

## Who Will Roll Away The Stone?

All through this endless winter,  
I've watched the International Year of the Child (\*) starting badly  
for poor children  
from slums and shantytowns.

This year has begun badly, because everything has turned against them.  
Some experienced fires in their families' shacks,  
others, the unemployment and exhaustion of their parents,  
the chill of a home without heat,  
and the darkness of a home without electricity.

This year has started badly,  
because people were trying to steal it from them.  
Childhood institutions don't treat them like other children.  
"They're retarded," they say.  
They refuse to include them in their programs  
that could change something  
in the lives of these children and their families.  
No doubt they're afraid  
of putting the country and its citizens to shame,  
if they point out that even today  
hundreds of thousands of children  
leave school barely able to read and write,  
that the world declines all responsibility  
for the future of hundreds of thousands of children.

And yet,  
these children tell us about the school of their dreams.  
It would be nestled among fields of flowers,  
crowned by a giant rainbow  
arching overhead like a bridge.  
The children would be walking hand in hand,  
laughing, skipping, dancing on their way to school.  
They show us what solidarity means,  
even though childhood institutions won't show them any in return.

"I have to take care of my little brother because he's sick."  
"I have to do mom's work when she's not home."  
"I have to earn some money."  
"I try to smile, even if I don't feel like it."  
"I should sing to make my mommy and my little brother happy."

They teach us a lesson  
by sharing all they have,  
their bread, or a piece of chocolate.  
Someone gave away his only scarf...  
Because grown-ups don't understand,  
children come up with their own ways

to draw joy out of life.  
No matter what, they laugh anyway.

“You know, we found a place to live,  
but it is too small for all of us.  
So the landlord won’t let us move in.  
That’s why my little sister  
is being sent away to winter camp.  
That way there will only be four of us.  
You know what my mom told me? It’s a secret:  
‘We’ll hide your baby brother in a bag  
and sneak him into the house. No one will ever see him,  
and we’ll all be so happy!’  
Mom is right, because when my little sister comes back,  
the landlord won’t be able to say anything,  
because he’ll be seeing us all together in the house! ”

That child wrapped in a bag reminds me of the man  
who was buried wrapped in a shroud  
for the salvation of mankind  
And I wonder,  
who will roll the stone away that buries the poor alive?  
Who will come to them with enough solidarity to break the chains  
that bind up their will to love...?

We are celebrating the International Year of the Child,  
and Easter morning is drawing close.  
Who will roll away the stone?

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(\*) Translator’s note : This is the message Father Joseph wrote for Easter 1979, a year that had been declared “*The International Year of the Child*” by the United Nations. In it, the reader can sense his overriding concern to promote at the heart of this yearlong event a spirit that would enable people everywhere to draw closer to the poorest children and their families with deeper understanding and renewed compassion.

