

Word of Life Resources

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Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear Word of Life group leaders:

This month, **In-depth** begins with a piece by Chiara in which she affirms that prayer, is inherent in human nature and is a true relationship with God of which Jesus is the model, and that is why it is possible to speak with Him on a one-to-one basis. Proof of this is this month's Word of Life, which presents us with an anguished mother who implores Jesus to help her demonically possessed daughter. Despite the reproach of the disciples and the harsh rebuff that Jesus gives her for not being an Israelite, she doesn't stop; her faith, as it is underlined in the **Points** section, is sculpted in the verbs: go out, go to meet, shout, cry, beg for mercy, recognize Jesus as Lord and prostrate before Him with the certainty that He can do all things. For us, as community leaders, it should be emphasized that in this passage Matthew is also addressing the first Christian community that "is searching and has great faith."

In the **News** section there is a piece of the Pope's message to those who are going to participate in WYDⁱ in Lisbon in which he encourages young people not to pay attention to those who reduce life to ideas, but rather to practice "the three languages of life": that of the head, that of the heart and that of the hands. In the same section we continue with the theme of the **Synodal Path**, this time with what the Pope said to the bishops and leaders of the Italian Synodal Path in which he speaks of "an open Church", "that allows itself to be challenged by the concerns of history", "concerned (...) to serve the Gospel", "rooted in what is essential".

In the end, **two experiences**: the first, of a Costa Rican teacher who works in a marginalized sector and, beyond his school work, is interested in helping families in the sector; the second, in the desert of Egypt where two medical students, encountering about a thousand lepers, offered to paint their houses to make them more habitable and understood that, more than material aid, what they hope for is someone to listen to them.

On the synodal path this month, bringing to life the languages that the Pope speaks in his message to the youth of WYD, we continue to move forward with Jesus in our midst, without losing hope of achieving "that all may be one."

With great love, *The Team of the Word of Life Workbook*

Prayer: For you Jesus

Prayer, as we know, is our relationship with God. It is a building block of our very being, of our being human. Indeed, since we are created in the image and likeness of God, we are capable of a direct, personal relationship with God; we are persons who can address God as “you”.

And the same applies to us Christians, We are brothers and sisters of Jesus, through grace; and in him we find the model of how to relate to the Father. Jesus, in fact, did not only preach, work miracles, and call the disciples to follow him he also immersed himself in prayer. Indeed, just as Jesus was always in communion with his Father, always in his presence, so it should be with his followers.

We all know that Christians pray in different ways. It is possible, therefore, to highlight the main and typical ways of praying among those who have been given the charism of unity.

These characteristics clearly emerge if we compare our prayer life with that of Christians, even the ones who knew their Christianity best, at least those in our countries, at the time when the Focolare began.

I remember that in speaking of prayer we said that “one needs to put to work the mind, the will and the heart. Our mind helps us to reflect on the words we hear; our will leads us to formulate resolutions on the basis of our reflections our heart draws us to love what we have promised to do.”¹

Nonetheless, within the Focolare Movement, prayer immediately became something else. From the early months we emphasized, for instance, the duty to “pray always”, as Jesus requested. But how could we pray always? We knew that we couldn’t do this by multiplying the prayers we said.

We could pray always by being Jesus. Jesus, in fact, prays always. If in performing any action it was not we who lived but Christ living in us, through love, our day would become

¹ From an unpublished letter of Silvia Lubich, Bozzana (Italy), July 22, 1939. (Silvia the author’s baptismal name, was changed to Chiara during her time in the Franciscan Third Order.

In-depth

a continuous prayer. And this would be possible if we based our life on love, being a living expression of the word “love,” which sums up all the Law and the Prophets.

Another way to “pray always” – which we practiced a little later – was to offer to God during the day one action after the other by saying short expressions of love, such as “For you Jesus”.

Thus all our actions were transformed into sacred actions. We were convinced then, as we are now, that by offering our daily work to God in this way, and performing it well, we cooperate with him in the creation of the world we are co-creators with him.

And this way of praying is very much in tune with our times. Today we see the world and the whole universe in evolution, and human beings are reminded of their duty to “subdue the earth”. (Gn 1:28)

In addition, when we work for a Work of God and, therefore, for the Church, we participate with Christ in the redemption of the World.

Excerpt from: Lubich, Chiara (1920-2008) (2006). A New Way, The Spirituality of Unity. Publisher New City Press. Pages 95-98

<https://www.focolaremedia.com/bookstore/new-way>

Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish. (Mt 15:28)

Jesus is making his way to the region of Tyre and Sidon, to a foreign land. It seems that he and his followers are searching for an opportunity to rest at last and maybe also for solitude, silence, prayer, and shelter. Suddenly, they hear the cries of a woman who, like other characters in the gospels, has no name. Her presence disturbs and irritates the disciples who 'beg' Jesus to send her away: 'she comes shouting after us.' The woman is not blocked by the fact that she is not an Israelite, nor because she is a woman, nor because the Master ignores her. She is a mother, desperate for her daughter who is being 'tormented by a demon.' She approaches Jesus with the tenacity of wanting a personal meeting with him and she manages to 'kneel before' the Master as she insistently asks for help. Jesus responds with unusual harshness and says, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'

Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.

The woman accepts the refusal, and she understands that her world is not part of Jesus' primary mission. She accepts that his God is not a machine that dispenses graces, but a father who desires a true relationship that recognizes her personal poverty. Aware of this, the woman looks Jesus in the eye and says, 'Yes, Lord, yet the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' She puts Jesus - so to speak - with his back to the wall, and he is moved by the humility of a person who is content with crumbs. Even her cries seem to express faith and she calls him 'Lord, Son of David!'

Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.

Her great faith is enshrined in the gospels thanks to a few verbs: the woman comes out and goes to Jesus; she calls out; she cries; she asks for mercy; she recognizes Jesus as Lord and prostrates herself before him; she maintains her tenacity and certainty that for the Lord the impossible is possible; she responds to Jesus' harshness with impeccable logic. Motherly love and trust are her strengths. 'And her daughter was healed instantly.' This Word is a picture of a person's living faith in action. And, at the same time, it shows the efforts and journey of the early Christian community to which Matthew addresses these writings, as it opens up to the non-Jewish world which both contains and searches for faith.

Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.

As with the Syrophenician woman, 'our faith can be challenged by a sudden difficulty, by an unforeseen event that upsets our plans, by a serious illness or by the prolongation of a very painful situation' ⁱⁱ, and, we might add, by the absence of peace in the world, by structural injustices, by a planet that is seriously ill or by conflict in the family or society... And one of our weaknesses might be a lack of perseverance and total faith. 'God

allows our faith to pass through difficult and sometimes absurd situations. He wants to purify it, he wants to see if we really know how to abandon ourselves in him, believing that his love is much greater than our plans, desires or expectations.' ⁱⁱⁱ

This happened to Saliba. It seemed he would have to leave his city and his elderly parents in Homs, Syria. His father was a glazier and his shop had been destroyed during the war and the city destroyed. Like other young people, Saliba thought he would have to create new opportunities elsewhere, but he did not give up. He was just 22 years of age and had the resolve of someone who does not want to run away from helping his people, who are suffering. He took advantage of the opportunity offered to him by a project called RestarT, to open his own convenience store, where his fellow citizens could find cheeses, yogurt and butter made by his mother, as well as pulses, oils, spices and coffee. He already had a refrigerator and a power generator. On days when the convenience store is closed, he and his elderly father distribute baskets of food to families in need.

Edited by Victoria Gómez and the Word of Life team

ⁱ From August 1-6, 2023, the XXXVII World Youth Day will take place in Lisbon. The gospel theme chosen for the gathering is 'Mary set out and went with haste' (Lk. 1:39). In his message inviting young people, Pope Francis explained, "The Mother of the Lord is a model for young people on the move, who refuse to stand in front of a mirror to contemplate themselves or to get caught up in the "net". Mary's focus is always directed outwards." And he hoped that WYD will be a time to rediscover together "the joy of a fraternal embrace between peoples and generations, an embrace of reconciliation and peace, an embrace of new missionary fraternity!"

ⁱⁱ-Chiara Lubich, Word of Life, June 1994

ⁱⁱⁱ-Ibid

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- Jesus hears the cries of a woman who, like other characters in the Gospels, has no name. Her presence disturbs and irritates the disciples, who "beg" Jesus to attend to her in order to get rid of her: "she comes shouting after us." The woman is not blocked by the fact that she is not an Israelite, nor because she is a woman, nor because the Master ignores her. She is a mother desperate for her daughter, "tormented by a demon." Her great faith is sculpted in the Gospels by several verbs: the woman goes out to meet Jesus; shouts; cries; begs for mercy; she recognizes him as Lord and prostrates herself before him; she keeps intact her tenacity and the certainty that the impossible is possible for the Lord.
- Our faith can also enter into crisis due to an unforeseen difficulty, due to an unforeseen event that disturbs our projects, due to a serious illness, due to the prolongation of a very painful situation, due to the lack of peace in the world, due to structural injustices, due to the serious illness of the planet, due to family and social conflicts. And one of our weaknesses could be the lack of perseverance and full confidence. This word is the photograph of a person's living and working faith. And at the same time it shows the perseverance and the path of the first Christian community to which Matthew addresses himself, in his openness to the non-Jewish world that is searching and has great faith.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What does Mt 15:28 tell us?
- When Jesus heads towards the region of Tyre and Sidon, what does he seem to be looking for?
- How does the screaming woman approach Jesus and what does she achieve?
- With what words does Jesus address her?
- How does this woman respond to Jesus by looking into his eyes, how does she put her request to Jesus, what do her cries seem to express, and what does she call him?
- What are this woman's strengths and what happened to her daughter?
- Why does God allow our faith to go through difficult and sometimes absurd situations?
- Have you been like the young man, Saliba, who thought about looking for new opportunities elsewhere, but didn't give up? We invite you to share your experience with us.

Pope: 40 Days to WYD, 'My doctor says I can go, I cannot wait!'



Forty days before the upcoming World Youth Day in Portugal, Pope Francis sends video message to young people who will participate or follow the WYD in Lisbon, saying: "The doctor told me I can go, I can't wait."

By Salvatore Cernuzio

"Some think that because of illness, I cannot go, but the doctor told me I can, so I will be with you. Come on, young people!" On the same morning in which during the audience at ROACO, he spoke of some discomfort from the recent laparotomy operation, the Pope sent a message to the young people from every continent who will all gather in Lisbon from 1 to 6 August for World Youth Day and reassured them of his presence at the great event.

Showing the grey backpack with the kit that will be distributed to the pilgrims, he says: "There are 40 days left, like Lent, to the meeting in Lisbon. I am ready! I already have everything. I can't wait to go!"

Pray for those who reduce life to ideas

The Pope speaks to young people, both those busy preparing for the trip, and those who will follow the world meeting from a distance - in a video message recorded today, 22 June, during an audience at the Vatican with Bishop Américo Manuel Alves Aguiar, Auxiliary Bishop of Lisbon and President of the WYD Foundation.

The World Youth Day organization released two videos: one addressed to the participants, the other to those who have been working for months to set up the organization, welcome and accommodation for pilgrims.

"The Day is a point of attraction for everyone. Right now it is the point we must look toward, toward which you young people must look,' the Pope says. "Come on, young people!" he encourages, adding, "Don't listen to those who reduce life to ideas. Those poor people who have lost the joy of life and the joy of encounter. Pray for them".

The three languages

As in other meetings with the new generations, Francis once again asks the young people to approach life with "the three languages" of the head, heart, and hands: of the head to think clearly about what we feel and do; of the heart to feel well, deeply, what we think and do; of the hands to realize what we feel and think.

"Come on, be cheerful. See you in Lisbon!" is his final greeting.

Thanks to the "workers"

Speaking in another video message to the "*trabalhadores*", the "workers" of WYD, the Pope first of all expresses his gratitude: "Thank you. I know that you are spending hours and

hours of work to make all this possible. And this is not the worst part. The most difficult part will come later, when during WYD, you have to maintain the structures of order, health, food, cleanliness, so many things that are necessary. You do not appear as the protagonists of WYD, but it is you who make it possible."

"WYD cannot be realized without your work. For this I say thank you, thank you for being seeds. You are like seeds, you will germinate from below. You cannot see it, but the fruit will be born."

Encouragement

"Thank you for helping this organization. Thank you for your generosity," repeats the Bishop of Rome.

Pope Francis, as confirmed by the Vatican Press Office, will be in Lisbon from 2 to 6 August. A stop at the Marian Shrine of Fatima is planned for the 5th: a return, after the 2017 trip on the occasion of the centenary of the Marian apparitions to the three shepherd children.

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Video: <https://youtu.be/HFRfSTcyKIY>

Pope to Italian Bishops: A synodal Church is open to everyone



As the Italian Bishops conclude their 77th General Assembly, Pope Francis urges the Italian Church to continue journeying together on the synodal path to promote the "co-responsibility" of laypeople and clergy and build a less clerical Church.

By Lisa Zengarini

Pope Francis on Thursday encouraged the Italian Church to continue its synodal process "with courage and determination", above all by "valuing the potential" present in its parishes and Christian communities.

The Pope was addressing the bishops and diocesan representatives of the synodal path in Italy in the Paul VI Audience Hall, as the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI) concluded its

77th General Assembly focused on the synodal process in the lead up to the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality.

A unique spiritual experience of conversion and renewal

The Holy Father introduced his speech by noting that the process is a “unique spiritual experience of conversion and renewal” which can make ecclesial communities “more missionary and more prepared to evangelize today's world”.

As the Italian Church concludes the two-year listening phase and enters the discerning phase, he therefore offered four recommendations responding to some questions submitted by the CEI Permanent Committee regarding the pastoral priorities for the Italian Church, how to overcome objections and concerns, and the participation of clergy and lay people.

Keep walking guided by the Holy Spirit

The first indication he gave was to “keep walking guided by the Holy Spirit”, always serving the Gospel and cultivating “the freedom and creativity” of those who bear witness to the good news of God's love by “staying grounded in what is essential”.

“A Church weighed down by structures, bureaucracy, formalism – said the Pope - will struggle to walk through history, in step with the Spirit, meeting the men and women of our time”.

Ecclesial co-responsibility

The second instruction the Pope gave was to make Church together, that is enhancing “ecclesial co-responsibility” by involving all the baptized in the life and mission of the Church as called for by the Second Vatican Council.

"We need Christian communities in which space expands, where everyone can feel at home, where the structures and pastoral means favor not the creation of small groups, but the joy of being and feeling co-responsible."

Church ministry – the Pope stressed – can never be exercised without others. This applies to bishops, whose ministry cannot do without that of priests and deacons and to priests and deacons themselves, but also to the entire community of the baptized, “in which each one walks with other brothers and sisters at the school of the one Gospel and in the light of the Spirit”.

"We must ask the Holy Spirit to make us understand and experience how to be ordained ministers and how to exercise the ministry in this time and in this Church: never without the Other with a capital "O"."

An open Church

The third point highlighted by Pope Francis was to be a Church open to everyone., able to listen to the voices of young people, women, the poor, those who are disillusioned, those who have been hurt in their lives, as opposed to what is still perceived as “self-referential” and clerical Church.

"Clericalism is a perversion and a clerical bishop or priest is perverse, but a clericalist layman or laywoman are even worse."

“The Synod”, the Pope insisted “calls us to become a Church that walks joyfully, humbly and creatively in our time, aware that we are all vulnerable and need one another”.

A "restless" Church

Finally, the last instruction Pope Francis gave was to be a "restless" Church "that welcomes the challenges of our time, that knows how to go out to everyone to proclaim the joy of the Gospel", without prejudices.

"We are called to collect the anxieties of history and to allow ourselves to be questioned, to bring them before God, to immerse them in Christ's Passover."

The Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the synodal process

Bringing his address to a close, Pope Francis again encouraged the Italian Church to continue this journey together, trusting in the Holy Spirit, " the protagonist of the synodal process". " It is He who opens individuals and communities to listening; it is he who makes dialogue authentic and fruitful; it is he who enlightens discernment; it is he who directs choices and decisions. It is he above all the One who creates harmony and communion in the Church", Pope Francis concluded.

"Let's entrust ourselves the Holy Spirit. He is harmony. He causes all this disorder, but He is capable of creating harmony which is something totally different from the order that we could create by ourselves."

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Experience

The experience of Toni from Costa Rica, in his work as an educator of the new generations.

I am a Religious Education teacher in a public school, with about 800 students in a marginalized sector of the city, consumed by drug addiction, robberies, etc. The evangelical churches are a healthy presence in this situation. Since my subject is optional, even if it is part of the curriculum, the parents with an evangelical formation have wanted to know about the study program and my actions, and most have decided that their children are receiving a good religious education. I thank the spirituality of the unity for my academic, cultural and spiritual formation, because it is the basis of my actions, both in the social and educational fields.

Sensing the needs of the students, together with the teaching staff, a wonderful interdisciplinary team and the management, an assistance bank has been set up where students donate what they can spare, such as shirts, pants, shoes, notebooks, books, pencils, etc. In this way, the culture of giving is encouraged with the circulation of goods among them, and also the closeness and support of parents to the school. Seeing the difficult economic situation of several families, with this team (composed of teachers, the psychologist, the counselor, the sociologist, the director and the cleaning staff), we visit these families every two weeks carrying a bag with food, thanks to donations from companies and individuals of good will.

Because of the commitment to love others as ourselves and wanting to respond to the needs of the students, we came up with the idea of organizing an "ecumenical breakfast" where we could meet. Some of the school staff met with four evangelical pastors, the priest and the mayor to thank the pastors for the formation they provide to so many students. But, before long, the meeting took a different turn. Together we discovered the limited availability of jobs for young people, as well as the lack of job training, for which the National Institute of Apprenticeship is a tool with its short-term technical training courses. It was a meeting full of charity and understanding, where the love for the city and for the students was felt in each of the participants.

This work of welcoming each student with his or her needs has generated a family atmosphere in the school, even if difficulties are not lacking. One day, I was teaching, I saw a pre-adolescent student hurting her arms with a razor. I approached her, and she, frightened, covered her already bleeding arms and looked at me in silence. We left the class to the hallway to talk and, at that moment, a student in a loud voice said: "the teacher is sexually abusing Natalia." Immediately the entire student body reprimanded him, and the management and psychologists were present. For me, it was a very painful moment because of the insult I felt. Only faith in God's love, especially in Jesus' cry of pain on the Cross, allowed me to welcome this heartbreak of mine. The dream and hope of helping others continues, knowing that I am contributing to carry forward the Kingdom of God and to give my contribution to a better world.

Toni V. D., Costa Rica

Experience

Living the Gospel: “Live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11)

A School of Solidarity

In the desert, outside the city of Egypt where I live, there are 1000 people with leprosy. Until a few years ago no one knew about this colony. We went to check the situation and found that they lacked everything. No doctors visited them. We contacted Carita and we opened our group to other young Christians and Muslims with whom we go there on our days off work. Two of us are medical students and are in charge of medical care, so they brushed up on the methods of treatment for leprosy. Others gave their time to paint the houses and make them more comfortable. A young journalist has published some articles in various newspapers and magazines in order to inform as many people as possible and raise awareness of the problem. Above all, we realized that the patients of this colony need someone to listen to them, which for them is almost more important than medicine. This experience has become a real school for us: it has made us understand how each of us can give our contribution for others.

(H.F.S.- Egypt)

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