



A CHILD... WILL BE CALLED PRINCE OF PEACE

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PROTECTED CHILDHOOD: SOURCE OF PEACE

OUR REFUGEES. They arrived in February, fleeing, with the war on their heels. They were three mothers with three small children: Ludmila with six year old Vladik, our Prince Without a Sword of Lake Nemi, Luda with her 10-year-old daughter Vika, and Maria with Sofia, barely six months old. Katerina has joined them with two daughters, at a desperate moment, with nowhere to go. We've celebrated Vladik's seventh birthday, we've seen Sofia's first steps, at the age nine months old and Vika grow into the beautiful teenager that she already is. All three, Vladik, Sofia and Vika live with a smile on their faces, happy, sheltered by the maternal presence, by the company and help of *Caritas* in Genzano and by our love and hospitality. They are the true victims of the war, but they live it in the safety offered to them by the adults that have received them. They've lost their childhood among their own, with their parents at the battlefield, without their grandparents, without their cousins, without their school, without their classmates... We see them every day and we wish for a present of Peace for them, and that is our plea. *"I know the plan I have for you, plans of peace and not of misfortune: to give you a future and hope"* (Jer 29, 11; cf. 33, 9). May it be this way.

In this Letter of Communion I would like to tell you that both wars and the Birth of Jesus have drawn my attention to filiation, birth and childhood. The child -what a beautiful word to name the human cub- that patient, innocent, vulnerable and precarious creature, is a being of the future, but of an uncertain future. When I see María and Sofía, I cannot stop thinking about the Family of Nazareth and their fleeing to Egypt in the face of the imminent threat of death from the dictator. *"Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt"* (Mt 2, 13-15. 19-23). They are our refugees from a terrible and bloody conflict. Also today. And I can't stop thinking of CHILDHOOD as that time when our fragile lives are absolutely in the hands of others.

BEING A SON. Birth is always astonishing, because of it being an event that brings along an absolute beginning, a wonder. But it's also traumatic, and what comes after that moment may also be so, or at least it will be at some point in time. The wound left by every birth remains for a lifetime, imprinted on the body itself. It's the wound of a painful interruption, separation, and distance, something that will make us always yearn to be loved and welcomed.

And today, being a son is for many an intolerable debt. If modern incarnation hates the idea of incarnation, even more so that of filiation, because being a son means depending, living in the utmost weakness, losing all self-referentiality, because we are linked to an origin to which we refer, with which we have a close bond. And, on the other hand, having a child is risking a lot in the short life we have: we cannot guarantee a future or well-being, it requires our own and comfortable tranquility, it takes us out of the solipsism of one or two, of self-contemplative happiness. The antinatalist theories appear to us as the wise prudence of our days. And, even sometimes, there is no one to take care of that life which is engendered, born and so many times not loved. But we know well that without the family, without the original tenderness that is the cradle of being, the child does not nest in this world or in this life.

"THIS IS MY SON, THE BELOVED ONE" Mk 1, 1-11; Mt 1, 20-25. God has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Both the essence of Christianity and Christian holiness, or discipleship, rest upon filiation, which leads us to know the Being of God, Three Times Holy, Immortal, Three Times Good, Three Times Beautiful, Father, Son, Spirit, One. That God the Father reveals his Beloved Son

is the counterpart (counterculture?) to the serious ontological crisis of filiation and pater-maternity that we are living.

Celebrating the Birth of Jesus, the Son of God, we recognize that He has given us the true value of filiation and human childhood. His Incarnation, at the initiative and request of the Father to Mary, was made possible thanks to a woman who would assume the gestation in her womb, the birth in the flesh. The recognition of the Father will give him the identifying Name, "*This is my Beloved Son in whom I am pleased*" (Mk 1, 11; Mt 1, 20-25) and this Name, Beloved Son, will chain and seal the doors of evil, of the Dragon, of the primordial serpent, of the Devil, of death (cf. Rev 20, 1-15). Yes, evil will be banished because there is no more evil than not having a name (without documents) or being a number (Auschwitz, Jasenovac, Dachau, Gospic, Cambodia, Gulag...), not having citizenship, and being canceled from the list of the living. The name seals the doors of the abyss and founds the human and, in this case, the human-divine in Jesus, our Prince of Peace.

He will reveal to us, by becoming a child-son, how childhood is the unconditional openness to the Father, to "*Abba*" (Mk 14, 36), how childhood is passivity made receptivity and gratitude, which marks one's life as a reference to Another, from which I come, to which a bond of love and care binds me, of which I speak and to which I make known. It is from the origin, from our filial being, to be children in the Son (cf. Gal 4,4-7; Rm 8,14-1), which makes us understand what is created (cf. Col 1, 16), this world, Humanity, ourselves, our true depth, height and gravity and the "*path that leads to peace*" (Lk 19, 42) that we find so difficult to discover.

MOTHERS PROTECTING CHILDREN. The Father entrusted the care of His Son to Mary. We too have inherited the care of this Mother (cf. Jn 19, 26-27). She revealed to us that none of us is alone before God. A multitude accompanies us, for whom we are responsible and for whom we must care. But, if someone is with us before God, it is children (cf. Mt 19, 13-15; Mk 10, 13-16), ours, yours, all the children of this world; they have something to do with us and they are our "presentation" before God the Father.

Today war has a human shield: Jesus, born of Mary, his Mother, the Prince of Peace: "Peace for those who are far and near" (Is 57, 19), for the poor, sunk in the mire, and for those lost in every desert or sea on this earth, for those who seek him with passion and for those who banish him from their lives.

Today our wars have many human shields: childhood, boys and girls who live confused, who lose, lack, get sick, die... cry. God, who is Mother, heard the child cry (cf. Gn 21, 17). What about us? Our wars, our genocides, exterminations and forced exiles should end for them. They should be our reason for Peace. Benedict XVI said: "The sign of God is the child" (2006 Christmas Eve Mass). In this "*Abbreviated Word*" (cf. Saint Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer*, c. 28), as the Fathers of the Church called Jesus, is our Peace.

I invite you to see in FILIATION the way of being and living in this world, allowing ourselves to be saved in the Son, in such a way that, children in the Son, we go hand in hand with Mary to the Father, who is the ultimate meaning of our existence.

I invite you in this new Christmas to promote the CULTURE OF BIRTH in light of the Birth of Jesus, the Savior, the Beloved Son. If in the salvific design of God the Incarnation was the way, today this also continues to be the way of salvation for the human being. May Mary, the Mother, help other mothers to engender, give birth, care for and protect their child.

And I invite you to TAKE CARE OF THE CHILD, to be fathers and mothers, like Mary and Joseph, of those who begin to live, those who have "the finest skin" and need the shelter of tenderness, love, education, of the company, in the first moments, in the first steps and always.

May you all have a good and Holy Christmas of Protected Childhood, SOURCE OF PEACE.
Merry Christmas to all the children of the world!

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