 Reading time: 1 min.

The German poet Rilke lived for a time in Paris. To go to university, he walked every day in the company of a French friend, along a busy street.
One corner of this street was permanently occupied by a beggar woman who asked passers-by for alms. The woman always sat in the same place, motionless like a statue, her hand outstretched and her eyes fixed on the ground.
Rilke never gave her anything, while his companion often gave her a few coins.
One day the astonished young Frenchwoman asked the poet:
“But why do you never give the poor girl anything?”
“We should give something to her heart, not her hands”, replied the poet.
The next day, Rilke arrived with a beautiful, newly bloomed rose, placed it in the beggar’s hand and made to leave.
Then something unexpected happened: the beggar woman looked up, looked at the poet, barely lifted herself from the ground, took the man’s hand and kissed it. Then she left, clasping the rose to her breast.
For a whole week no one saw her again. But eight days later, the beggar woman was again sitting in the usual corner of the street. Silent and motionless as ever.
“What must she have lived on all these days when she received nothing?” asked the young Frenchwoman.
“The rose, of course”, replied the poet.

“There is only one problem, only one on earth. How to give humanity spiritual meaning again, to arouse a restlessness of spirit. Humanity needs to be sprayed from above and for something resembling Gregorian chant to descend upon it. You see, one cannot go on living by dealing only with fridges, politics, budgets and crosswords. It is not possible to go on like this”, wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.