

Among the requests that we receive in the prison, one is particularly striking for us: as modestly described below by Sister P. She is one of the "mothers" of the prisoners. In fact, she could be the grandmother of a lot of the strapping lads that tower over her. A frail silhouette with grey hair, with a lilting voice echoing her *native* Andalusia: she mothers them with unending affection.

Her request: "*If you have school materials for the children, surely it is possible to have them also for adult literacy classes?*". Behind her, the students from the course that she set up, some sheepish, some agitated, envious of the good fortune of the young students. For some, it's the first time that they discover the joy of going to school. They came in the company of cellmates, brought by curiosity or the desire to learn or simply to kill time that appears unending.

I have already made the calculations in my head: I know that I have brought enough pens, pencils, rulers or erasers to cover the beginning of the new school year for the children. So, why not use the surplus for the older prisoners? They have at least as much right to learn. Here, as with in the youngest classes, the materials are made the responsibility of one chosen student, who will be responsible for collecting everything afterwards and locking it away. He will need to make an inventory and to make sure that nothing finds its way out of the classroom. In the prison, an eraser or a piece of chalk can be swapped for a cigarette or a doughnut. They want to learn, they love learning, but they are also hungry. What can one tell them? We cannot let them deplete this treasure of modest resources, but who could hold it against them if they tried?

Thanks to these donated items, classes are made possible. More students can be admitted and solidarity grows between them. As the days go past, Sister P. and I relish the joy of the project: cautious to begin with (it is important to be cautious before declaring victory for a project) and then more relaxed. We are surprised by the attitude of the students, as we stand inconspicuously in a corner and watch them hard at work. It gives us great satisfaction to see how they take turns supervising their homework groups; seeing them studying their exercise books, fingers in their ears blocking out distractions; listening them read their first letters. Telling this story, their voices echo in my head. It's pens, copybooks, so little for us and so much for them. And, above all, it is so beautiful to rediscover this joy through admiring theirs.