
Canzani: “Focolare Movement, a people of unity, a people of peace”

Over the next few days, the Focolare Movement will be celebrating its 80th anniversary throughout the world. It will be celebrated in different ways in different countries, with Mass, with conferences, in some places with special editions of the various Cittanuova journals. It was on 7 December 1943 that Chiara Lubich consecrated herself to God. This date became the official date on which the Focolare Movement was born. The first event marking the day is the audience with Pope Francis, who will receive in the Vatican Margaret Karram, President of the Movement, and Jesús Morán, Co-President, together with a group of leaders of the Movement. A thanksgiving Mass will then be celebrated by Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, in the Basilica of St Mary Major at 6 pm. “There are two feelings that guide our celebration today,” says **Francisco Canzani**, Consultant for “Knowledge and Learning” at the International Focolare Centre and coordinator of the Movement's Synodal Commission. “First of all, we thank God for the gift of the charism that he has given to the Church through the person and the 'Yes' of Chiara. This is a gift not only for the members of the Focolare Movement, it belongs to the Church and it is for everyone. At the same time, there is a feeling of melancholy joy. In recent years we have come to understand all the mistakes that have been made in the Movement in the last 80 years, how many difficulties there have been, how many people have been hurt, even by the actions of members of the Movement.”



This certainly confers a different connotation on this celebration, for while on the one hand we thank God for the gift we have received, on the other we feel the need to ask forgiveness to all those whom we have wronged over the years and who deserve our attention, our understanding and the love of all the members of the Movement today. **Which new elements did Chiara bring to the Church 80 years ago?** The first, without a doubt, was to embrace the Gospel and to try not only to reflect on it, but to actually live it and put it into practice, word by word. The group of people Chiara gathered around her was another important innovation. Most of them were young girls and young women, at a time when women did not count for much in the Church and did not have a say in it. In total fidelity to the Church and its hierarchy, they were able to pave the way for women and the laity in general. The third novelty, at a time when the press associated the term perhaps only with the Communist Party, was the search for unity. Unity understood not only as a vocation of the Church, but as a requisite of her mission, in the words of John's Gospel, “that they may all be one, so that the world may believe.” **What impact has the charism of unity had in our present times?** That's a difficult question, in the sense that it's difficult

to assess the impact that a charism can have in the course of history. However, there are some prophetic signs and achievements. One of them is the obvious contribution that Chiara's charism has made in the ecumenical and interreligious field, to which she was deeply and personally committed. The other achievement is the Economy of Communion project, which today forms part of Francis' path of Economy. This project has the audacity - as was typical of Chiara - to bring together opposing poles, entrepreneurs and workers, with the poor at the centre. A further prophetic vision is dialogue with contemporary culture in all its forms and disciplines: art, sociology, politics, science and ecology. Many people in many institutions are engaged in this field and seek to make a contribution, together with many others, on the basis of a belief in the transformative power of culture. Then there is the social action of the Movement, the efforts patiently made by its members over the years for the benefit of the poorest, refugees, immigrants and the disabled. At the heart of it all, however, is unity. In the end, these commitments, where they are put into practice, create paths of unity in a divided world, among rich and poor, among members of different Churches, religions and cultures. **Who is the "Focolarino"? Pope Francis described you as those who "always smile".** In fact, we have been given many definitions. Pope Benedict XVI described the Focolarini as "apostles of dialogue." Our movement was founded on the Word of the Gospel and today it seeks to put it into practice through a culture of relationships, of interpersonal relationships. That which Pope Francis calls the "culture of encounter." This is done by seeing a brother behind every face. Therefore, in all the countries of the world where we are, we want to be the people of mutual love, of the new commandment. This does not mean that we will always succeed or that we will never fail. But that this is what we are called to be, even in our failures. **Admittedly, talking about mutual love and unity is a challenge today, in a world torn by wars, climate crises and migrations. What is your response to this cry of the world and what is the greatest challenge for Chiara's charism today?** These days we are all praying very hard for peace. We pray for peace throughout the world. Young people and adults, people in the ecclesial, civil and political world. Prayer helps to heal the small divisions that exist around us and the great divisions that exist among humanity. It helps to heal hearts. At the moment, peace is one of the main concerns of our movement. This is a very important time for us and of course we are particularly sensitive to this issue. To quote Pope Benedict XVI's definition, the Focolarini are called apostles of dialogue. Dialogue is sometimes an ambiguous word, but it is undoubtedly an extremely valid one, today, in this time, for unity and peace. **Can we then define the Focolarini as a people of peace?** I dare say, a people of unity and therefore of peace. Because we know that without relationships based on true fraternity, without the recognition of diversity and differences in the search for unity, there will never be true and lasting peace.

M. Chiara Biagioni