still raging, the war that has been going on for years in Eastern Europe is completely unleashed. This occurred almost without the majority of the world's population being aware of it, since there are about 30 wars in the world right now, and there comes a time when we "disconnect."

The war in Europe seems to have the possibility of becoming a world war in a matter of hours. That is why we do not stop meditating, staying connected to the endless Source of positive energy, of Love that, like a waterfall, continues to provide us with everything we need to counteract any sign of violence, of non-love.

Today, the threat is creating a historic Exodus. The desert through which millions of women, girls and boys, as well as soldiers, are passing is not very different from the desert that the people of Israel passed through during a long and difficult period, where, persecuted by a great power, they were looking for their space, their land.

But, before reaching the land that God had promised them, which they called the Promised Land, they lived in tents. There, they took refuge from the suffocating heat during the day and the severe cold at night, from the sandstorms and the meaninglessness of the long journey, from the loneliness and the feeling of always being outdoors. It is in these tents where they lived together, socialized, discussed, loved, accompanied each other, cried and laughed.

"Tent of refuge" is a powerful biblical image of God Amma that indicates protection, welcome, shelter and training. Faced with our difficult reality, I propose to re-know and rediscover the tent of refuge called Christian community, and also the one

called religious community.

Jesus breaks with the rigid patriarchal mold of centuries to indicate to the disciples of all times that the Christian community — a group united by his way of loving us, of liberating us, of communicating his life — is the authentic family, as he tells us in Mark 3:31-35.

It all begins in an experience of personal love that we know is real when his life is alive in our hearts. That is the first tent of refuge, which allows the daily gestation of this life to develop.

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This life has as its reference point the small community, which has as its center his word made flesh in each person who composes the community. It aims to be that space of welcome, shelter and accompaniment for real training so that we become tents of support and shelter for others.

I am struck by the words of a North American community member who has spent a few days in Mexicali, Mexico, sharing with the women who are preparing to cross the customs barrier to the United States. She says: "They know that they cannot return to their countries and so they will go forward, no matter what, because going back means death, but going forward brings hope to their lives and to their families."

My companion recognizes the indescribable courage of these girls and pregnant women, ultimately risking and courageous women, as people who are "tent of refuge." In their desert crossing, in their Lent accepted for love of their own life and that of their loved ones, they are able to support, heal, comfort and protect their companions.

Religions become "decaffeinated" when they are mixed with ideologies, an expression that St. John refers to as "darkness." What remains is what is configured in the desert in which we Christians find ourselves today — in the face of institutions that have disappointed us. We call this community/sheltering tent.

These communities are the present and the future that make it possible for us to remain listening — *Shema* — to the Word. We are listening to the silence and the word of the sisters who have discerned, in the tent, that this does give us life, that

this sharing and celebrating in the open, in nature, in our deserts, enables us to continue awakening.

I look out the window and feel the spring. In our hemisphere, Easter always happens in spring. Lent is a time of desert and tent of refuge that precedes reawakening.

Here at home, in community, we have been "tent-making" for years. If you are interested in the subject, get in touch. It is worthwhile. We find it essential to weave tents among ourselves. Literally, we must get out and glimpse the large tent camps that welcome, accompany and await us to lend a hand to all those who come looking for shelter.

Last night, we had a Zoom meeting with some companions from another Colombian community. The affection, the synergy, the laughter and also the serious and worrisome sharing made us feel at home, part of everything, as in the last nine Zooms of the previous week and weekend.

I saw a lot of shelter tents and I could also be a tent for itinerant people looking for online or face-to-face communities of life. The same morning, a secularized and married priest had written to me, in need of community where he could be himself.

For those of us who gather in the tent, in Jesus' name, he remains at our center and centers us. I know this to be true. So it is.

Would you like to contemplate that tent of refuge image as a symbol for your journey this Lent? I would! If you want to share, get in touch.

This story appears in the **Lent** feature series. View the full series.