

Dear sisters and brothers,
the world is full of walls. Dividing walls, separating people from people.

"I'll never talk to you again". The wall starts being built.

"You never understand me". The wall gets bigger.

"You've never really been interested in me!". Accusations on accusations, stone on stone.

"It's better, you get out of the way, when he comes along!" Now you must already stretch to see over the wall.

"If he is invited to your party, then I definitely will not come!". The wall divides and destroys.

The world is full of walls. Sometimes you can see them immediately. Sometimes you run up against them without having noticed them. Sometimes it takes some time to discover them.

People are separated from people.

In Korea. In Israel. In Ukraine

There are walls between black and white. Between rich and poor. Between Protestant and Catholic. Between man and woman. Within a country. Within a relationship. Within a congregation. Walls. Visible and invisible.

But always separating. They are signs of alienation and harm.

When he entered Capernaum, a Centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.' And he said to him, 'Shall I come and heal him?' The Centurion answered, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go", and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this", and the slave does it.' When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' And to the Centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.' And the servant was healed in that hour.

The story begins with walls. Dividing walls, separating people from people.

The Centurion is a representative of the Roman government. An occupier. He is the one who makes the Roman government visible. He represents the system of violence, the "Pax Romana", the so-called "Roman peace", which was established over and over again by violence and bloodshed and merciless cruelty.

"With this person I'm not going to talk a single word. You better get out of the way when she comes along. With this one you better not mess, it will end in disaster."

The wall between Jews and Romans. Between subjects and masters.

The first point in this text is a wall.

Even between Jesus, the Jew, and the Centurion, the Roman: "Shall I come and heal him?"

"I know I'm not good enough that you enter my house..."

The wall. Visible, noticeable for all, every day, with every small action. Also in Jesus' question and the Centurion's response. You are the master - we are on different sides of the wall. In the first point of this story is a very high wall.

And the rest of the story tells us how the wall slowly disappears.

It tells us that walls only exist to be overcome. It tells us that walls are not monuments built forever and certainly not monuments built by God.

"Lord, my servant is paralyzed at home and suffers horrible agony".

Possibly lumbago. Those who have ever suffered from it know how bad this is.

Standing - impossible. Sitting - hard to endure. Lying - pain at every turn. A torment. There is nothing that helps. You are unable to move.

The Centurion is used to commanding and to others obeying. He has not learned how to ask or request. His report is short, brusque, military. My servant is sick. He is paralyzed. He is at home. He's in pain. In huge pain.

Who, what, where.

But: He says "Lord" to Jesus. In fact, he says "Lord" to a Jewish Rabbi. He has stepped outside his comfort zone, he takes the first step.

And the wall shrinks.

Both of them, Jesus and the Centurion, approach each other carefully. The fronts are about to move. People start talking to each other. Listen to each other. Ask questions. Clarify positions. Give up claims. And in time are able to make a request.

And the wall becomes smaller and smaller.

What is the starting point of this healing process?

It is the pain of a human being!

Someone suffers great pain, perhaps screams in pain, which means he is alive. You are in pain not as a Jew or as Roman. You are in pain as a human being.

How much of that have we forgotten or never learned.

How blind have we become, or have we just never looked?!

You are in pain not as an Israeli or Palestinian, but as a human being, as a fellow human being. You are in pain not as a Russian or Chechen, not as a German or a Nigerian, but as a human being, as a fellow human being.

You are in pain not as an American or Iraqi, not as a local or a foreigner, not as a Christian or a Muslim, but as a human being, as a fellow human being.

Pain comes before boundaries. Pain is more significant than national identity, ideological, social or religious walls.

The pain of the servant brings the Centurion to Jesus, makes him forget all that divides, all prejudices, all warnings, all possible risks and dangers. The pain of his serv-

ant touches the powerful man, lets him go down a road, that didn't exist for him until then, puts him into a conversation with the Jew Jesus, whom before he would have considered as subordinate.

There is movement in the story: because of the important and exclusive focus on the pain. Because of the all-dominant look at the suffering of a fellow human being.

How much healing could there be among us, if we'd allow the Holy Spirit to turn our views and our thoughts: How much pain is there in the life of the person next to me? I need not ask how much the others bother me and state that we won't find together anyway. But I need to notice their pain. I may then consider how to decrease their pain and, of course, also the wall which is there between me and my neighbour.

"Lord", the Centurion says to Jesus. And hereby he states not only a position and a relationship; he removes more stones from the wall.

He who is the master, who reigns over the Jews as a Roman, he says "Lord".

And he says: "You, Jesus, are more than I. You're bigger than me."

And he says: "I am a limited human being. Jesus, you are now my measure! I can only command. But you can heal."

In the encounter with Jesus he is encouraged to take a serious step forward. He is encouraged to admit to his humanity and say: I am not omnipotent. I'm helpless. I need someone bigger than me to heal my servant. I am dependent. I need you, Jesus! Lord!"

How much healing could there be among us all, if we could let go of all our thoughts and wishes of being almighty. How much healing could there be among us all, if we could say to each other and before God these simple words: I have limits. I'm weak. I make mistakes. I need others. I need you!

Many of us think that needing others is a weakness. But it is a sign of strength, a sign of a mature personality, and a sign of an adult and mature faith to be able to say: I need you, God. I need you, brother, sister!

How much the Centurion trusted in Jesus, we can hear in one short sentence: "Only speak the word!"

The Centurion knows: he can command, but in this situation commands don't help. It needs something else, another word. A more powerful, healing word. A word that creates something new.

The Centurion's request to Jesus to only speak the word, reminds us of what is written at the very beginning of the Bible: "And God said: Let there be! And it was so!"

It is an echo of creation, which we recognize: When someone is healed by God, healed in body or soul, a healed person is a new creation.

And that doesn't work by command. It requires the healing power of other words.

"Let it be done for you..." replied Jesus. 'And it was so' we read in the creation story -

'And it was so' we read in this story. The life of the servant is newly created and changed and so is the Centurion's.

"Only speak the word!!" The word that heals.

How many wounds could be healed among us, if we could do that more often: Speak the healing word, which can be: Excuse me. Forgive me. Let's start once again. Yes. No. I. You. I love you. I need you. Stay with me.

We know all the words that do not come out of our mouth, although we know how healing they could be. We know the things we could say but too often don't. We know how walls suddenly start to shrink, as soon as the first word is spoken. The word that brings God into play. The word that helps me to accept my limits and to restrain my power. The word which God speaks through me. The word that becomes a prayer.

"Let it be done for you..." says Jesus to the Centurion. And in addition to the story of the creation there is also a resemblance to the Lord's Prayer: your will be done!

Probably you can hear the word of Jesus like that: "You will experience the will of God." Which means that a suitable headline for the whole encounter could be: The prayer of the Centurion.

Approaching Jesus, realizing the pain of his servant, accepting his limits in front of Jesus, expressing his requests...all of this is an attitude of prayer.

Sisters and brothers, the world is full of walls. Dividing walls, separating people from people. But walls are not everlasting monuments.

Walls can break when people see each other's humanity and pain. If we fail to recognize other's humanity and pain then bullets and missiles will fly. And they leave nothing but scorched earth.

If you can say before God and without any fear: I have limits. I'm not omnipotent. I am dependent. I need you. Help me! -then walls become permeable and life starts being healed.

As soon as we pray with confidence in the creativity of God: Only speak the Word!, as soon as we open all our senses to hear God's word and let it grow among us, walls become permeable, wounds heal and a new creation emerges:

A sign, a taste of God's new world.

One day there will be no more walls; there will be nothing that divides people. All will come and dine together and celebrate an abundant feast.

But besides this promise of Jesus to make us new, we will also have to hear his warning that we, as Christians, sometimes have to work harder than others, to remove the walls, admitting that we depend on each other and that we all need the love and grace of God.

As long as there are people in pain, God's new world is not present yet. We still have to remove walls, and we still have to learn more about ourselves and the power of the prayer: Only speak your healing word, Lord Christ.

Tear down the walls we have built up.

Free us from ourselves. Make us free for each other. Amen