

“

I invite you to accompany me
in the prophecy for peace—
Christ, Lord of peace!
The increasingly violent and
belligerent world really frightens me;
I tell you truly, it frightens me—
in the prophecy that indicates
the presence of God in the poor,
in those who are abandoned
and vulnerable, condemned
or set aside in the social construction;
in the prophecy that announces
the presence of God in every nation
and culture, meeting the aspirations
for love and truth, for justice
and happiness that belong
to the human heart and that beat
in the lives of peoples.

”

Pope Francis

The war in Ukraine and the “prophecy for peace”

“I invite you to accompany me in the prophecy for peace—Christ, Lord of peace! The increasingly violent and belligerent world really frightens me; I tell you truly, it frightens me” (Francis, *Audience with Communion and Liberation*, October 15, 2022).

We wish to vigorously support the effort Pope Francis is making to find a way to end the terrible conflict in Ukraine, which is a part of that “terrible third world war” (November 13, 2022) on which the Holy Father has long and unsparingly focused his concerned attention.

The tireless search for peace

Nothing is more in keeping with the deep aspiration of the human heart than peace. It is an ideal that can never cease to be pursued and that is not naïve or abstract: the pope reckons with humanity in its entirety, with its miseries and its lies, its greed and its claim of dominion; and at the same time he does not resign himself to war as the inevitable consequence of tensions between people, peoples, and nations. Everything must be done so that war is not the last word and politics does not fatally turn into the continuation of war by other means. Europe, which has long been perhaps the most belligerent place on the planet, has shown in the last phase of its history—albeit with many limitations and dramatic repercussions—that this is possible.

There is no peace without justice

Working for peace always takes place in the “here and now,” and it must be accompanied by an awareness of the facts and circumstances that characterize the situation. In this sense, no doubts regarding the attribution of responsibility for the war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the fact that there can be no true peace without justice, are permissible.

We perceive with concern that two opposing risks loom: on the one hand, that the bewilderment and fear produced by a near and increasingly violent war will not lead to a desire for peace, but only to be left alone; on the other hand, that the necessary support for the Ukrainian people may be reduced

to an instrument of “imperialisms in conflict” (Francis, September 15, 2022).

War only brings death and destruction; it erases the fundamental recognition that the other is a good. Is there a possible path to peace in the current conditions? Yes, dialogue. It is a path that can be undertaken now, even amid the tensions that inevitably remain. When the thread of dialogue is broken, when self-interest becomes absolute, the bottomless abyss of conflict opens up, which leaves only the defeated and sows the seeds of future and more vicious violence.

Therefore, if it is right for Ukraine to defend its sovereignty, firmly rejecting Russian aggression with the necessary aid, it is decisive at the same time that the responsibility of all countries and powers involved in the conflict directly and indirectly be activated, so that a dialogue between the parties may be resumed or initiated as soon as possible, with a view to a peace negotiation in which the realism of justice can prevail, going beyond established strategies.

“The key word is dialogue”

Dialogue is not a fantasy, but the only reasonable way forward. In every situation, even the darkest or most putrid. Pope Francis said this boldly, “It is difficult, but we must not discard it; we must extend the opportunity for dialogue to everyone, to everyone! Because there is always the possibility that in dialogue we can change things, and also offer another point of view, another point of consideration. I don’t exclude dialogue with any power that is at war, even if it’s the aggressor... sometimes dialogue has to be done in this manner, but it has to be done; it

‘stinks’, but it has to be done. Always one step ahead, an outstretched hand, always! Because otherwise we close off the only reasonable door to peace. Sometimes they do not accept dialogue: too bad! But dialogue must always be done, at least offered, and this is good also for those who offer it; it helps them to breathe” (September 15, 2022).

“Prophecy for peace”

The pope’s is both a prophetic and realistic stance. It calls everyone to responsibility, both those who perform governmental tasks and those who, like most of us, face their daily tasks day in and day out. In order to stand with the pope in the prophecy for peace, we desire to mature the awareness, educated by the Church and its witnesses, that peace is a good for all people, and the willingness to be authentic builders of it through our own lives. This is what Fr. Giussani said after the 2003 Nassirya massacre: “If there were an education of the people, everyone would be better off.”

For these reasons, we are committed to promoting gestures of prayer and public moments of discussion that can foster a deepening and greater understanding of the value contained within Pope Francis’ s judgment on what is happening. It is a contribution we offer to all to sustain hope in that true peace that the whole world awaits.

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The ruins of the railway station
of Seversk in Ukraine.

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Letters

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That Spark, After So Many Years

During a cookout abroad with the CL community, I noticed a couple who kept looking around, talking with someone now and then, but still keeping their distance. Guessing they were new, I went over to say hello, speaking to them in English. The guy answered me in Italian, telling me he was from Milan and that after finishing his studies, he had moved abroad for work and that the young woman with him was his girlfriend. When I asked how they had come to the cookout, he said, "I met the movement in high school through one of my teachers. Later, I distanced myself; I went to college and then I was out of the country for many years for my work. But when I met my girlfriend a few months ago, we perceived that this was a serious relationship, from which we desire something great. I asked myself if in my life I had ever lived something true and important. Immediately what came to mind, both as a memory and a desire, was the only time in my life that I perceived and lived an intensity of life and of meaning: when I had met that teacher. So I looked up her number and called her and I asked her, 'Does what I saw so many years ago still exist?' She replied, 'Yes!' And in response to my objection that I was living abroad, she gave me the contact information for the movement here in this city. And here we are." After so many years, in front of the reemergence of a desire for destiny, his instinct brought him back to that spark he had glimpsed during high school, moving him to find it and see it again, today, where he lives abroad.

Signed Letter

"Do Not Be Afraid"

I've been in Kampala for a few months, working at the Meeting Point International, the NGO founded by Rose Busingye, which helps women infected with AIDS. With some friends from the movement, we followed remotely the pope's audience on October 15th. The first thing that gave me a jolt were the songs. To hear certain melodies and words made me feel at home. During Rose's witness, I looked around and saw the faces of the women whose story she was telling. I was moved and I thought, "This is Jesus who happens now, who happened for these women, and who is happening in St. Peter's Square and a thousand kilometers away here in Kampala." It is such a great thing that can unite diverse people from every corner of the world. And I asked myself, "But who are You who makes all this possible?" I found myself crying out of happiness because I felt like I had returned home, to the arms of a Father and a family who never abandon me, no matter where I go. As the song says, "But do not be afraid, never stop, because My love is faithful and is never-ending."

Irene, Kampala (Uganda)

The Possibility of Forgiveness

I lost my mother when I was sixteen years old. After her death, my father, without any other points of reference, lived the remaining thirty years of his life in the most dissolute way. I often had to endure his abuse, his insults, and his threats. I fought tooth and nail trying to maintain serenity with my husband and my daughter. When he died, I didn't feel anything. I had always thought that I would be incapable of forgiving my father for all he had made me live through—the category of forgiveness doesn't belong to me. I was diffident about those who during their lives were able to forgive the wrongs that had been committed

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against them. This year I went to work as a volunteer at the Rimini Meeting and I visited the exhibit titled *Memorial, Men Despite Everything*. In the video, there is a dialogue between a journalist and a survivor of the Soviet gulag, who at a certain point says, “We are not cruel, we aren’t executioners, and in no way, not even for an instant, can the desire for revenge rise up in us. The desire for revenge destroys me, destroys us. Instead, we should live, live and face our difficult times, we should face them and educate our children to be honest and upright, with dignity. And it would be beautiful if our children were not put in the position of having to choose between justice and mercy.” I was jolted: like the woman in the interview, neither was I an executioner, nor do I seek revenge, because revenge destroys. Despite everything, after years of suffering, years lived in fear and agitation due to my father’s behavior, I was aware that perhaps I, too, could forgive. My judgment was the same as the woman who had survived the gulag who, more than I, had faced and withstood horrible crimes. My “I” had been prodded and anxiously placed in front of an event that was awakened in me by the exhibit at the Meeting, the charisma, and education in the movement.

Elisabetta, Ancona (Italy)

My “Beautiful Day”

After a really difficult period at work, some completely different kinds of days were opened to me. I’m embarrassed to admit it, but often the temptation is to not believe that He is powerful enough to manifest Himself in the banality and littleness of domestic life or in the simplicity of a game while I am with my children. Each day, the struggle is choosing between giving in to cynicism or listening to the cry of my heart, which, even though buried by doubt, at a certain point always emerges with power in all its irreducibility. The request burns within me that He might happen, that

He might move me, that He might conquer me and that I might experience that I am chosen and loved, there where I am. Each day I ask that a “beautiful day” might happen to me because everything is in play in every moment (if I think about the future, anxiety sets in). I understand that the only thing that can give me peace in this vortex is recognizing that I am in dialogue with the mystery, or, better yet, that He, above all else, is in dialogue with me. I want to stretch myself toward Him to understand to where He is calling me. A fixation for me has been Fr. Giussani’s description of “the beautiful day.” “My life as a very young man was literally invaded by this; both as a memory that continually influenced my thought and as a stimulus to make me reevaluate the banality of everyday life. The present moment, from then on, was no longer banal for me.” In order to experience this, I have nothing other than the reality, whatever it might be, that is given to me now. I was jolted when the pope affirmed that Fr. Giussani had intuited that the unifying center of all reality is Christ; it is toward Him that I lean, and each day I need to be amazed again.

Signed letter

Beauty in Sports

With the World Cup in Qatar about to begin, I read Fr. Giussani’s words in the October edition of *Traces*. “It seems that a cry from the crowd that can give a kidney punch to life is only produced by sports—sports with stadiums instead of ancient cathedrals.” I thought about the times this had happened to me, to rejoice wildly for some goal or when the national team advanced to the next round.... Should we be scandalized? Not at all, because it’s nothing less than “a human kidney punch to life,” a tension that breaks through the horizon and stretches beyond. Fr. Giussani will never stop amazing us by his love for freedom, never removed from reason. Without one the other is mutilated, inadequate to the

need for totality that defines us as humans. Therefore, returning to the World Cup, it is exactly this position that we can learn from. Enthusiasm is an aspect of sentiment, “an inevitable and irresistible reaction, its magnitude depending upon the measure of the person’s human vivacity,” as he writes in *The Religious Sense*. Millions of people experience similar reactions during the World Cup. It is an incontestable fact, an element of reality, neither good nor bad. To acquire meaning, true meaning for man, reason must be involved. We need to take this fact as a “sign,” opposing the rationalist and illuminist thought that seeks to reduce reality to insignificant matter, even more so when it deals with corporeity, an inferior dimension of the human being. But what dignity can this concept then give to the delirious enthusiasm of a crowd? It is clear for all to see how rarely any serious, acute judgments are made about sports, and it is even more rare that those judgments are connected to other cultural spheres. On the contrary, Fr. Giussani gives proof of the vastness of his gaze: during a meeting with athletes in 1987, he affirmed that “sports are, above all, beauty.” He legitimized them, comparing them to all the other forms of culture that are born from the attractiveness of beauty. This does not mean we should lose the freshness inherent in the experience of sport, weighing it down with intellectualistic constructions. It means, instead, that we should utilize the passion generated by sports to activate a “work and training,” to achieve an “asceticism,” which develops an attractiveness that becomes knowledge. Certainly, without Italy, the attractiveness this year will be less... But we cannot waste any opportunity, including the World Cup, to walk toward destiny.

Alberto, Forlì (Italy)

The Pain and the Food Bank

One morning, on my way into school, I heard about a tragic event: a young boy from my high school was

killed at an intersection just a few meters from our school building and in the sight of many students. The event at that moment left me shaken and almost incredulous. That afternoon I was gripped by a strong sense of powerlessness and inadequacy. I called a colleague and asked her, “How can we stay in front of the kids tomorrow?” My dismay was also hers. The next day during a break between classes, we had a minute of silence. On returning to classes, the students were shaken and moved. We weren’t able to have our lesson. I didn’t know how to face the situation: I, who for such a long time have been on a Christian journey, who have a solid faith, and yet I couldn’t give any answers or explanations. I only said that I prayed for him, and that this, for me, was the most reasonable thing to do. Then I proposed that they share what they were feeling. A profound and intense dialogue followed about the value of our living, of our pain and death. We also remained in silence, but a silence “full” of a profound quest for meaning. With some colleagues, we proposed a Mass for the deceased young man. The church was full of students, all in silence, moved as if they were waiting for something. During his homily, the priest said that we must not “sweep under the rug” what had happened, but we must savor our lives, lives that aren’t only the absence of death or a “surviving,” but lives of fullness. At the *raggio*, a young girl described what I also had felt during those days. “We felt like brothers and sisters in our pain and our fragility. What we experienced was a true, fraternal embrace.” In fact, going to classes in the following days, I had a different attitude toward my students and they had a different attitude toward me. I didn’t want to lose everything we had lived through—it’s easy to forget or to “sweep everything under the rug.” So, I thought to invite all of my students to the Food Bank, saying that I wanted to share with them that “fullness” of which the priest had spoken and that, within that gesture of solidarity, all of the brotherhood we had experienced in those days was present.

Paola

Close-up

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■
Borodjanka, Ukraine. A lady during the blackout
caused by the attacks on the power stations.

Prophecy and presence

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We have asked scholars, artists, journalists, and figures from the cultural and ecclesiastical spheres to read and share their thoughts on the CL flyer entitled “The War in Ukraine and the ‘Prophecy for Peace.’” The document, which opens this issue, is meant to be a contribution for all so that we can better understand the value of the pope’s judgment on our time and the invitation he addressed to us at the audience for the centenary of Fr. Giussani’s birth on October 15th: “I invite you to accompany me in the prophecy for peace—Christ, Lord of peace!” In the subsequent pages you will find the first collected interventions and some experiences that illuminate, explain, or question the hope and the path that the pope indicates. These interventions span from Ukraine to Russia to the Arabian Peninsula and, among other things, touch on welcoming the many war refugees into families. We do this in the tireless search for real signs of the “true peace that the whole world awaits.” ■

Tanja's love



Elena Mazzola

President of Emmaus, Kharkiv



To talk about peace while your home has been bombed for almost three hundred days seems absurd. We obviously wish for peace: it is my greatest wish and that of our Ukrainian friends I live with. For us, peace is to be able to return home, to take back what was taken from us overnight by force, to find what is left of our previous life. We were also there in Rome for the pope with some friends from the Ukrainian community who are now refugees in Italy. There were about seventy of us, plus some of our Russian friends. We wanted to experience the pilgrimage together and together we heard the pope ask us to accompany him in the prophecy for peace. But we are at war, we live inside the war every day, not the war that “we hope doesn’t break out,” that doesn’t touch us personally, but war in which we have friends at the front, friends who died fighting, friends who have been bombed for months, while those of us who are here feel as if we are in exile—we don’t know if and when we will be able to return home.

It is very difficult to talk about peace among ourselves, and even more difficult to talk about forgiveness: these are very serious words that we cannot tolerate when they sound disembodied. Rather, what is at stake



among us is our need for Christ, for His gaze upon us, upon our pain. Perhaps that is why we heard the request the pope made to us in Rome for “practical help” loud and clear: “Christ, Lord of peace!” The path we are on, what we are able to do, is to live a relationship with the One who found us and brought us together in an unimaginable and most powerful way thanks to Fr. Giussani’s charisma. That is to live the movement, the church. For me, to live the prophecy of peace with my Ukrainian friends is to verify that we are Christ’s and that Christ is everything every day. As Fr. Giussani taught us when talking about prophecy in the world, “To be prophets means to cry out before everyone (*pro-femi*), to cry out before everyone that Christ is everything. And to say ‘Christ is everything’ is to be prophets of the future: because if Christ is everything, what about your betrayals of today and yesterday? Therefore, prophecy tends to change today’s life so that tomorrow’s hell, tomorrow’s nonsense, does not happen.” That is why I understand that the pope, in asking us for help, associates the prophecy for peace with what “indicates the presence of God in the poor.” Let me explain

this with an example. Tanja is one of my Emmaus girls. She was born with a mild disability and grew up in an orphanage because of tragic family events: when she was six years old, her dad hanged himself and a year later her mom also died, killed by her new partner. One could speak of Tanja using the pope’s exact words: “abandoned, vulnerable, set aside in the social construction.” Intervening in a discussion in which people were arguing for the impossibility of forgiveness and that hatred of the enemy, i.e., all Russians, is justified, Tanja said, “Yet, in my encounter with Emmaus, I had such a great experience of love that I was able to forgive the man who killed my mom.” Our community is following Tanja’s experience because the prophecy of God’s presence among us lives in her. In the face of her experience, it is easy to recognize that peace is the presence of God within life, so that within life He is even able to enter war.

We are hoping for the experience of love that Tanja had; we are telling everyone about this possibility and we are making it into memory, each person according to the details of his or her personal story, a story of having had the same ex-

perience of love that Tanja had—we have friends who have given us their homes for free, friends who bring us food, others who are helping us find work; there are friends and friends of friends and strangers who have given us their time, things, and money, and whom we could not even thank because this charity was “nameless”; or, rather, through many names it spoke of only one name: Christ. “Christ, Lord of Peace!” There is a love so great, so real and all-embracing, that at a certain point it can even come to make you want to forgive those who have irreparably destroyed your life.

In this light, the words that have helped me most during this time are those the pope addressed to his Jesuit brethren in Kazakhstan: “I am not interested in you defending the Pope, but that the people feel cared for by you who are the Pope’s brothers.” And, “The Pope does not get angry if he is misunderstood,” he said of himself, “because I know well the suffering behind it.” It is the same love that became real in Tanja’s life when she was received by Emmaus, which has become real to so many of us in these months: it is a caress, it is “helping those suffering,” it is all of this charity in which the heart recognizes that it is God who is close to us, because, as Francis concluded, “God’s style is closeness.” Thus what happens is that—while objectively there is no peace—there is peace in us and among us because Christ’s presence is stronger than any death. ■

Christmas and the presence of prophecy



Paolo Pezzi

Archbishop of the Mother of God in Moscow



12 **I** invite you to accompany me in the prophecy for peace—Christ, Lord of peace! The increasingly violent and belligerent world really frightens me; I tell you truly, it frightens me.” When I heard these words of the pope I was with several friends in Moscow because I had not been able to go to Rome for the audience. I was a little bitter... Then I saw our friend Fr. Aleksej, who, not having received his visa in time, had traveled far from his country to Moscow to experience this event with us. Those words of the pope set me in motion, having once again perceived our communion with the whole church present. I needed Fr. Aleksej to rediscover this, just as the pope needs the people of CL for the church to once again be a prophecy of the presence of peace: *God Needs Men* is the title of an old, beautiful film.

I then asked myself how I can accompany the pope in this prophecy. He instructs us that we should be prophetic presences, and mine is a prophetic presence of peace to

the extent that I first live my vocation. It may sound strange, but I accompany the pope by living the task that is asked of me responsibly. That is why I always try to keep the channels of dialogue open. “Dialogue is not a fantasy, but the only reasonable way forward. In every situation, even the darkest or most putrid... dialogue must always be done, at least offered, and this is also good for those who offer it; it helps them to breathe.” Dialogue is already an announcement of peace; it is not cowardice but rather it is the attempt to find a way of compromise that leads to a just, stable, convincing peace without losers or winners. I recently saw a film remake of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Without making judgments, it struck me how the director emphasizes peace, or rather truce and armistice, as an act of surrender that ends up humiliating the losers. We know how 1930s Germany then fanned the flames of this humiliation....

In order to accompany the pope in his prophecy of peace, it is nec-

essary to enter into suffering, or rather pity, in his bending down toward men, especially the most vulnerable, as is said today: in reality, we are all a little vulnerable.

Thus prophecy is also a sign of awaiting Christmas—Advent is the bearer of peace, bringing us to the King of Peace. Perhaps we are called to live Christmas more consciously this year. And also to live it with a sense of “atonement” for our sins. This word is no longer very fashionable, as a priest friend told me, but there is ultimately much that is beautiful and moral (and little that is moralistic) about this atonement. The Bible tells us that sin is a fact that on a large scale leads to war. Something else was needed to win the war and bring peace, a particular fact with a large-scale value. Genesis, later taken up by a Psalm and the Letter to the Hebrews, speaks of a strange character, Melchizedek, king of a place called “peace,” who offered bread and wine. That child in the stable in Bethlehem will one day offer Himself in “atonement”



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for peace and for reconciliation, and leave His own a memorial that will make His sacrifice present—bread and wine. This is the Eucharist that we celebrate every day.

How can we not remember Péguy: “All the parishes shine eternally, for in all the parishes there is the body of Jesus Christ. The same sacrifice crucifies the same body, the same sacrifice causes the same blood to flow. The same sacrifice offers up the same flesh, the same sacrifice sheds the same blood. The same sacrifice sacrifices the same flesh and the same blood. It is the same story, exactly the same, eternally the same, which happened in that time and in that country and which happens on all days in all days of all eternity.” Perhaps we need to go back to seeing and marveling at this atoning presence. Really it is only near to Jesus in the crib, as on the cross, that will we find peace. *Here, near you, my Lord, I want to stay. No one sees my pain, but you see it O God! O living true bread, only you can give me peace, and there is peace for me, here, near to you.* ■

Sloviansk, Ukraine. Among the ruins of a town in the Donetsk region.



Never close yourself off



Giovanna Parravicini

Christian Russia Foundation Researcher

Pope Francis's invitation "to accompany me in the prophecy for peace" is one of the expressions that struck us most as we participated in the audience from Moscow, together with friends from the community and various people we wanted to invite, aware that their attending the "spectacle" of this meeting would be to give them a sign of hope. It is as if these words illuminated the desire with which we decided to stay last February, to bear witness to a possible hope in the face of the profound desolation and disorientation prevailing among the people.

So many people have left in recent months, and others—especially men, the young and the not so young—left Russia in a hurry at the end of September, following the mobilization. And those who stayed often live as if the air is now unbreathable, feeling that there is no hope left. There are those who have seen the collapse of everything they tried to build through years of work, of teaching; there are those who are overwhelmed by guilt for what their country has done and continues to do; there are those who are troubled by the divisions that have suddenly dug their way into their families and into

friendships established over the years that seemed indestructible; finally, there are those who suffer from the positions taken by their religious and parish communities—as a friend told us a few days ago, they ask: "Who is your Christ? It is certainly not ours, the one that the Orthodox Church preaches."

Hence, it is a deeply wounded, divided society without peace even though the bombs of war have never touched it. And the challenge that has driven us in recent months to keep the Library of the Spirit Cultural Center open, even amid the skepticism of many both inside and outside Russia, has been the awareness drawn from our charisma—a new fruit in these dramatic new circumstances—that we are a sign of hope and of unity, a place of dialogue precisely in the sense understood by Pope Francis, in the sense that we can and must always engage in dialogue because "the other is a good."

Hardly a day goes by without someone at the Center expressing amazement and gratitude that we are there, but sometimes it is far from obvious, for us as well as for those around us, to understand what it means to live this "prophecy for peace." The temptation—in an extremely radicalized context,

where the issue of war is a question that is always in the background—is to take a "political" stance; that is, to measure the other with whom you meet or clash according to the percentage of justice and error in their assessments. For example, a famous religious author, an Orthodox monk beloved by many but who has taken a particular stance on the war, recently presented his book on faith at the Center. Many immediately cried out about this scandal on social media. A friend, however, confessed to us that if by now, like so many others, she can no longer talk to these people as it is too painful for her, "you manage to do it.... I understand that it is the same thing that the Pope does, who never closes the dialogue with anyone." The Orthodox priest who has taken a very courageous stance with respect to the conflict encouraged us in our slightly intimidated request for advice without any ifs and buts, saying to us, "The trouble is if we start choosing who to talk to and who not to talk to. In the end we will close ourselves off to everyone. The important thing is to really dialogue, so that what we really care about emerges." To dialogue is not to pull the other to your side, but to walk together, each on his own path, toward the truth. ■



Beyond war



Andrea Riccardi

Founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio

A great fact that characterized the twentieth century and our century is the popes' prophecy of peace: this prophecy has accompanied the history of Europe and the world from Benedict XV in the First World War up to Pope Francis. The popes often found themselves in a condition of isolation in the face of overweening warlike and nationalistic passions, putting into question the motives of one or the other warring side. The position of the popes has been accused of walking a political tightrope and sometimes detachment from reality, but—as Pope Bergoglio has said—we are “not neutral, but allied for peace, and for that reason we invoke *ius pacis* as the right of all to settle conflicts without violence.”

Throughout its long history, the church, “an expert in humanity,” knows that “every war leaves our world worse than it was before,” as the pope stated in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Indeed, the encyclical offers a lucid and dramatic reflection on conflicts. It rightly states that war “is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil.”

We reflect inadequately on the lessons of history, not least because war, with its retinue of passions and propaganda, brings about the eclipse of reason and politics. Therefore, it seems to me that it is very appropriate today to adhere to the words of Pope Francis in his address at the audience with Communion and Liberation on October 15: “I invite you to accompany me in the prophecy for peace....” The pope's prophecy for peace in the face of the war in Ukraine expresses not only the feeling of us Christians but the lament of so many suf-

fering men and women who are so unheard. Pope Bergoglio's vision helps us to break free from the pessimistic realism of those who do not look beyond the conflict and are prisoners of a belligerent logic. Going beyond war is the search for possible and just ways to stop the bloodshed and establish peace. Peace and dialogue are never impossible. The CL text rightly states, “Dialogue is not a fantasy, but the only reasonable way forward. In every situation, even the darkest or most putrid.”

When we speak of peace, we particularly think of Ukraine, which has been thrown into a serious and bloody conflict as a result of Russian aggression. The war has killed, destroyed, caused immense suffering. And it continues to do so, especially in these conditions of winter, cold, and the reduced availability of energy. And then so many have died, both Ukrainians and Russians. To talk about peace is not to say that Ukraine should not defend itself. However, military discourse has overshadowed political-diplomatic discourse based on dialogue. Little has been invested in diplomacy, believing that the problem will be solved with weapons. In fact there has been diplomatic inertia. This is a mistake. I am convinced that this war could end in a stalemate, like other current conflicts in this globalized world of ours (see Syria).

We must never forget what is happening in Ukraine and must remind the public and the decision-makers that there is always a path of dialogue. Moreover, prayer, offered with faith and insistence, is a force that “fights” war and hatred because it rises to the One who is the Lord of peace. Indeed, peace is a daily quest, and above all a gift from the Lord whom we invoke. ■



In the face of any war



Wael Farouq

Professor of Arabic Language, Catholic University of Milan

The CL flyer reminded me once again of how big the pope's heart is. His repeated calls for peace in Ukraine take on an even greater significance for me, considering that in doing so, he never forgets other wars. Many public figures and the media often prefer to ignore them. Not the pope; he does not forget or separate the destructive wars in the Middle East from the current one in Ukraine. They are all part of the "World War III in pieces." For example, in his address to the members of the synod of the Greek

Melkite Church, received in audience on June 20, 2022, he said, "The tragedies of recent months, which sadly force us to turn our gaze to the East of Europe, must not make us forget what has been going on for twelve years in your land," Syria. This defense of humanity, all humanity, in the face of war, any war, is what I most appreciate. Although war is an absolute evil, it does not differentiate between people; bullets and guns do not distinguish between black and white, Muslim and Christian, Arab and European. But some

judgments do. The pope, however, does not fall into this sin of loving those that are like you instead of your neighbor. He knows that it is the very instrument of war that must be fought. He knows that there is no escape from war except through love.

I believe that the flyer's call to join the pope in practicing this love for one's neighbor is the right thing to do in the face of a war whose evil people like us have no power to stop. We can, however, protect our hearts from the corruption of this evil. ■





The inconceivable




Aleksandr Archangel'skij

Russian writer and journalist

What can you do when it seems that you cannot change anything? Pope Francis answers this question: you have to act without being worried about how you will be perceived and judged. His prophecy for peace is often read incorrectly as a proposal of an unacceptable compromise or as a call for premature negotiations or as a forerunner of the times; that is, a failed attempt to open a way into that phase of universal history in which all contradictions will find a solution, and a mother will embrace her son's murderer. That is, as an attempt to pass judgment on today from the perspective of eternity. The pope actually does not speak of a compromise, because compromise (itself often important) falls within the sphere of politics, and not within the sphere of faith. He does not speak of negotiations (also critically important in themselves), because negotiations are within the sphere of diplomacy. And he does not anticipate the future but follows the rule that "each day has enough trouble of its own."

The pope is talking about something else. About the fact that already here and now—beyond politics and diplomacy, in daily life—we can and must think in the categories of peace, not war. Yes, it is true that we must not hesitate in declaring who is in the right and who is in the wrong, who the aggressor is and who the victim is. But beyond that, before that, we must leave room in our conscience and soul for peace. Not for a miserable reconciliation dictated by weakness, but for the magnanimity that comes from strength. The fact that a Ukrainian and a Russian woman carried the cross together at Easter was not a gesture of admission of the "parity" of the two peoples, nor the testimonial façade of a neutral stance. No, the gesture simply indicated that the dimension of the person, of the human and even more so of the divine, does not allow itself to be caged in the logic of division. Aggressor and victim should not be equated and lumped together but people who carry peace in their hearts cannot be divided.

I understand the pope's words thus, and this is the condition, the starting point, for being able to survive in this catastrophic moment in history. Everything else comes later—politics to politicians, military action to the military, diplomacy to diplomats—but at the beginning comes an unwavering promise: "My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." It is illogical, it is inconceivable, but only thanks to its being inconceivable do we receive the opportunity to realize the impossible. ■

 Pokrovsk, Ukraine. From the Donbass the trains are leaving for the West.

Close-up

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“When the pope speaks about peace, it seems he’s asking us to look deeply at the daily experience of our families.” This is how our conversation with Luca Sommacal, the president of Families for Hospitality, began on a mid-November Sunday in front of a coffee at Pacengo di Lazise on Lake Garda. The association, which began forty years ago and includes over three thousand families who give of themselves through hospitality, adoptions, and foster

parenting, had just concluded its national conference. Many members were present in Saint Peter’s Square for Pope Francis’s October 15th audience with CL. “Hearing the pope speak of ‘a prophecy for peace’ and associating it with that ‘of the presence of God in the poor, in those who are abandoned and vulnerable, condemned or set aside in the construction of society,’ struck us,” said Sommacal. Words like hospitality, embrace, friendship, and forgiveness recurred in every testimony and story during the con-



Where are you?

Opening your home and life to the other as the first gesture of peace, both in emergencies and in daily life. The experience in these months of Families for Hospitality, which was founded 40 years ago in Italy.



Paolo Perego

ference. “Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, the pope has invited people not only to look seriously at what that country is going through and reflect on it, but also to ‘share the anguish of a people wounded in its identity, history and tradition.’” Thus, only a few days after the invasion, many families offered their

hospitality. Luca himself and his wife welcomed 16-year-old Masha into their home. “She arrived with her mother and sister, who were hosted by a family of our friends. They had only a few articles of clothing in a little backpack,” recounted Sommecal. Masha and Luca’s family had known each other for years because of an initiative of Families for Hospitality called “Children of Hope,” which since 2015 has enabled Ukrainian young people to spend the summer in Italy, hosted by families. With this initiative as a starting point, the association developed a project for refugees together with AVSI, the NGO Emmaus, and other partners. “It was necessary not only to give these people a roof over their heads, but also to accompany them and those who would host them.” The Italian government and local administrations

have been able to assist only about 20 percent of the 120,000 Ukrainian refugees in Italy. “For the others, for the first time in these numbers, families were called to the front line, both relatives of the refugees and people who offered their help through associations or parishes. We have received 830 offers to be hosts, with more than 200 Ukrainians hosted, mostly women and children.” With AVSI, in a space made available by Unicedit in Milan, they also established a call center hub named *#helpukraine*, which is still active; it has received 3,200 requests from all over Italy and provided over 2,000 services to date, ranging from searching for housing to helping with documents and job interviews, and much more. Association members Paola and Antonino, who live in Rimini, have not hosted anyone, but “faced with the

“The point is not for the other to change. The other is the other. The point is how I look at him. He may never change. Why do I love him?”

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growing need, it seemed we were being asked, ‘Where are you?’ They responded by ‘offering companionship to the fifteen families of our area who have hosted thirty-five mothers with their children. We were surprised by all the good happening around us.’ One family welcomed six people, and another transformed a small studio adjacent to their house into an apartment. A group of mothers organized play times. Others were able to help with work. ‘For example, a friend organized courses in his hotel with video tutorials, translators, and practical tests to teach mothers to do maid service, even issuing a final diploma.’

There has been no lack of difficulties. ‘One example is a young girl who was a very good musician. There were problems with the first family who hosted her, and also with the second one where we moved her. She kept to herself and was reluctant to be part of the families’ life, which made relationships difficult.’ A couple of friends who years ago had adopted three young Russians, now about the same age as the girl, said they were willing to host her. It could have been a disaster. ‘Instead, with them she felt loved just the way she was. Slowly but surely, she began to get involved with other friends, too. She seemed reborn.’ After a series of meetings, she was able to accept a scholarship and housing to attend a conservatory.

Sommacal pointed out that ‘this is not just a matter of giving hospitality to Ukrainians. In the experience of foster parenting and adoption, in accepting the other, in embracing them just as they are, needy and wounded, you discover more about yourself.’ This was the case for Martina from Pacengo. She told the psychiatrist Cesare Maria Cornaggia about her difficulties with her six-year-old son who had arrived from Africa in the middle of the pandemic. He wanted to be loved, and he provoked her until she could hardly bear it anymore. ‘The only certainty I had was the memory of my yes, and it gave me serenity. In fact, when I accepted the match, I understood clearly that my yes was to Another who was knocking at my heart.’ Cornaggia responded, ‘His need to be loved is the same need you have.’ It is our need to be embraced first.

“Only in this way does forgiveness happen,” commented Sommacal. This was clear in the testimony of another couple who had fostered a boy for years, and encountered difficulties and arguments when he turned eighteen. ‘He wanted to be autonomous and free, to live somewhere else.’ About this time, the couple visited the exhibit at the Rimini Meeting on the forty years of Families for Hospitality. ‘For quite some time we had not been following the meetings of the association, but our heart was always there. We had been walking in a desert, and then we found ourselves in front of a spring.’ Embraced. ‘For months, we had looked at our son only in terms of the problems he created. We returned home and told him we loved him’ even though the situation was complicated and they did not agree with his choices. ‘The point is not for the other to change. The other is the other. The point is how I look at him. He may never change. Why do I love him?’ As Cardinal Angelo Scola said in his talk at the conference, ‘Letting the other ‘be’ is what best explains this love. The mystery of the Trinity is the greatest example of this,’ as the Father allows the Son and the Holy Spirit to ‘be.’ Sommacal commented, ‘Without forgiveness, the other is always blackmailed, everything is reduced to negotiation, which in any case is a clash. Here we are talking about families, fostering, and adoption, but the origin of these experiences holds for every relationship among people, even for war. Certainly, negotiation is the way, and it is necessary to judge the truth arising from the facts, who is the aggressor and who the victim. But as the pope reminded us, true peace is born of the new measure introduced by Jesus, ‘Christ, the Lord of peace,’ who is already seen in hospitality given to those in need, in the embrace of difference, and in forgiveness, and who speaks *now* of a chance for the world.’ ■

Disarm the heart

The pope's trip to Bahrain, in the words of those who traveled from various places on the Arabian Peninsula to participate in the event.

We are a group of friends who live and work in various places on the Arabian Peninsula. Even though some of us knew each other previously, we in fact met here, in the desert. We have been living our lives immersed in Islamic society, some of us for years, others for less time, but all are trying to help each other keep our faith alive and go more deeply into an encounter with the Movement, with Jesus. When we learned of the pope's visit to Bahrain, our little School of Community group planned to go together, at least those who could, to be with him during his pastoral visit. We drove or flew from Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, and met in the same hotel in Manama. This encounter with Francis struck the heart of the experience of each of us. In the following letters, we have tried to recount what happened to us.

There are two things in particular that I am bringing home with me from this journey. The first is that this land, the desert, causes the heart to thirst. It puts you in continual movement in search of the presence of Jesus. When the pope arrived in the Awali stadium, I was moved by the fact that the church, that is, Jesus present today in our midst, had mercy on me and was seeking me, even when I was thousands of miles from my home in Chile. I am here and the church is present for me, now, where I would least expect it. The second thing is that the pope asked us to "disarm" hearts. He was not just speaking in the geopolitical sense, but about our daily life of work, family, and relationships. He was not just speaking about relationships with people of other religions and cul-

tures, but also with those who come from my own Western background, with whom I often try to defend my faith, or even hide it. This disarmament, Francis told us, "cannot just be the fruit of our efforts: it is first of all a grace, a grace that must be asked for with insistence. 'Jesus, You who love me, teach me to love like You. Jesus, You who forgive me, teach me to forgive like You.'" I am returning to my work in Saudi Arabia on my knees, asking for this change of heart.

Barbara, Saudi Arabia

The only definitive thing for everyone in the history of humanity is Christ, the King of Peace. How moved I was to see the pope, his courage in offering himself as a father for all, never tiring of preaching the peace of Christ and His love, in Bahrain,



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in this very small corner of the world. During the Mass, he seemed tireless in his announcement, notwithstanding his physical condition, and I thought of the crowd in front of him, with so very many migrant workers who live here in the midst of difficulties and exploitation. What a consolation to have a father who comes to you and accompanies you. In the bleachers, further away, there were some Muslims in traditional garb, apparently distracted and uninvolved. I thought and prayed, “If you could only understand what it means to forgive and be forgiven, to turn the other cheek, because God did so in the disarmed humility of gratitude that moves the heart.” But then I thought, “What do I know of their hearts? I have to understand it in my *own* life, and finally decide for Jesus.” I think again of his invitation at the October 15 audience, how he expects “more” from us, “much more.” What is this “more”? Just look at how he lives, and you will understand.

Sara, Qatar

As I set out for Bahrain I felt great joy at the preference the Lord was allowing us to experience with the pope’s

visit to our Gulf. Also, we were not going alone: we were together with the part of His people, the companionship of the Movement, with whom you always feel at home. We also met young people from another parish in Muscat and other new friends. I think each of us arrived there bringing the pope not only ourselves and our own intentions, but the whole country we live in. From Oman, we felt like we were the “envoys” of the young people of our parish. Unable to come, each of them had written a letter to Francis. What a joy when we were able to give the Holy Father their letters. A young Indian friend who met us at the airport in Bahrain spoke about the difficulty of this period, when her life seemed to be “slipping away” into apathy about everything. The next day she participated in the pope’s meeting with some students and graduates of her school, and that evening she called me, irreplaceable. Francis had spoken about exactly what she had been experiencing and had answered every question of her heart. She told me she had never been so happy in all her life: finally she was understood and loved, and she had even been able to shake his hand. We were very struck

The pope on his visit to Bahrain (November 3–6, 2022), during his meeting with members of the Muslim Council of Elders, in Awali.

that the pope stressed how we are here to love our neighbor. Shared living and friendship with all those around us who are so different from us is always the newness of His presence. In these desert countries where water and the small rivers are always coolness and refreshment for everyone, the church is like a river that flows from Christ's side.

Fiorenza, Oman

When I learned that the pope was coming to Bahrain, I immediately said yes to the invitation. I wanted to go to support him in this missionary journey, so significant for me and this part of the world, and to do so with friends from my local parish. About two thousand of us from Saudi Arabia went. I also wanted to experience some days together with other friends who live in the various Gulf nations and with whom I do School of Community. These days have been an event, a miracle for my life. Coming from Saudi Arabia, where public expression of one's faith is received negatively, the experience of going to meet and listen to the Holy Father in a nearby country, in the open and without hiding, in a place with the cross of Christ present in the midst of thirty thousand people, well, friends, for me all of this is the evidence of the presence of Christ in our midst. See-

ing a cross there makes you feel "at home." In the midst of your friends you feel like you are with family: in the midst of thirty thousand you feel you are part of a people. Being able to listen to the pope, to the things he said to us, made me feel loved. It is a gift to be able to return to the heart of the desert, to almost-total solitude, with the awareness that I am part of a fraternity, the people of the Risen Jesus, always present, who does not let me go without what I need, wherever I may be.

Luca, Saudi Arabia

The thing that most struck me about the pope was the power and tenacity with which he stressed the urgent need to love, to not be alone, to pursue unity and peace. Receiving his visit in these lands was the concrete realization of what he says, given the many risks and the energy it took to make it possible. My own personal experience of those days consisted in seeing and experiencing communion with friends who arrived here after exhausting journeys and with those I met for the first time in Bahrain. I would also add the good I perceived in meeting Cardinal Christoph Schönborn at the Mass in the stadium, and in receiving Fr. Derrick's help in participating in the celebration. Both

have a surprising fondness for our story. We also discovered closeness with some strangers: the Philippine friend of one of us and the Pakistani who had too many suitcases and was not allowed to bring them on the flight: we took them as our own.

Patrizia, Oman

The long and monotonous journey from Qatar to Bahrain only heightened my expectation of an encounter that could renew my experience of living in Qatar and my mission. I brought with me the difficulties and conflicts at work that arise primarily from a culture gap with the Arabs. From the title of the pastoral visit, "Peace on earth to people of goodwill," I expected that the pope would reaffirm his heartfelt appeal against war. But I was surprised above all by his personal call to each of us, to me, in the "concrete situations of our life." There will be friction, moments of tension, conflicts, different points of view, "but those who follow the Prince of peace must always strive for peace. We need to 'disarm,' to shatter the chains of evil. We need to keep loving, always." I returned to Qatar with the joy of having shared this encounter with many friends and with the certainty that the first terrain to "de-mine" is my own heart.

Chiara, Qatar ■

To Give One's Life for the Work of Another

LUIGI GIUSSANI

Edited by Julián Carrón

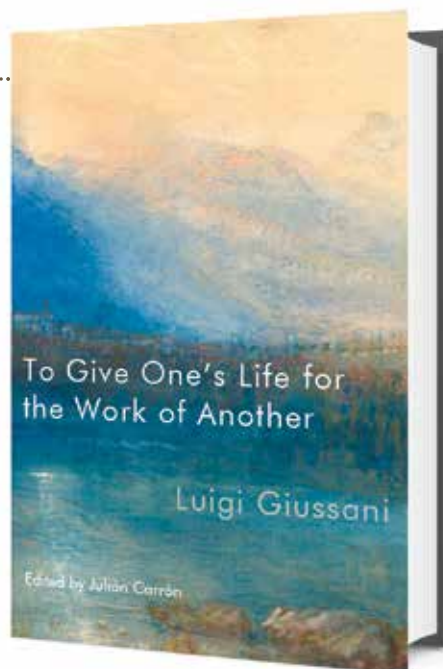
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