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On 21st September, at the proposal of the UN General Assembly, we celebrate World Peace Day. This day is an invitation to strengthen the ideas of peace, while calling for a temporary cease-fire in war areas to guarantee humanitarian aid.

This is not the only international day dedicated to peace. 2nd October is, also at the proposal of the United Nations, the International Day of Non-Violence, coinciding with the birth date of Mahatma Gandhi. On the anniversary of his death, on 30th January, schools observe the School Day of Non-Violence and Peace. Also, on 1st January, the Catholic Church celebrates the World Day of Peace, since 1967. Each of these days is a good opportunity to promote reflexion, thinking about all the different symbols and initiatives that favour peacebuilding.

To mark this day, the portal asked me to briefly share my thoughts on peace. How to summarise in a few words such a broad and transcendental issue, of which so much has already been said, discussed and written for centuries? What can I say without repeating ideas over and over?

What I really ask myself is this: if we are to be realistic, can we still talk of peace and work for peace when humans, since immemorial times and despite all the scientific, material and technical progress tragically continue to resort to war, violence, abuse and all sorts of aggressions? Does it not seem like some pipe dream, an unattainable illusion? Should we not listen to those who say that violence is inevitable, that there will always be evil persons in the world and that it is not possible to give up arms to defend ourselves or that war is just a continuation of politics? Are we blind to the continuation of the arms race, the persistence of terrorism and fundamentalism, that large powers continue without control, that there are political or national conflicts that seem unsolvable? Does it not seem there is a global regression in democracy, that inequality is rising, that nations are turning to their own interests and that there is a proliferation of authoritarian or violent leaders?

Well, despite all of this, our answer is yes. We are convinced. Peace is a totally irrevocable aspiration. It is not an option, but a need within every person and community. An aspiration that is intrinsic to the human nature. Something we must continue fighting for, today and forever.

Precisely, it is the commitment to and the work towards peace, the relentless efforts to gain peace, regardless of the level of success and immediate results, what gives life an incomparable meaning and depth. In the Christian tradition, a quote attributed to Jesus of Nazareth, in one of his main speeches, that reflects this very same point: blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Mathew 5:9). In a way, what this tells us is that they will reach plenitude, and get to be the best a human being can hope for. This same intuition is contained in all of the major religious traditions; peace is the biggest desire for the lives of every being and for humanity.

On the other hand, it is evident that war or violence is not a fatality or an external fact; it is the result of human actions. For this very reason, peace depends on personal and collective behaviour, which is our responsibility, the result of our freedom. Persons and peoples can always work towards our common good, respect and justice. And this is what peace depends on, nothing more. So peace is always in our hands. In fact, all actions that are geared towards peace bring, communicate and make peace grow.

However, our actions, which may bring peace or destroy it, come from within each human being, the values, attitudes and the deepest psychological mechanisms that are in the darkest and unconscious parts of us. Mechanisms, attitudes and values that are learnt from a very young age and all along life, and are transmitted from one generation to the next. And these also include, we mustn't forget, the everlasting temptation of violence, egoism and treating others as objects or opponents.

That is why, to grow into persons of peace, it is essential to "convert" them to peace. This is a permanent process of working and transforming our inner selves, to purify all those destructive impulses. To promote this process it is essential to educate persons and peoples in the values and attitudes of peace. This calls for a deep revision of the way we interrelate to each other, the language we use, our habits, our expectations...Our shared horizon must be that of building a collective, strong and resilient peacebuilding culture. Getting public opinion and minds to be convinced about respect, solidarity, dialogue, the absolute value and dignity of each person and people. A culture that rejects all forms of violence. This is the true and decisive challenge to make peace a reality.

Peacebuilding can never be the work of a single person; it is always a collective effort, in each society. An effort for each generation, that never stops. We need a constant effort to achieve this individual and collective inner transformation to reach peace and keep peace.

This process is what can make social progress possible and it is absolutely necessary to reach peace: protecting and safeguarding the human rights of persons and peoples; developing conflict resolution mechanisms; growing and strengthening democracy; progressive and multilateral disarmament; the end of arms trade; establishing international authorities that will favour global governability, the transformation of the dominant economic model towards new forms and structures that allow all our needs to be met; decent work for all and finding a balance with nature. These are formidable and long-term challenges, but they are possible.