

ATD Fourth World

Isabelle PYPAERT PERRIN Message for 17 October 2017 – English translation

We cannot but question what life means if people around us are dying, unnoticed.

We cannot but question what life means if children deny themselves the right to dream to the point of saying: *“I never dream. What's the point? My dreams won't come true anyway.”*

We cannot but question when mothers are forced to ask themselves: *“If I let social workers take the child I carry into care, as I have been asked, will they let me look after my other child who is old enough to go to school? Or will they take him away from me as well?”*

We cannot but question when young people are excluded from social or school programs because we are afraid of them, or because everybody has given up on them and on their families.

We cannot but question when people who are fighting to promote justice on the behalf of those living in poverty, but who never really take the time to listen to them.

We may also question what life meant for Fr. Joseph Wresinski, who, as a child, grew up in extreme poverty and who, as a grown man, called people together on 17 October thirty years ago today.

At that time, he bore witness to *“the millions and millions of children, women and fathers who have died from misery and hunger”*, to *“the poor of all times, still poor today, forever on the road, fleeing from place to place, despised and disgraced”*, and to *“the millions of young people who have no reason to believe or even to exist, and who vainly search for a future in this senseless world.”*

What legacy has Joseph Wresinski left us? What has he inspired us to do, to help give meaning to a world where the quest for security by those who have plenty, sometimes exacerbates the insecurity of those who have nothing?

Walking in his footsteps, millions of women and men, and millions of young people and children have sought to overcome their sense of guilt and the notion that extreme poverty is inevitable. They have refused to let their knowledge go to waste.

They have found the strength to meet people in high places, although they did not attend the same schools and did not have the same education as them.

They have shown that these encounters, rooted in the hearts and minds of those who experienced them, are not impossible.

Such encounters took place in neighborhoods where people felt unsafe and neighborhoods where people were over-protected.

They took place between people who were desperate for work and were made to

feel useless by it, and people who were constantly overworked. They took place between people at the very bottom and people at the very top of the social ladder.

Such encounters were aimed at upholding the rights of those who have nowhere else to go except to places nobody would consider acceptable for raising their children.

By initiating these undreamt-of encounters, people resisting poverty have experienced the pride of coming together as one, of being part of the same humanity, and of realizing they were able to generate unexpected changes. They have also raised hopes that new encounters will happen in the future.

In this way, they have responded to the message that Fr. Joseph Wresinski sent out on that day of the first gathering which brought defenders of human rights together when he said:

“What about you? ... Are you going to pave the way for a new world where justice will prevail over profit and exploitation, where peace will prevail over war, where justice and love can be finally reconciled.”

The time has come for us to initiate new encounters such as these, and to increase the opportunities for them to happen, so that we can learn how to give meaning to life by working together to build a world free of extreme poverty.