

In conversation with the president of the Focolare Movement

## Building fraternity, point by point

Interview with Margaret Karram

*As an Arab Christian born in Haifa, Focolare president Margaret Karram developed a strong sensitivity to dialogue from a young age and is guided by the conviction that peace must be built by everyone, day by day. Thus, it is more than understandable that Pope Francis' appeal to the Focolare to become 'artisans of peace' resounds forcefully for her.*

*Pope Francis addressed these words to you and other representatives at the December 7, 2023 audience marking the 80th anniversary of the Focolare's beginnings: "Today, unfortunately, the world is still riven by many conflicts and continues to need artisans of fraternity and peace between men and between nations."*

*What does it signify for you to be an "artisan of fraternity and peace"?*

Certainly, I cannot deny that the Pope's mandate, with all that is happening now in both the Middle East and many other regions of the world, resonates even more strongly for me. There is no moment in my day when I do not pray or offer all my suffering for God to use in stopping all this senseless violence.

I also believe it is important to remain anchored in the realities in which we are living. This is why we must admit that no life exists without small or large conflicts. Conflict is a part of our existence. This is not only for those who were born or live in a country at war, but for each of us when we face opposition or hostility on a daily basis, both personally and in society. Moving from a logic of conflict to a logic of pacification is a process, a sometimes long, tiring journey with moments of stalls and restarts. The achievement of peace – which is not simply the rejection of war – is based on a patient journey. It is a critical and constructive confrontation with social, political, cultural, but also religious realities. An image that seems to me to express the peacebuilding process is one of a piece of embroidery that requires patience and perseverance. I think that peace is like this: we build it over time, often with small gestures, point by point.

I am convinced that the many – and often untold – experiences, projects and efforts towards fraternity in numerous parts of the world *are* the path to peace. Although they can seem like small drops in an ocean that overtakes us in the face of all that is happening (and what we do is always too little), they are valuable gestures because they go against a cultural current that brings hatred, polarization and division among persons and peoples. These gestures are

revolutionary because they show that the path to peace always comes from personal choice and conviction. If we do not make a conscious choice, there will never be peace.

*Pope Francis also emphasized that this is not only a human commitment, saying: "We know that the fruit of peace is born only from love. Therefore, I ask you to be witnesses and builders of the peace that Christ achieved with his cross, defeating enmity." This is a call to dig deep roots into evangelical soil, isn't it?*

Indeed, we do not work for peace only for human reasons. We believe in something greater: we believe that peace is God's plan for humanity. It is this faith that makes us walk along paths of peace. It is not because we are good or expect to be rewarded for this effort, but rather we know that by living and witnessing to peace, we are God's collaborators in weaving bonds of fraternity among all peoples.

From the testimonies given at the *Together for Humanity* Conference, which took place last June 16th - 19th at our Meeting Center in Castel Gandolfo (Italy), some key words reflective of this commitment emerged: *relationships, intergenerational relationships, trust, community, dialogue*, and above all, the word *together: Together for Humanity*. These words expressed attitudes, gestures, and "styles" that are necessary to learn in order to be co-builders of peace.

I am deeply convinced that peace is made through dialogue. This means that I let you enter inside me with all that you are and all that you carry; I'll make room for you. Often this dynamic of welcoming you requires that I lose something. But it does not mean losing the essence of who I am. Rather it is letting go of something to gain something greater, and this builds broader horizons than I could ever have built on my own. This is why it is important to return again and again to Jesus, and to the logic of the Gospel that leads us to trust in dialogue and do things that are even heroic at times.

*Do you then focus on the responsibility of everyone to build fraternity and initiate concrete processes for peace?*

This brings to mind a writing by Chiara Lubich that seems extraordinarily timely for today, in fact, so much so that we could take it as a mandate:

*"The most visible aspect of unity is fraternity. This certainly seems to me the best path to swim against the current; to heal wounds that are now festering and more fully achieve freedom and equality. It is that fraternity brought by Jesus upon the earth in becoming our brother and making us brothers and sisters. It is a valid path for those holding the fate of humanity in their hands, but also for mothers in families, for volunteers who bring hymns of solidarity to the world, for those who apportion a part their company's profits to eliminate pockets of poverty, for those who refuse to surrender to war. In this way, fraternity 'from above' and fraternity 'from below' will meet in peace."*

If this fraternity 'from above' is in the hands of institutions, governments and all those who hold the fate of our peoples in their hands, then fraternity "from below" is the responsibility of all of us. We cannot expect it only from institutions. Rather we ourselves must patiently and passionately continue to weave this peace from below.

**edited by Hubertus Blaumeiser**

<sup>1</sup> C. Lubich, *No alla sconfitta della pace*, in «Città Nuova» magazine n. 24/2003, pgs. 8-9.