

## With You Soldier and Friend...for You Pastor *The Meaning of a Presence*

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Dear Readers,

in all or almost Nato Armed Forces exist among "officers" the Military Chaplains of different Religions and Confessions which ensure the Spiritual Assistance to all personnel and their families, this: for a "people" with very particular characteristics, kind of service and mobility. Under each uniform there's a person with his life and his history.

In Italy this presence is ensured by Catholic priests, who have the responsibility and obligation to serve every man and woman with their respective families, whatever faith they profess.

This role, that while in the country has a normal course, abroad in peacekeeping missions, it becomes important and decisive, not only to assist all the staff, but also to collaborate with Commands to ensure such a serene and right work for the aims settled.

I'm not born now in this world and for this service, but every time that I have the opportunity to be with my soldiers during their "job", I'm amazed and delighted as a child in front of the twinkling lights of shop windows.

We are people in uniform like "Samaritans" on the dusty streets of the land where we go, with respect and commitment and so we try like this we try to live these experiences.

As Chaplain to see our soldiers, asking about the fundamental questions of life is so gratify, so I would like to tell you the words of the Church that I have in my mind every day that explain and qualify my presence: *"The vocation of the soldier is the PEACE. During the Synod of the Church Military Ordinariate in Italy, we have clarified our identity on beatitude: Blessed are the peacemakers so that they should be called Sons of God". Then the Second Vatican Council remind us: «men as sinner, are and will always be under the threat of war until the Jesus' coming», so that our Military Church said in its Synod that "all those are serving the community by choosing to do the military profession in the all corps, ministers of security and freedom of peoples, that if properly perform their duty, really contribute to the stability of peace. » [nr. 564]"*.

Our soldiers are really the servants of peace, people who operate for peace. «Our soldiers love the "Peace-keeping"». It's the title of a book that has shown that our soldiers have made these operations not only from the professional point of view, but also in the human one.

I feel privileged to be able to do these experiences of faith, outside the common conventions that we know. I'm with them soldier and friend, and for them pastor of hope and faith.

Since I was a young priest and during the years of formation, I always thought to priest as one who goes where nobody wants to go, looking for all those who might avoid him because they are harder to engage, surpassing the reality of the parish and making every man image of that God who stands talking to everyone: from the Zacchaeus' house,...to the messy life of Magdalene, who welcomes everyone without judging but looking into the heart. Maybe I'm so close to the limits, but I think that God lives in every heart that knows how to reflect about the answers that might are not inside the rules that we know, at least initially, and here in this condition, helping them to follow a walking of knowledge and spiritual life that the Church indicates and offers from the tradition.

How many times I've seen in these recent years, faces full of such emotional tears facing the dangerous service: the smile of children that greet us and making shine our eyes, attentive faces during a Mass for their





fallen colleague, a prayer for those who awaits us at home, so these wet eyes from the men in uniform who believe in justice and Peace to every man and every man that pay back for the service and the commitment.

Therefore, even for me Chaplain, Missions abroad are unique and rich of humanity: see and hear our young soldiers so determined and eager to do their professionalism, knowing the risks and the hardships and difficulties that they expect, this is so satisfaction.

During the day, and alternate in their various services, there's a time for a greeting, a coffee together, and the moment of confrontation and about of questions for the meaning of the hate from these people and of the presence of religion that sometimes divides rather than unites.

This is being Chaplain and it's the sense of this presence. We are proud to be soldiers, and Christian soldiers or whatever Faith, that through the service for the Peace offers their young lives helping others for the security, and I with them, as an older brother, accompanying them to live their life, their service through the faith of this noble work: to be "peacemakers". This tells authenticity, vocation, commitment, responsibility, Faith in one word. The strength of our service has been transformed into a fortress of our faith.

The Military Chaplain is this brother who shares and guides the heart of these people so that their service will always be authentic and true. It may seems, to a stranger's eyes, a small thing, but we know how important it is, that consciences are straight and have the right attitude, to be a true Peace defenders.

This is my commitment in the Armed Forces and the sense of my presence, cheerful and serene, God, by whatever name we call Him, in whatever form we pray Him, He is the Lord of life and for this is worth living and committing for it.

