

Our brothers from afar

# The Drop

**Maria Treu**

When I retired, I asked myself: what do I like to do? I like to teach! It was not hard to find work. I joined a small group of volunteers connected by friendships and shared ideas. For some months now, I have been teaching Italian in a community that welcomes young people who have arrived in Italy from various places along the Mediterranean coast by somewhat dubious ways. They are male teenagers and have little or no knowledge of Italian. Given my age, I see them as their grandmother would see them. I find them beautiful, energetic, full of dreams, but also lonely and sad. They always look me straight in the eye as if looking for support and I will never know the pain behind their gaze.

How I wish they could magically learn everything immediately in order to fit in quickly into this country that they have chosen! When I arrive with the other volunteers in front of the large green wooden door at the center, we make a decisive pact together: To try to see the face of Jesus crucified in these young people. We commit ourselves to being a loving presence for them, sure that God will do the rest. Jesus will be with us as he promised in his Gospel (Mt 18:20), bringing his light and his peace which is much more than simply our good will.

In the lessons we have with them, in the sentences to be practiced, I am very attentive to topics that are meaningful for them, like family or things from back home. Their desire to learn is undeniable, even if there are also the up and down moments that one can expect in young people who have also been through many hardships. In fact, one day a student, Fawsi, suddenly asked after class: "Are you coming back tomorrow?". It seemed the most beautiful phrase I could have heard at that moment.

Then, yesterday Marwan (not his real name), in the midst of learning challenging numbers and language, wrote on the edge of a blank sheet of paper in beautiful handwriting and in fairly good English: "I come from Gambia and am 17 years old. I lost my father and mother. I left Gambia for Italy to learn and to become someone in life."

On another day, I watched Walid and Abdul bent over their papers, intent on learning the Italian alphabetic symbols that were so different from the sinuous flow of Arabic letters. But they were without a mother, father, siblings, brothers and friends. They were also without money, homes, a school and a native homeland.

How could I not think of some of their Italian peers, who instead are fortunate for the simple fact that they were born elsewhere? These other teenagers have parents, money, a home, school, friends, sports, clothes . . . I tried to overcome my mounting anger in the face of what seemed to present itself to me as 'Injustice' personified.

This is life, you will say. What is there to do?

I went back to the beginning once again, making a choice again to not let anything block me from loving, from loving Jesus in each of these young people. It is a love for Jesus even when He appears in ways we do not like or are able to understand. In essence, it is recognizing and loving Him in his abandonment, in the things that do not change and cannot be resolved. And once I have done this, I go ahead step by step, knowing that it is like a drop in the ocean. But it is my drop, a drop falling into the sea of God's Love.