



International Solidarity Reflexion

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Children's Well-being

November 2019

Introduction

A child's life is "for his good, for the good of the family, of society, of mankind as a whole. From this also derives the depth of the human experience of being son or daughter, which allows us to discover the most gratuitous dimension of love It is the beauty of being loved first: children are loved before they arrive ... they are loved before having done anything to deserve it, before knowing how to talk or think, even before coming into the world! Being children is the basic condition for knowing the love of God, which is the ultimate source of this authentic miracle. In the soul of every child, inasmuch as it is vulnerable, God places the seal of this love, which is at the basis of his/her personal dignity, a dignity which nothing and no one can ever destroy," says Pope Francis in his catechesis given in Saint Peter's Square on [February 11, 2015](#).

Children's basic physical needs are met in their families, where they experience loving care. At the same time, if they do not receive enough love, their childhood will be painful and wounded. As Pope Francis said in 2015: "There: the children. ... I ask myself if we are not just anaesthetizing ourselves to the wounds in children's souls. The more you try to compensate with gifts and snacks, the more you lose your sense of these spiritual wounds — so painful and so deep. ... Do we feel the weight of the mountain that crushes the soul of a child in those families where members mistreat and hurt one another? ... When adults lose their head, when each one thinks only of him- or herself, ... the souls of their children suffer terribly, they experience a sense of despair. And these wounds leave a mark that lasts their whole lives." ([General Audience, June 24, 2015](#))

Call for Prayer

Providing God, grant us the listening heart that can hear the voice of the children and listens to their spiritual needs! Lead us and be with us, so that we can help them on the way towards the fullness of life!

Experience

According to a survey about the situation of families in European countries, the number of divorces is constantly increasing and the number of people choosing to live in marriage is decreasing. In the past decades, the number of marriages has decreased by half, whereas the number of divorces has risen by half compared to the data before. (Marriage and Divorce Statistics, [Eurostat](#) June 2019)

More and more children grow up without their father or mother (or both), and the number of patchwork families is rapidly growing. More and more of our students suffer from this difficult situation. I work with boarders and I often hear young people saying painful statements like the following: "Mom doesn't want to see me; if I call her, she doesn't even answer the phone. She only cares about her new family" (girl, aged 13). "My first childhood memories are my mom taking me to the bar with her" (girl, aged 14). "My mom gave up on me in writing because

she doesn't need me" (girl, aged 14). "I visit my mom every other week but she drinks all the time. Next time I will tell her I'm not going any more if she's drunk" (boy, aged 12). "My dad can't put up with having that many children, and he moved away from home so that he wouldn't start drinking again" (15 year old girl with 5 siblings, of whom she is the eldest).

Reflexion

These young people seem to have everything they need for their physical wellbeing; they do not need to worry about not having enough food or proper medical care; they have clean homes; they have opportunities to learn, etc. At the same time, they have not experienced their parents' faithful love, the safety of belonging. They have numerous painful experiences from their childhood due to the loss of one of their parents, for which they often blame themselves. They carry their childhood wounds, and their lives lack safety, attention and very often love.

As *You Are Sent (YAS)* reads, "Mother Theresa risked already meager resources to satisfy needs wherever she was called. ... Like her, we exclude no one from our concern, but we are especially sensitive to youth and women and are impelled to prefer the poor" (*YAS, Constitution 24*). Children who have been hurt in their family at a very young age are also the poor and needy of our times; they lack what is necessary, not for livelihood, but for spiritual health.

If we can teach them that God provides for them, and they have their basic needs met, then we can help them become reconciled with their lives and assist others on the same journey "directing their gifts towards building the Earth" (*YAS, Constitution 22*).

Action

- In order to understand better her pupils' situation, Mother Theresa often sat on the school bench of one or the other child and prayed for them. Once this month we can also try the same thing, so that we can get a deeper understanding of the young person to whom we are sent.
- On a previously chosen occasion, let us pray for every young person we serve by name!
- As educators, we sometimes have to deal with refusal on behalf of the students. What a rebellious child often desires is simply love and attention. Let us listen to these young people, pray for them and direct them with love to do what is good.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you care for all your creation, especially those who are in need. Help young people to understand that their life is precious to You. Inspire their families to provide the emotional and spiritual support that will help them to grow into mature members of their societies.

Make us attentive to the needs of the young and help us respond lovingly even if we face rejection or opposition.

Lead us to make Christ visible among the children through our shared love, faith and hope.

Guide us with your Spirit so that we can "recognise who the poor are and what the urgent educational needs of our times are" (*YAS, General Directory 37*).

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