

Hosman, Easter 2020

*Dear friends,*

I let my hand rest lightly on Andrea's shoulder. Her posture is cowering, as if she had to protect herself. She looks at me furtively from below. Then she straightens herself and blows her ever-running nose – into a handkerchief, not onto her sleeve as she used to do.

For the past month Andrea has been living in our Hosman community. In our house everything is very different from at home. A nicely laid table, tableware and cutlery – those were unknown. She attended school for eight years but cannot read a word. Now she has started to copy the letters and we hope that she can soon write her name. She attends the "Stella Matutina", our housekeeping school. The subjects she can learn here are the practical ones: cleaning, ironing, cooking and baking bread. She is industrious and has already found friends.

On the Sunday after her first week with us I accompany Andrea to her family in Ziegental (Țichindeal), twelve kilometres from Hosman. How happy her Mama is to embrace her daughter once again! "Do you like my new jacket?" Andrea asks and lets her mother feel the pink fleece fabric. "I have already earned it, from the clothing storeroom." Her mother nods: "You look lovely." She hopes that Andrea will find her own way in life, not like Chiva, the oldest of her eight children. Chiva is 25 and already has five children, with the sixth on its way. Until quite recently she was living with one of the shepherds near his flock, none of her children went to school. Last summer, her husband killed another shepherd in a dispute and now he is serving a twelve-year sentence in prison. Chiva came back to her parents – where else should she go? The young woman is traumatized, unable to lift a finger or care for her children. Misery without hope, a family under the shadow of death.

After Andrea's grandmother had died, her father pulled down the shed which had been the old woman's dwelling. We built a house with two rooms and a kitchen. The mother keeps the house clean. A colourful cloth hanging on the wall depicts Jesus with his disciples at the Last Supper. Alongside that hangs a photograph of Ionci, her seventeen-year-old son, on his deathbed. Bone cancer carried him off two years ago. Tears well in her eyes as she gazes at the photo. "Misery persecutes us", she sobs. She is tired out. Every morning she rides out on the horse cart with Luca, her husband, to do the stable work and the milking on a farm; once again in the evening.

Luca is proud of his two horses. With them he can carry out transport work for the farmers during the day. In that way they manage to make ends meet for their large family.

Andrea is becoming impatient. She wants to get back to the community where a birthday celebration is taking place. She embraces her parents and tugs me out. "See you tomorrow, Alex!" she calls to her brother. He is one of our agricultural apprentices. All of them eat their midday meal together in their green overalls, in the "Stella Matutina". On Monday Andrea will serve her brother there, erect in her white apron.

The acclamation in Mass – "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection, until you come again in glory." – I have experienced it during this family visit. Death: fear, poverty. Resurrection: the concern for the children who shall sometime have an easier life, the friendship which they bestow upon me. We dedicate all our imagination to ways in which to provide education and training to the Roma families' children. The housekeeping school "Stella Matutina" and the building yard with its carpentry shop and agricultural training are places in which they can take steps into the future.

When a young person like Andrea straightens up, I experience Resurrection. Along with many young people, I have you, dear friends, to thank for the Easter joy. May it also shine into your families!

For that I pray.

*Fr. Georg Sporschill SJ*

*In Advent I told you about Adriana.*



*On February 6th Adriana passed away. She was 26 and left 5 children behind. We will care for them together with Avram, their father.*

