

CORRIERE DELLA SERA December 24, 2022

The feast of simplicity and of a child
by Davide Prosperì *

Dear Editor,

In his message for the 56th World Day of Peace, Pope Francis invites everyone to let “God transform our customary criteria for viewing the world around us.” Faced with evil, war and the many contradictions of today's world, the Holy Father reminds us that “even when tragic events seem to overwhelm [...], we are likewise called to keep our hearts open to hope and to trust in God, who makes himself present.”

Christmas has always been a time filled with joy and hope for everyone, even those who do not believe. This hope today seems to belong to a now distant past in our memories. Traces of it remain as a sentiment of goodwill, but available only to those who have the privilege of affording it, as long as things are going well. But in recent years things have not been going too well.

A few days ago, sociologist Sergio Belardinelli wrote about Christmas: “We have desiccated, above all, the hope that something truly new might break into our lives, rescuing it from its torpor.” This is a despondency that spares no one, and when life hits hard, when they begin bombing your homeland, or when you lose what you hold most dear, it becomes impossible to remain indifferent. A few weeks ago, Antonio Polito (*Sette-Corriere della Sera*, 11/11/22) recounted the painful funeral of Francesco, the son of some of your colleagues at *Corriere*, and the demand for meaning that such a tragedy inevitably generated. It is the same question raised by the images reaching us from tormented Ukraine, or from the many scenes of conflict around the world. Polito adds, however, that the priest's homily, imbued with a lively Christian hope, “eased the burden from our hearts, wiped the tears from our eyes, believers and non-believers alike.” Yet he was then saddened: “what a shame that the Christian message has been so weakened in our Italy.” Yet, on closer inspection, what is the Christian message? On what does this hope rest? A child. It is almost crazy to think about. The hope of the world rests on the most fragile and helpless thing imaginable. Paradoxically, it is by using the frailty of this child that God meddles in the affairs of men: “A God, my friend, God went out of his way, God sacrificed himself for me. Here is Christianity,” Péguy wrote. The origin and meaning of all things, that Mystery to which the heart turns in search of an answer to its demand for truth, justice, happiness and love, has become a child, has come among us. There is no more long-awaited announcement than this in the history of all humanity. No one, if open to the possibility that there is an answer to those needs, can avoid coming to terms with such an event. Why did God, as Péguy says, bother? On reflection, no other answer comes to me but this: out of love. Out of infinite tenderness toward every man and woman, toward you and toward me. Fr. Giussani, when speaking about the joy of Christmas, said: “It is pure love and pure altruism. [...] This is why Christmas is the feast of the child in the Gospel sense—the feast of simplicity. [...] This simplicity is nothing other than the shining forth of what we are, deep down: expectancy of an Other.” Christmas teaches us a simplicity that can be shared by all of us, because it reveals the possibility of pure, divine love within everyday life.

This child makes all things new, and He gives those who recognize Him a form of original presence that encounters everything: “We are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion,” the Pope says in the message already quoted. Made the object of God's love that comes among us,

everything changes. A friendship is born which does not disavow any aspect of each person's humanity, which does not solve the evil of the world, but generates a path of goodness because it is certain (because of that fact that happened!) of a good destiny. A friendship that is certain, and, at the same time, humble. Indeed, true Christian humility consists in allowing oneself to be provoked by the world's questions in order to share them with "responsibility" and "compassion." It is for this reason alone that the Christian is attracted by the cry for meaning that arises in the face of pain, illness, limitation; or the need to love and be loved in a context in which the meaning of these words now seems vaporized. There are many questions to which today's person, even with all his or her technological knowledge, struggles to find answers, ending up taking refuge in a right to self-determination that drags society toward an increasingly sterile individualism (think of the birth rate crisis). After all, as Romano Guardini explained, "having abandoned God, man has made himself incomprehensible to himself." Christmas, on the other hand, is that Event that everyone awaits: freeing oneself from self-determination in order to discover oneself determine— that is, affirmed, loved—by the One we seek from the very first cry we utter as soon as we come out of our mother's womb. "Who are you, who fill my heart with your absence? Who fill the entire world with your absence?" goes a beautiful line by poet Pär Lagerkvist. That "You" has revealed itself. This could indeed represent the seed of a true peace. As Fr. Giussani advised his young people, "We must admit that it is a thing without comparison that Christianity says that God has become man, and abides in the midst of this company of friends." Yes, it is without comparison, and yet possible.

*(President Fraternity of Communion and Liberation)