

Even geese know how to waddle

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“I heard that you would like to dance during the week at school. This aroused my curiosity so much that I wanted to have a serious talk with you; if dancing is so useful, you should be able to do it in the holiest of places, but if it is not, you shouldn’t even be able to do it at school.

School must be a place where useful things are taught, the kinds of things that the world does not teach, otherwise, it is no good.

So, even if the dance is only a useful thing, doing it at school is quite improper.”

Don Milani always spoke his mind. A few days before Carnival, the prior of Barbiana, an isolated village in the Mugello region of Tuscany, confronted some girls who had asked to be allowed to organise a dance party at school.

“But even if it is useless, if it doesn’t hurt anybody, it’s hardly immoral, is it?” one of them asked.

Don Milani answered with the frankness he was known for. “If life is a gift of God, we must not waste it; wasting it is a sin. If an action is useless, it’s like wasting one of God’s wonderful gifts. It’s a very serious sin, I call it a blasphemy against time.”

The conversation went on for more than an hour, with the prior pressing the girls further. “The foolish girl that everybody wants is enjoying herself, she goes home and wets herself, but fails to notice because she’s so happy, not because they thought she was intelligent or cultured, but because she could waddle like a goose. Do you ever think how stupid a pretty girl will grow up to be, hoping that she’s wanted by everyone and going from one ballroom to another? Just think what kind of “mother” she’ll be! What kind of politician! What kind of trade unionist! But the girl that goes home grieved because no boy asked her, is grieved by something she doesn’t deserve. What happens in this ballroom is a disgrace.”

These are harsh words indeed against dancing and fun, against the ephemeral and against those who “blaspheme against time”, in a world where everything is uselessly enjoyable. These are harsh words that only a prophet like Lorenzo Milani could declare without even the slightest shame.

That was in 1965, another time.

But in our time, closer to home, a young woman from Varese, at the age of 19, has decided to become a hardcore porn star. A 28 year-old woman, a public relations graduate, spends her time in the Big Brother house. And parents stand in line for an hour to accompany their children to a disco party, where there is more alcohol and more drugs than air.

As for “blaspheming against time”, our province provides a wealth of opportunity.

Besides, what is wrong if the example to follow is that of Ruby, Nicole, or Noemi, of the hip-swinging TV assistants, of the “stables” of pretty young girls in the court of Lele Mora?

The sense of good manners and of responsibility, the contents of democracy, the redemption of outcasts, the craving for freedom, and female emancipation mentioned by Don Milani are old-fashioned, the children of a holier-than-thou, country priest's morality, some might say.

Long live Italy!

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