



"Taking risks, based on his Word"

The Gospel is the Word of God expressed in human words and for this reason it is a source of ever new life, even during the pandemic. But in order for this life to develop, we need to put Jesus' words into practice, to translate them into concrete acts of faith, love and hope.

... *"If you say so, I will let down the nets"* (Lk 5:5)

In order for Peter to experience the power of God, Jesus asked him to have faith. He asked him to believe in Him and to believe in something which was impossible from a human point of view, indeed absurd: to let down his nets during the day after a fruitless night.

If we want life to come back to us, if we want to experience a miraculous catch of happiness, we too must have faith and, if necessary, take the risk of believing in the absurd things that at times his Word requires.

We know that the Word of God is Life, but we obtain this life by going through death. We gain this life, but have it by losing it; it is growth, but we reach this growth by becoming less.

So what must we do? How can we come out of the state of spiritual tiredness in which some of us may find ourselves?

By taking on the risks that his Word implies.

We are often influenced by the mentality of the world in which we live and end up believing that happiness is found in what we possess, in asserting ourselves, in enjoying ourselves, in lording it over others, in being noticed, in satisfying our senses by eating or drinking. But in fact it is not like that.

Dear readers!

"Love doesn't stop!" – This is the simple and profound message of this issue of our Mariapolis Newsletter. A love rooted in a relationship with a Father who loves us immensely makes us become a more global family (pg. 2, 9, 11, 13), encourages us to share our goods (pg. 4), opens our hearts and minds to dialogue with all (pg. 6) and is an inexhaustible



Let's try taking the risk of cutting away all these things. Let's allow our ego to run the risk of a complete death. Let's risk it, let's risk it! Once, twice, even ten times a day.

What will happen? In the evening we will find that love has gently blossomed in our hearts once more. We will find union with God in a way we could not have hoped for. The light of his unmissable inspirations will shine out again. His peace and consolation will fill our hearts and we will feel that we are enveloped by His Fatherly love once more. Enveloped by his protection, we will find that strength, hope and trust grow in us again and will be sure that the Holy Journey is possible. ... We will be sure that the world can belong to God.

But we need to take the risk of dying to ourselves, nothingness and detachment. This is the price to pay!

Take courage then! Let's take risks based on his Word in order to obtain a miraculous catch of happiness in our hearts, and in the hearts of many who love God

Chiara Lubich

Tratto da: "Rischiare sulla sua parola", in: Chiara Lubich, Conversazioni in collegamento telefonico, pag. 108. Città Nuova Ed., 2019.

source of imagination and creativity in finding new ways of getting closer to others (pg. 5, 8, 10, 12). It is a way, the way par excellence, to live a fulfilled life (pg. 14, 15). Happy reading!

*Joachim Schwind
Focolare Communication Office*

Towards **new times**: all people as **one family**



What effects has this pandemic had on life in society and in the Church? What did it bring about in the Focolare Movement? How can we live these new and as yet unknown times that await us? An open dialogue with Maria Voce. From an interview with Radio Inblu (Italy).

From 18th May, Mass can be celebrated again [with a congregation], by taking all necessary precautions of course. Could you comment briefly on this?

Maria Voce: We have always followed the Pope's Mass and there have been very many opportunities to pray together online. But we cannot hide the fact that Christianity is an embodied religion. We feel the need to be physically present at the liturgy, to participate more directly and actively in the sacraments of Christianity. So we certainly missed participating in the Eucharist in a real way and this gift is now being given back to us.

So we are ready to do all that is required, to take precautions in order not to miss this opportunity.

Q: Of course, many things have happened during this time. We have had to review our behaviour and what we buy. What do you think the pandemic is bringing out in social life and therefore also in church life?

Maria Voce: It is bringing out beautiful things but there can also be bad things.

A first thing worth emphasizing is equality among all. The pandemic has shown that faced with this small virus that we have been hit by, we are all the same. It has affected the powerful as well as the poor, the rich and those who have nothing, children as well as adults, those in prison and those outside. So in this sense we are all truly equal.

At the same time the pandemic has also revealed many inequalities that are not created by the fact of

being human, but are created by different cultures, by prejudices and by lifestyles. So some people can afford treatment and others cannot; some people have homes where they can isolate themselves and others are forced to live with several people in a very small space. Some people have lost their jobs and can draw on savings set aside in a bank account; others don't have anything to draw on and when they lose their jobs, they and their families are in danger of going hungry.

So, unfortunately, inequalities have become even more obvious. And this should make us reflect, because it's clear that these inequalities are not wanted by God, nor are they willed by human nature. They are due to the ill will of people who have not been able to manage correctly the gifts that God has given us all. We need to make up for these inequalities so as not to find ourselves, when the pandemic is over, in a worse state than we were before. Instead, we want to come out of this having gained from realising the need for equality and make programs that respect the equal dignity of all.

Q: What about the church community?

Maria Voce: For the church community, I feel this period has highlighted what is essential, because so many things have fallen by the wayside. We have seen that church walls are not essential but that living the Church as communion is essential. We've seen that going every day to visit Jesus in the sacrament of the Eucharist is not essential, but it is essential to love our neighbour; it is essential to answer with love to the people near us; it is essential to seek out inspiration for our lives from Jesus' words in the Gospel. Many things have fallen away even on an ecclesial level.

However, this has done us nothing but good, because it spurs us towards the rebirth of which Pope Francis continually speaks, to the resurrection and the completely new start we can make in truly reforming the Church in a vital way, not in an institutional or formal way.

Q: Which of these essentials is most essential?

Maria Voce: The most essential thing is to keep in mind that we are one human family. Being part of one human family must push us all to take care of each other and take care of creation, which is the only house this one human family is living in. We must care responsibly, attentively, precisely because Christianity makes us look at this reality also in a responsible way. We are all members of a family but we are all responsible for this family. Therefore, every person in this family is important; everyone has rights but they also have duties. There is a collective responsibility.

I think this must push us to make proposals, to put forward programs, to see what can be done to truly include everyone. We must propose ways forward both in the economy and in politics, ways that can truly look to the common good, not to the good of one group or another, not to the interests of one side or the other but to the good of all. So proposals should be put forward that aim towards a communion of goods on a more universal level.

Then the Church itself – and we too, in fact, as Focolare Movement – is universal, it has no boundaries. In a certain sense, the Church competes on equal terms with the virus. The virus is not afraid of borders but neither is the Church; the Church is universal because it is God's family on earth.

We must look to this, God's family, to see how to make it truly be one family. We must see how to create structures that enable the integral development of all, which respect the history, culture and way of life of each people, without coercing them into developing according to our models or our plans. At the same time, we should make available to each other all the talents with which God has endowed every people, every culture and every person. We can make them available to each other so that all together we can make the world become a common home that is ever more beautiful and ever more worthy of being inhabited by the children of God.

Q: Maria Voce, what reactions has this time brought about in Focolare Movement? How have you been reflecting on this?

Maria Voce: The same reactions as everyone, in the sense that we too, from one day to the next, found ourselves not being able to organise our lives, neither personally nor as a Movement. So we had to change all our programs. It is an important year for us because it is the centenary year of Chiara Lubich's birth. We have the General Assembly of the Movement planned for the month of September and several preparatory meetings for the Assembly were scheduled. All this ground to a halt from one moment to the next, from one day to the next, so we found ourselves completely unable to foresee, plan and think what could be done. Naturally, this was a shock.

At the same time, Chiara Lubich taught us to live the present moment, wanting to do only what God asks us to do. Therefore we want nothing other than His will and to seek together – precisely by listening to each other and trying to understand the needs of all – to hear together what God wanted to tell us through this circumstance. In doing this, first of all we changed all the programs,

thinking always not only of the needs of the people who were supposed to participate in the programs, but also of the needs of those who would perhaps suffer economic losses from the changes, who would experience upheavals; there were many things of this kind.

We did this and did it joyfully, without letting ourselves be overwhelmed by the situation. And now we are seeing that it was all in God's plan, because it has led us to greater simplicity in life, to reviewing our lifestyles, to a greater sense of moderation when deciding whether to buy something now or not. We have put off acquiring something we had planned to buy, delaying or deciding against it entirely in order to make that sum of money available for more immediate needs.

It led us to seeing how all our families are and how they are coping at the moment. Many of our people, like others, have lost their jobs and don't know how to manage. This has brought about a more complete, open and transparent communion of goods among all. So we have communicated more about the various needs but also about what Providence has sent us. Truly we can say that Providence has shown us once again that it is true, that it is a reality, that the Father sends what is needed to his children if his children want to live for him and in mutual love.

So, in a way, he has given us the light to see the driving force that moves us, this love which is the love that God has placed in our hearts, not as focolarini but as people, as human beings. For us focolarini, this light takes on many colours because it becomes love that leads to unity, a love that enables us to give our lives for one another and risk everything. This really is something that has energised the Movement throughout the world.

The Movement, like the Church, is also universal, so we suffered what our people in China were suffering, what those in America, the Middle East, everywhere, or in Italy were suffering. And we lived all these things together so that people who had more gave to those who had less. Aid has come from China, Korea, Japan, the Middle East and Syria. Maybe it was aid in terms of encouragement and good wishes, but everyone said that this great family that lives the Ideal left to us by our founder, Chiara Lubich, wants to be one. Through unity we want to help the world become one.

From an interview with Alessandra Giacomucci for the Ecclesia (Radio InBlu) column, 8 May 2020.

A communion of goods that bears witness to fraternity

The Coronavirus crisis challenges us as members of the Focolare Movement's "large family" to review our lifestyles and increase the witness we give to fraternity.

In all parts of the world, the members, communities and associations of the Movement have begun to respond to the needs of the people in their areas. We are very grateful that this is happening.

Nonetheless, the impact of the pandemic is leading to new forms of poverty and inequality.

Just as in local areas efforts are being made to support the most vulnerable, so too the International Centre of the Movement has established a **Covid-19 Communion of Goods Fund to meet the needs of the many people with whom we are in contact.**

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Living the Gospel: What I believe

I'm a hairdresser, and I do home service. One day I was called by a young recently married lady who was expecting a baby. Sadly, she confided in me that she was planning to divorce her partner. Her mother-in-law made life impossible for her. I listened to her for a long time, then I advised her to wait. After a few days, her mother-in-law called me to get a haircut. Immediately she spoke badly of her daughter-in-law. "How strange," I replied, "just two days ago I was at her house and only heard her say nice things about you." When I met the daughter-in-law again, I told her, "Your mother-in-law spoke well of you, she loves you very much." A few days later, the family got together at a party. After months, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law were meeting once more. As they described it, it was a beautiful moment. And they thanked me. "Who teaches you the beautiful things you tell us?" they asked. So I was able to explain to them what I believe in: a Gospel that teaches us to be peacemakers. (F., Pakistan)



*Edited by Stefania Tanesini
(see Il Vangelo del Giorno, Città Nuova,
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Loving one village at a time – never stopping!

The experience of a community in Bangalore, India, during the covid-19 lockdown.

What do you do when you suddenly find that everything is closed for three weeks and you don't know what the near future will be like? What do you do when the work that has kept you going up until now ends and you don't know if it will start again? I think this is an experience that is not limited to India at the moment but is being lived by many people in different countries all over the world. The Italians, unfortunately, were the first to experience this sense of bewilderment and now here in India we are in the same situation. However, here, as you may have seen on the news, there are 450 million people who work as day labourers, without any security, and most of them without any savings. Therefore, not being able to go to work means eating less every day and trying to survive.

The Focolare community in Bangalore asked themselves how they could help people in need and how they could involve others people who were at home during lockdown. It all started with a WhatsApp message that someone in the community sent to Kiran who is a seminarian and lives in a village we visited a while ago. "Are there families in need in your village?" we asked. The village, which is in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, has a population of about 4560 families of which about 450 are Catholic. That same evening, Kiran (which means "ray" in the local language) had been out walking and visited various families who had confided in him and spoken about their fears for the future. They were already eating kanji (boiled rice with lots of water: you eat green chili pepper with it to give it some taste) and did not know what they would do during the 21 days of lockdown. It's not normal for adults to talk to a young person about their problems and so Kiran had come home feeling worried. When he looked at his phone and saw the message, he realized that God was giving him a solution for those families who needed help. And so, we set to work.

Kiran knew how many families were in trouble. We prepared a message to send to all the people we know, with details and information about where to send help. Our target was to help at least 25 families by providing a 25 kg bag of rice and a bag of vegetables – enough food for a family for about two weeks. This would cost about 1500 rupees, about 20 euros.

The response was immediate. Many people participated – families and many young people. Some gave a thousand rupees, others three thousand, and others five thousand rupees. Within a few days we reached the target set. But the contributions continued and so we were able to help more than 30 families. There was an average of four people per household and so this support has reached at least 120 people.

However, there are many other villages where people we know are in need and so we started to help in other places too. Now there are three villages that we are supporting. We always work in collaboration with local people who know the situation well and know how to help in the most appropriate way.

Chiara Lubich taught us to love people one by one and it seems we are doing just this: we are trying to love one village at a time, but without stopping!

What we are doing is very small – it's only a drop in the ocean – but many people have become involved. Here in the diocese of Bangalore, the Archbishop has worked extremely hard to help workers blocked in the area due to the lockdown. We have also collaborated in this initiative.

Now Bangalore is asking Mumbai, New Delhi and Goa to take up the challenge and do everything possible to help circulate whatever we have so that no one is in need. We are all realizing that, in the end, everything passes and all that remains is the love we share: this love fills our hearts.

The Focolare community Bangalore, India



Impossible without you! **In dialogue with those who do not believe in God**

Building a united world without distinction of race, religion, social or economic status.

“As a new Movement within the Church, we have a universal vocation. In fact our motto is ‘May they all be one’. We can’t do this without you, because this ‘all’ includes you. Otherwise we cut ourselves off from a third if not half of the world. How can we exclude all these while at the same time saying ‘May they all be one!’” This is how Focolare foundress, Chiara Lubich in May 1995 explained why her Movement was reaching out to dialogue with people who do not acknowledge any religious faith.

We talk to 73-year-old Luciana Scalacci, from Abbadia San Salvatore, Italy. A self-declared ‘non-believer’, she is a member of the Italian and International Commissions for the Focolare’s Center of Dialogue with people of non-religious convictions.

The Focolare Movement’s interest in dialoguing with people who have non-religious convictions goes back a long way. What are the most significant steps?

The Focolare’s Center for Dialogue with ‘non-believers’ was opened in 1978. A year later, for the first time, people of non-religious convictions participated in a conference organized by the Focolare. Chiara encouraged the whole Movement to embrace a new openness towards ‘non-believers’, maintaining that as we’re all ‘sinners’, we can embark on a common journey of liberation

to build universal fraternity together. In 1992 the Center organized its first international convention, entitled “Together to build a united world”. Chiara told us, “Your participation in our Movement is essential for us. Without you (as without its other parts) it would lose its true identity”. A second convention followed in 1994. At that meeting, Chiara affirmed, “our goal is to contribute towards the unity of all, starting from Love for every single person. Therefore we’ll try to see how strong the aspiration for universal fraternity and unity is among humanity at all levels”. After Chiara’s death in 2008, Maria Voce, as President, confirmed on various occasions that people with non-religious convictions are an essential part of the Movement.

In the 1970s it was quite unusual for a Christian-inspired movement to open its doors to ‘non-believers’. Why do you think they did this?

For the unity of the human race. To make the goal “May they all be one” more solid, because a united world can only be built with others, not despite or against them!

What are the foundations needed to build a dialogue between ‘believers’ and ‘non-believers’?

The existence of common values, like fraternity, solidarity, justice, help for the poor. We also share an understanding that we all have a personal conscience, which permits us to reflect on these values on our

own and also together in a collective way, so they become a shared patrimony for everyone.

What difficulties have you encountered along the way?

To engage in dialogue when holding very different positions is not always easy. Connecting together to achieve something practical is simpler, because action doesn't distinguish between colour, religion or ideas. The difficulties start when you move from action to values, to ideologies, to the super-structures. At this point, dialogue can risk running aground. But this hasn't happened. Chiara has challenged both believers and us 'friends' to open ourselves up as much as possible, not as an 'act of charity' but to enrich and be enriched as we journey together towards a better world.

As a non-believer, how did you come across the Focolare? What impact did it have on you?

One day our daughter wrote that she'd found a place where she could put into practice the values we had passed on to her. She had met the Focolare community in Arezzo. We'd never heard of the Movement and were naturally rather concerned. So we went along to see what it was all about. Immediately we had the impression of being in a place where other people's ideas were treated with respect. We found a rare kind of openness among the people there. Meeting the Focolare Movement was like a light which allowed me to hope again in the possibility of building a better world.

You met Chiara Lubich several times. How important has this personal relationship been for you?

In an open meeting in 2000, Chiara answered one of my questions saying, "for us too, humanity has the solution for humanity. But precisely who in humanity? For us, it's Jesus, the man Jesus. So take him for yourselves too, because he's one of you, he's a man". That's when I understood the Focolare Movement was a place where I could be active. I also understood why, even as a non-believer, I've always been fascinated by the figure of Jesus of Nazareth.



As this dialogue has progressed over the years, how have you moved from a "them" and "us" to feeling united together in "us"?

Our initial scepticism is the first thing to overcome. On our side, as non-believers, there's the fear that it's all aimed at proselytizing us. On the side of the believers, I think there may be a concern that we'll try to shake their certainties and their faith. The only one who never had any kind of worry about it was Chiara herself! We've increasingly experienced that the one great resource for advancing towards the goal of universal fraternity is dialogue. Gradually we've established trust between both "sides", until we no longer feel "them and us" but "united in us".

How do you find young people responding to this option of dialogue?

Not all young people are well informed about such openness towards those who don't adhere to any religious faith. But those who've had the opportunity of getting to know about it show a real interest in this reality. After meeting us recently, one girl wrote, "I see this dialogue like a face in a precious diamond, entrusted to us by Chiara ... let's be sure to keep it shining!"

Claudia Di Lorenzi

Disorder

I am enrolled in the Faculty of Psychology and I live with other colleagues in the students' quarters. When we do not go to the canteen, we share the use of a common kitchen. One of us, who is quite messy, never bothers to clean the kitchen after making use of it. This morning when I went to the kitchen to make myself a coffee, I found that there was a big mess. He had guests the night before and he did not bother to clear up. I wasn't the only one to notice the disorder in our kitchen. Someone, who was furious about it, suggested that we should leave everything until our colleague realizes it and does something about it. However, shortly after when I went back to my room to study, I was not at peace with myself; the thought of the mess in the kitchen kept coming back to me... What should I do? Should I teach a lesson or do an act of love?



I wasted no time, I went back to the kitchen and started clearing up: I washed glasses and dishes, I took the garbage out ... When I returned to my room, it seemed that I could understand better what I was reading. Life with others is a form of education that completes the lessons I listen to at university. (G. T. – France)

Giving confidence

He was a man in his 40s, a bit sad, who didn't look so good: dirty, shabby clothes smelling of alcohol and nicotine... But he didn't ask me for money, just work, any job. He clearly needed help.

What would Jesus have done in my place? I decided to invite him to my house, where I needed some repairs. He had told me that he just got out of prison and had expenses while on probation, but he had nothing. His wife had left him, too.

He did the job I asked him to do, which I paid for. Before taking him back to where he was spending the night, he asked me if I had any other work. After we talked to some friends, we found other things for him to do. He came back several times, and our mutual trust and respect grew.

After about a month or so, he never showed up. I was afraid he had ended up back in prison. Then one day he called me on my mobile. "Thank you for everything



you've done for me, for the trust you've given me. I was able to pay my probation and buy a phone. Now I have a steady job. I'm very happy!" (W., U.S.A.)

Philippines: Mariapolis goes online



“Necessity is the mother of invention.” Following this slogan, the Focolare community of the metropolitan area of Manila, Philippines, organized the very first Online Mariapolis on May 14 and 15.

“We were on the verge of separation. With just the two of us together once the lockdown began, we felt we had to confront our issues, set aside our differences and start again. Thank you for all your love.” This was just one among many of the feedback we got from those who registered and participated via Zoom for the first ever Online Mariapolis held on May 14 and 15, 2020 in the Philippines.

The unexpected Enhanced Community Quarantine due to Covid-19 pushed us to look for means to connect our people and sustain them through the spirituality of unity. The whole idea was an offshoot of the online Mass that we began live streaming privately to a small group of focolare members. Soon after, it became a daily appointment, with our Facebook group for the Mass reaching the homes of around two thousand people.

We felt that if God hindered the possibility to carry on our big plans to “celebrate and meet” Chiara on her centenary, He opened this way, to do the same, in small bursts! From the outpouring of our Mass attendees through comments on Facebook Live, it was crystal clear that even for 30 minutes on a virtual platform, people are able to make an experience of God!

In the meantime, we had our first experiences with Zoom, for example during the United World Week and the Run4Unity. We felt we had to go for the Online Mariapolis, in order to be with and beside our people, in this very difficult moment. We were against very big odds: the “Mariapolites” would be with all the distractions at home, and would most probably be multitasking – there would be children to look after, meals to cook, chores to finish, etc. Another

major challenge would be the disparities in internet connectivity and service in a developing country like ours. Because of this, our Mariapolis were held for 2 days only, and just for 2 hours each time. We also considered to call it another name, not Mariapolis, so as to manage the expectations of people. But in the end, we all wanted it to be Mariapolis – just like every other Mariapolis we have had.

And we wanted it not as a webinar, but a Mariapolis, a City of Mary, because we felt that we needed Mary now and that we have to be Mary, as Chiara taught us, to bring Jesus-in-our-midst, to our people, so that this experience may help give light to their experience of the pandemic.

Registered Mariapolites reached about 950, not only from the Philippines, but also from other Asian countries, from Latin America, Canada, the United States and some even from Europe. The program, which was made available via live streaming for an unlimited number of participants, was composed of songs, Gospel-based experiences related to the current pandemic situation, spiritual inputs and an hour of in-depth communion during the breakout groups.



One participant meaningfully expressed what this Mariapolis was: “For me it was really a very concrete sign of Mary’s love for all of us! As our mother, she really knows our personal and shared needs. Through the well-chosen theme, talks, experiences, and songs, she nourished us with the right food and vitamins both for the body and the soul.”

Romé Vital

Doctor balances faith, work in coronavirus hotspot

Gabriela Bambrick-Santoyo is an Internal Medicine physician. She was born and raised in Mexico City and has been an active and committed member of the Focolare community since 1987. She currently works as an Associate Program Director of the Internal Medicine department in a hospital in northern New Jersey, currently a hotspot in the current COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Here is an excerpt of the interview made by cruxnow.com



Gabriela, can you say something about how your Catholic faith and Focolare spirituality informs your calling to be a physician?

My calling as a Catholic and part of the Focolare movement and my vocation as a physician are inseparable. I was born Catholic and I found the Focolare movement when I was about eighteen. This encounter changed my life because it was the first time, I was pushed to concretely live the gospel of “love your neighbor as yourself.” This profoundly changed me and has been what has guided my actions, both as a person and as a physician.

What has it been like to be on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic in a hotspot in New Jersey?

It has put my faith to fiery tests. Especially the fear of death. It becomes a very real possibility when you see so much death around you. Once you say yes to the calling that we all have as Christians to lay our lives down for others the graces come pouring in and out of you! They really do!

I also had to ask myself what it meant to “love others as yourself” in this COVID pandemic. When I first started seeing patients, I was full of fear. I wanted to go in quickly...and leave the room as quickly as possible. Then a twist: my daughter, a healthy 18-year-old, was hospitalized with COVID.

During the evenings, she would call me crying from her hospital room saying “Mom, I have lost all my dignity. I need to go to the bathroom, and they won’t let me out. They don’t want to come in and keep pushing me back into my room and at some point I thought I was going to have to go to the bathroom on the floor.” That just crushed me, Charlie, and it made me wonder if I was doing something similar to my patients. At that point I resolved to change to fully give my life to my patients, to pour out more mercy and never let them feel abandoned.

It must be so hard to deal with death on the level you’ve had to see it during the last few weeks. It is so difficult for the rest of us to even imagine it.

That’s true, but at times there are graces too. One of my patients was a very sick 91-year-old that essentially knew she was going to die from COVID-19 and was at peace about it. My act of mercy consisted in being there in the last moments of her life. In spending time not only with my patient but also with her family over the phone. I will never forget when I told her that her family loved her very much and that they were at peace and they know you are ready and she just squeezed my hand. That is mercy.

I had another patient with whom I had what I call “the double whammy” situation. Besides being a COVID patient, he was very aggressive, not completely stable and stated he would punch me if I did not do X or Y. It took two or three moments to remind myself that this person is also a child of God and that I needed to look on him with patience, love and mercy. Once he saw this in my eyes his anger began to evaporate. On his way to being admitted to a different ward, he turned to me, smiled and said, “You and [nurse X] have been the only ones that have taken the time to explain things to me.”

What difference does your robust prayer life and theological commitments make for how you practice medicine under these circumstances?

Prayer has been a central pillar of my life and has allowed me to get through this crisis. It is in prayer that I find peace and solace. It is in prayer that I find myself in God.

Lastly, I participate in weekly meetings (zoom meetings) with my Focolare community. All those things together are the armor I count on to live through this crisis.

Laudato Si week to mark the fifth anniversary of the Pope's encyclical

A global campaign that involved thousands of faithful through interactive and educational seminars on the care of our common home. Launched by the Pope, it was organized by the Department for the Service of Integral Human Development with the support of a group of Catholic partners.

From May 16th to 24th the Laudato Si' Week was held under the title "Everything is connected", a global campaign on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical on the care of the common house.

The event engaged Catholic communities worldwide involving dioceses, parishes, movements and associations, schools and institutions to deepen their commitment to safeguarding Creation and promoting an integral ecology. Strongly desired by the Pope, it was organized by the Department for the Service of Integral Human Development with the support of various Catholic partners including the Global Catholic Climate Movement which includes more than 900 Catholic organizations worldwide among which the Focolare Movement.

During the Week there were various online initiatives following the indications of Laudato Si. In fact due to the Covid-19 emergency, the event took place entirely online through interactive and formative seminars.

On Sunday, May 24th the event concluded with a world day of prayer: at 12 noon (local time in each time zone), everyone was invited to pray for the Earth with this prayer.

In March the Pope sent a video message in which he encouraged the faithful to participate in protecting our common home. Together, through action and faith, we can solve the ecological crisis. "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who will come after us, to the children who are growing up? – says the Pope – I renew my urgent appeal to respond to the ecological crisis. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor can no longer wait. Let us take care of creation, a gift from our good Creator God".

In these 5 years, the Pope's encyclical has stirred the consciences of many citizens. People have formed communities with the aim of doing something for the environment, driven by the Pope's words on a more attentive ecological vision of our Common Home. Yet after five years these words resonate very topical in today's world torn apart by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Vatican Department for the Service of Integral Human Development also stresses how the teachings of the Encyclical are particularly relevant in the current context of Co-



vid-19 that has brought life to a standstill in many parts of the world. "The pandemic has struck everywhere and teaches us how only with the commitment of all can we rise up and defeat even the virus of social selfishness with the antibodies of justice, charity and solidarity. To be builders of a more just and sustainable world, of an integral human development that leaves no one behind"- underlines Don Francesco Soddu, director of Caritas Italiana –

During this week we have not only talked about ecology. The organizers asked themselves: what role does the economy play in terms of safeguarding Creation? In fact, on Thursday May 21st an online meeting was held with the English economist Kate Raworth, from Oxford University and Cambridge University, one of the most influential economists internationally. This meeting was also part of the preparation and formation process for "The Economy of Francesco", the event wanted by the Pope to be held in November in Assisi for which 3000 young entrepreneurs from all over the world have already registered.

On the subject of safeguarding Creation, "the economy is responsible for at least 50% if we consider each individual's economy, the economy of enterprises and the economy of States and the effects that all this has on the pollution of the Planet. Then there is politics, our lifestyles, etc.... (...) If we also look at what has contributed to the failures of these decades, global warming, for example, we realize that in short, the capitalist economy really has a great responsibility. So if we want to make a change we have to change the economy"- says the economist Luigino Bruni –

Therefore, to live Laudato Si means to show our sensitivity to the theme of safeguarding Creation but it also means we make life choices in the economic sphere. We can contribute to a profound economic and ecological conversion through practical experiences. We also need to understand what political change we need to promote in order to truly listen to the cry of the earth and of the poor.

Lorenzo Russo



From **El Salvador** in lockdown

An experience from Rolando, manager of a company in San Salvador: concerns and expectations for his country during this time of pandemic and the decision they made, as a family, to live for others.

In San Salvador, we are under lockdown, just like the rest of the world. Fear which is understandable but, in my opinion, exaggerated, has taken hold and measures to contain the virus are being introduced which contravene human rights.

The emergency is being exploited to undermine democracy and, once again because of fear, much of the population is calling for strong leadership. The pandemic has consequently generated a return to authoritarianism as a way to combat the virus. This in turn has led back to intolerance and a break in dialogue which has generated feelings of anger and revenge. On top of this is the negative impact that the closure of non-core activities, the high percentage of informal economy and the reduction in remittances is having on the economy as well as the high level of debt caused by the emergency.

This situation is a huge desolation for me. I experienced civil war as a young man and, despite many illusions, the arrival of dialogue and the signing of peace. I followed the slow process towards democracy, never completely satisfied but always hopeful. I never imagined that I would see armed forces dominating the political stage again and the collapse of constitutional order. It is a personal suffering and a suffering for society which has at times impacted negatively on my optimism. I think we are heading for an economic and social crisis in the near future that will affect democracy and especially the most vulnerable.

The spirituality of unity we try to live as a family urges us all to take concrete action in favour of those close to us. On a personal level, as I am now working fulltime from home, I try to love Irene, my wife, in the first place by appreciating all her efforts to cope in this difficult situation, helping her and covering the gaps caused by the pandemic because there is no one to help us at home. With joy I try to prepare the dishes that Roxana, our youngest daughter, likes, and I offer encouragement to Irene Maria, our oldest daughter, who studies abroad. Every day I hear from my parents and take care of their needs. We try to support and offer reassurance to the people who normally help us at home, by guaranteeing their salaries, for as long as we can...

Together with employees of the company where I work and other managers, we are introducing policies offering economic support and making it easier for employees to work remotely to secure their jobs. I am committed to dealing with my team as best I can and being understanding about their lower productivity. With a number of experts in different fields we share experiences, study the crisis, economic models, market development and politics, aware of the opportunity this is offering to learn new things and find innovative ideas to face the future.

Without realizing it, the days pass quickly, and a feeling of peace often floods my soul. I continue to worry about the country's health situation, its precarious democratic situation and the economy but I feel an ever-increasing strength to continue fighting for the values in which I believe, despite the fact that the storm is raging outside.

Rolando, El Salvador (received by Gustavo E. Clariá)



The Focolare's commitment to a world free from all forms of racism

After the events in Minneapolis and the demonstrations worldwide we feel powerless and outraged, yet we continue to believe and work for a spirit of openness and participation so as to address the deepest needs of our time.

“While we still have before our eyes the recent events that once again highlight the odious reality of racial injustice and violence, we are broken-hearted. We feel powerless and outraged. Yet we continue to hope.”

These are some of the initial expressions of the statement by the Focolare community in the U.S.A., expressing its commitment to racial justice in the wake of the events in Minneapolis and the protests we are witnessing around the world. This commitment is shared globally and we reaffirm it here on behalf of the members of the Focolare Movement worldwide.

With Pope Francis and many religious and civil leaders, we too affirm that “we cannot tolerate or close our eyes to any kind of racism or exclusion” and that we are committed to “supporting the more difficult right and just actions instead of the easy wrongs of indifference,” as the US bishops claim. “We cannot turn a blind eye to these atrocities and yet still try to profess to respect every human life. We serve a God of love, mercy and justice”.

At a time like this when “the dream of our foundress, Chiara Lubich, to see steps forward in the realization of the prayer of Jesus to the Father, ‘that all may be one’ (John 17:21) seems far away, almost out of reach”[1]. We ask ourselves what can we do both personally

and as a community? What change is needed in each of us? How can we make our voice heard in the public debate so as to support those who suffer from racism and in other ways?

“Our aim is to promote a deep spirit of open welcome and vibrant participation in our culturally diverse and multi-generational communities. We take as our guide the words of Chiara Lubich: ‘Be a family’ “[2] .

We believe and continue in the commitment to give life to local communities that are authentically founded on the Gospel law of fraternity; a principle and an action that unites us also to the brothers and sisters of all religions and to those who do not recognize themselves in a precise creed. We want to dedicate our efforts especially to the youngest, who may experience a particular fear and apprehension for their future.

Faced with such deep tensions and difficulties, the projects and initiatives we carry out may seem small or ineffective and there is still a long way to go. Projects such as the Economy of Communion, the Movement for Unity in Politics (Mppu) and the United World Project, the global strategy proposed by the young people of the Focolare Movement to deal with the world’s challenges on the ground, may seem like drops in the ocean, yet we are convinced that they contain seeds of powerful ideas capable of helping to address the deepest needs of our time together with many people, organizations and communities that constitute that invisible network capable of saving humanity.

Stefania Tanesini

[1] Statement of U.S. Focolare Movement: our commitment to racial justice – <https://www.focolare.org/usa/files/2020/06/Focolare-Statement-on-Racial-Justice.pdf>

[2] Ibid.



P. Ermanno Rossi
Fiesole (Italia)
1924 - 2020

Fr. Ermanno Rossi: “ask for nothing and refuse nothing”

He was one of the first members of a religious order to adhere to the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. A contemplative in full action; a man of God immersed in humanity.

What does “contemplation” mean and what is the point of contemplation today? And how does one contemplate in the 21st century? In times like these, closed in for Covid and pressed by concerns about the future, taking time to get in touch with the Absolute may not seem a priority.

A few days ago, however, I had to think again: I encountered the extraordinary character of Father Ermanno Rossi, an Italian Dominican, a pioneer of the Focolare Movement in the '50s who left for heaven last Easter Monday. His existential parable says that only an intimate relationship with God could make it possible.

This is confirmed by one of his writings, on the occasion of his 90th birthday:

“The events of my life have been many! I only remember an inner conviction that guided me in all my choices: ‘Ask for nothing and refuse nothing’. This meant for me: evaluating well the task entrusted to me, putting all my strength into it with the certainty that God would take care of the rest. For this reason, I never asked for anything or refused anything, whatever task was asked of me, even though it was almost always contrary to my feelings. At this age, however, I can assure you that it was worth trusting God. (...) Along with the difficulties I have had some extraordinary graces. Among these, the meeting with Chiara Lubich and her Movement has a very important place. This meeting was the beacon of my life”.

And his life was intense to say the least: from 1950 to 1955 he was in charge of the young aspirants to the

Dominican Order; he wrote that his cell was his car: “I was always travelling around central Italy”.

It was in those years that Father Ermanno came to one of the first Roman communities of the Focolare Movement and met Graziella De Luca: “I asked only one question: ‘Now while you are alive, everything is all right; but when the first generation has passed, won’t there inevitably be decline, as happened to all the foundations?’. Graziella answered me: ‘No! As long as Jesus is in the midst, this will not happen’ “.

From that moment his life intensified even more, if that’s possible: he was rector and bursar of a seminary; he taught Moral Theology at Loppiano; he travelled around Europe to make the spirit of the Focolare known to many members of religious orders. He was responsible for the Missionary Centre of his Order’s province, then parish priest in Rome and superior of a small community.

With what spirit did Father Ermanno live all this? He himself explains:

“In all these events one thing was constant: every time I had to start over; I had to “recycle “myself. It was as if they had entrusted me with a new job every time. Another constant: at the first impact, the new situation always turned out to be painful, then I saw it as providential. Now I have the certainty that what Providence arranges for me is the best that can happen to me”.

In the spirituality of Unity Father Ermanno found the way to a new relationship with God. Until then, God had been sought in solitude. From Chiara Lubich he discovered that the brother is the direct way to go to God; a way that does not necessarily require solitude: it can also be achieved in the midst of people.

Stefania Tanesini



Mark Ruse
Australia
1956 - 2020

Ciao Mark

An independent film producer, a citizen of the world, a fan of cinema, television and universal fraternity.

In the middle of the night in Italy, 11 am in Melbourne, we greeted Mark Ruse for the very last time via streaming. Mark was an Australian film producer who died after a very short illness at the age of 64.

Mark was not only a highly respected and greatly loved independent producer on the Australian film and television circuit, but he was a citizen of the world who, through his work, but above all through his humanity and simplicity, had built authentic and deep ties with many people outside the film industry.

Mark Ruse began his career as an independent producer and went on to found Ruby Entertainment with his partner, Stephen Luby. Over the last 20 years, they produced many films and TV series: their comedies received awards, recognitions and ratings that were among the highest in Australia. He also produced films and documentaries about social engagement, sometimes linked to the tragic history of his country: Hoddle Street about the 1987 Melbourne massacre earned him a major international award.

Nonetheless, above all, Mark was a simple and kind person, passionate about his work, who faced difficulties – which for an independent producer are many – with a lightness of touch and a good dose of humour.

We had met more than 40 years ago in Italy. We were among the many young people from different countries in Europe and from around the world, gathered together in a small town on one of the hills near Rome. It was the 70's and we had come to hear what Chiara Lubich was proposing to the Gen, the young people of the Focolare Movement. It was an ideal that was revolutionary in many ways: at heart, it was strongly spiritual and personal, but at the same time, community and global aspects were not lacking.

Our youthful dreams and passions (cinema and television) eventually became our work – I became a TV director and Mark a producer – and our desire to create a “space” where we could share the ideas and beliefs that we had in common was fulfilled.

At the beginning of this millennium, we worked together in establishing NetOne, a large worldwide network of professionals in various fields of media and communication: directors, producers, screenwriters and journalists. Today as then, NetOne want to contribute to creating new and different ways of working, not only as regards the relationships among people involved in production but also in respect of the public, the final recipient of our work. Mark worked tirelessly in establishing this network.

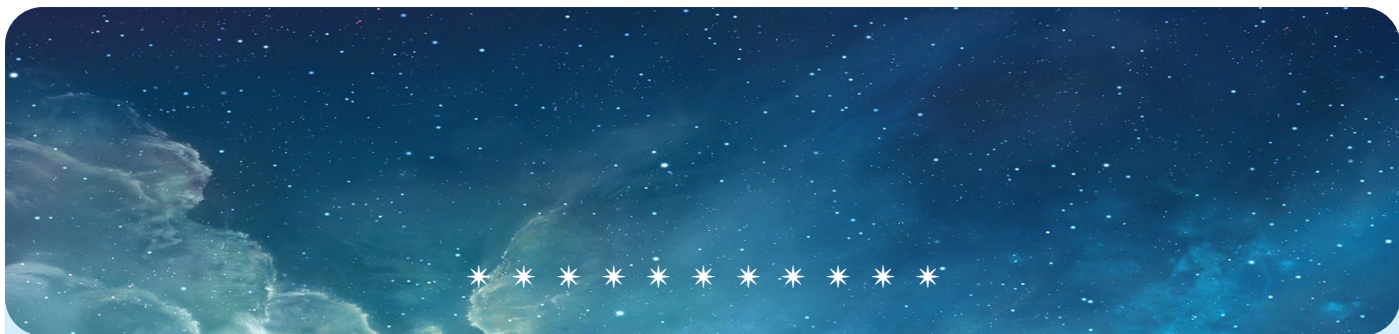
Every time we saw each other in Rome or Melbourne or somewhere else in the world, the conversation picked up exactly where we had left off, even after a gap of months or years. This continued till he sent a message a few months ago confiding in me about his illness: “I am beginning a journey I know, but I want to share it with you and everyone in NetOne. I have welcomed and embraced this new phase of life with love.”

He left us within a few months, even though during our last Zoom call, a few days before his death, he was cheerful and full of plans for the future.

Mark used to say, “The idea of wanting to love our neighbours is at the basis of my faith. Whatever we do should improve society in some way, people should be enriched by watching our films: that is another way of bringing love into our society.”

Australian cinema has lost a good producer, we in NetOne network have lost a friend, a travelling companion who left us with his smile... “We’re crazy, we’re crazy people, but we need to feel part of a family”. That’s right, Mark, that’s right.

Marco Aleotti
Courtesy of Cittanuova.it



Members of the Movement who have concluded their earthly life:

11 March 2020

Helena (Lena) Guedes Carrapa - married focolarina from Portugal

28 April 2020

Jacobo Kim Shin Hyeok - married focolarino from South Korea

09 May 2020

Mark Ruse - married focolarino from Australia

12 May 2020

Regina Maria Prado Nogueira De Sá - married focolarina from Brazil

16 May 2020

Rainer Stein - priest focolarino from Germany

17 May 2020

Helga Glowacki - focolarina from Germany

20 May 2020

Michel Pouzols - focolarino from France

26 May 2020

Amalia (Amata) Frontalic - focolarina from Roman Mariapolis

02 June 2020

Giulietta Napoleone - focolarina from Roman Mariapolis

11 June 2020

Silvia Tonini Dal Soglio - married focolarina from Italy

12 June 2020

Pietro Salvador - priest focolarino from Italy

Contributions to the Mariapolis newsletter:

Dear Readers, this printable Pdf newsletter contains the most important articles published in the "Mariapolis" section of the Focolare Movement's international website (www.focolare.org/mariapoli).

You can download it from the site or receive it by email by activating the link.

*It is a **free service** from the Communications Office.*

We are always grateful to those who wish to continue to support our work financially and in that way contribute to the spreading of the charism of unity.

The editorial staff

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