**The Climate Crisis: Gemma DiMarino Italy**

*Humanity’s greatest and most complex challenge today*

***“You say you love your children... yet you are stealing their future before their eyes. “***

These are some of the words from the speech Greta Thunberg gave during the 24th Global Climate Conference in Poland in December 2018. Greta is 16 years old, lives in Sweden and since September 2018, every Friday she skips school to stand in front of the Swedish Parliament with a sign which says: **School strike for climate**. I imagine being there, next to her, and asking her whyHere she is, sitting on the ground, with her sign. She’s a little girl, with long pigtails and an innocent face.

I approach her slowly and say: “Hi Greta, I’m Italian, my name is Gemma.” She says “hi”. I ask her if I can sit next to her and ask her some questions. “Sure,” she says kindly, “have a seat. That way I’m not alone”. And I: “Why are you here with this sign? Shouldn’t you be in school?” She looks at me, smiles, and responds in serious voice, almost as though reprimanding me: “because it doesn’t make sense to go to school and study for our future, if our future is at risk of not existing. Also you, instead of worrying about the future, should try to change it while you can”.

I reply: “You are right, but here, all alone, who listens to you? People pass, they see you, they stop a second, read your sign, and leave.”

Her look, even more than the words which she uses to respond, are full of pride:

**“*They will see me, listen to me and many will understand. You will see that not only you, but others like me, realize that and will do as I do. You’ll see, I will be able to tell rich folks how the suffering of many pays for the luxuries of the few”.***

As I’m talking to her, my mind wanders to another person, Pope Francis, who in his encyclical “Laudato Sì” calls me to an ecological conversion: take care and safeguard the Earth, our common home.

I end my imaginary conversation with Greta and think about all that she told me. That which could be a heroic albeit small example of protest could find imitators throughout the rest of the world.

Thanks to the social network campaign, and many newspapers, the world is talking about her. There are millions of students that have protested in plazas and squares around the world: in Ethiopia, Australia, Switzerland and Europe, using signs with the same slogan “School Strike for Climate”. Also in Milan, in Piazza della Scala, every Friday from 12-1 pm there is a manifestation/strike.

Greta was right. They have paid attention to her and she took the stage to tell 200 world leaders: “**I am interested in saving the planet Earth**”. Here is a brief excerpt of her long speech:

“…*You talk only about moving ahead with the same bad capitalist ideas that have gotten us into this mess, even when the only sensible thing to do is to pull the emergency brake. You are not mature enough to tell us how things really are, not even about the responsibility which you leave to us?”*

*“….I don’t care about being popular. I am interested in climate justice and saving the planet. Our civilization is sacrificed for the opportunity of a very few to continue to make enormous amounts of money.”*

*“….Our biosphere is sacrificed so that rich people in countries like mine can live in luxury. It is the suffering of many that pays for the luxuries of the few. In 2078 I will be 75 years old. If I have children, maybe they will spend the day with me. Maybe they will ask me about you. Maybe they will ask why you didn’t do anything while there was still time to act.”*

*“…. You say you love your children above all else, yet you are robbing them of their future in front of their eyes. Until you start concentrating on that which has to be done and that which is politically possible, there is no hope”.*

Greta is teaching us that there are no impossible challenges. The impossibility lies in our mindset. Unfortunately we know the reality about our planet’s health: glaciers that are melting, seas that are rising, cyclones and floods, droughts, heat waves and cold fronts, forests that are dying and deserts that are advancing.

The year 2018 was a year of record warming, one of the warmest ever. Let’s review some facts: 9 out of 10 people today breath dangerously polluted air and there are an estimated 7 million premature deaths/year due to illnesses related to the pollution of bio-oxide and particulate matter, which threaten the health of our children, causing developmental delays, lower IQ and autism. The amount of food that we waste (one third of all produced) is in step with the deforestation that we provoke to cultivate ever more areas, the desertification that we bring about due to the deforestation and the fact that 821 million people are starving. Greta’s tenacity, activism, and strong words take me back to Pope Francis encouraging us to act together:

“….*The first is political action, crucial to tame tecnocratic and speculative logic and to make the prospects of the common good central” (LS.26).*

*“….But political action also requires the participation of all, a real ‘ecological citizenship’ (LS 211) able to exert a healthy pressure on those who hold political, economic and social power’ (LS 206).*

We only have 2 generations (20-25 years) to save the planet from climactic changes and the devastating effects these will have on human health and our land; it is what the president of the Higher Institute of Health, Walter Ricciardi, says:

“…. *Climate change is the real global threat of this century and cuts across all human and environmental conditios, from heat waves, to water supply to food and waste disposal. The quality of our lives, our health, and our survival are therefore put at serious risk by climate change produced above all by pollution. Managing these transformations, changing course has become the real emergency and the real challenge. This challenge is only overcome with the cooperation of all. From policy makers, to the industrial world, to education and through every day actions”.*