

Word of Life Resources

No. 11-23

November 2023

Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear Word of Life group leaders:

On **All Saints' Day**, and during the month of November, we invoke the memory of the deceased who have gone through earthly life but have already passed on to life in Heaven. Therefore, to go in-depth we propose a piece of Chiara on 'the Holy Journey'.

How can this theme help us to live this month's Word of Life, we ask in **Dynamics for the meeting**. The answer is found in the commentary itself: by being the Word; by trying to make it take the first place in our lives; by living it in our daily lives, just like Jesus, who is the Word of God incarnate. In this way, being children of the light and not of darkness, as this month's Word of Life indicates, Jesus will be present in each one of us and in our midst and will be like a lighted lamp in the night of today.

To keep pace with the Church, we publish in the **NEWS** a piece of the Pope's homily at the opening Mass of the Synod on Synodality. In it, Pope Francis invites us to face the challenges of today's humanity with the gaze of God, to be a Church that contemplates and discerns the present; with God at its center; a Church composed of sinners and, therefore, always in need of purification, and open to the action of the Holy Spirit, its protagonist. Also in this space, is a brief news item on the Ulmas, an entire family, including their unborn child, who has been beatified. They were "a ray of light" in the darkness of World War II. We will speak briefly of the Pope's trip to Marseilles (France) where he appeals to the Mediterranean nations to recover "their vocation as the cradle of civilization, life and peace".

We conclude with **Pierina**, a Peruvian Gen who, having known the Ideal of Unity, discovered the value of friendship and came to affirm that "the happiness of living an ideal comes from within, smiles appear on the outside". Thus, she lived her last months in the hospital "being light in a silent apostolate" and generating experiences of generosity even in people who did not know her.

In November, the month of the dead, which begins with All Saints' Day, may we continue our collective "Holy Journey" to be, as children of light in the Church and with the Church, a lighted lamp in the night that is lived in our territories because we do not look at each other with the gaze of God.

We greet you with much affection,

The Team of the Word of Life Workbook

Being the Word

We are still now and for the rest of our lives, we hope, on the holy journey that we have all proposed to follow together. And certainly, we are not doing this because we have an obsession about being perfect, nor to nourish what could be spiritual pride. Neither are we doing it to be better than other people, but only so as to become holy for the glory of God, because God wants it. In fact, Saint Paul says, “This is the will of God, your sanctification.”¹ So then, during these next two weeks let’s go ahead, keep going ahead without stopping! And if we have paused a little, which can happen, it’s one more reason to start over again and continue with greater energy.

“Be holy,” Mother Teresa of Calcutta one day wrote to me, “because Jesus is holy.” And that’s so true. We have to become holy because Jesus is holy. And we will become holy by living God’s Word. In fact, we know that anyone who lives the Word, at least at the moment when they are living it, is already holy. Jesus said: “You have already been cleansed” - that is, those who welcome his Word in their heart and put it into practice – “by the word I have spoken to you.”² If this is true, then it is clear that we will become saints by trying our best, in every moment - now too - to be God’s Word, to “be” the Word.

My dear friends, today we want to understand better how to live God’s Word really well. Living the Word has to be the most important thing we do in our lives. How many times our hearts are drawn, instead, towards many things in the world around us, or that are within us! And how often, for example, do we give first place to our job, to our apostolic work, to our studies, or perhaps even to a hobby or to amusements. How many times we are carried away by something trivial or attached to an affection for something? Sometimes we are even slaves of things that are not at all pleasing to God. So, practically speaking, we live our lives focusing our attention, our affections or our desires only on the things of this earth.

What place then does God’s Word occupy in our lives? We might remember it every so often, and that’s it. And yet this is not the kind of life Jesus asks of us. God’s Word has to be our first love, before everything else. It has to be the pillar that supports our entire life, the root from which the rest of our life blossoms. It is his Word that has to shed light, moment by moment, on all our activities. It has to

straighten out and correct every aspect of our life.

Let's look at Mary. Her whole life was in total conformity with the words of God, which she kept in her heart and meditated on, so as to transform them into life. We might say that Mary is totally the "Word of God," and since she lived a holy life, in a perfect way, her life was truly a holy journey.

But let's look above all at Jesus. He lived a life like ours. He was a carpenter, he worked hard; he did apostolic work. He also slept; he ate; he loved Mary and Joseph; he taught his disciples; he worked miracles; he fed crowds of people. But who was Jesus? Wasn't he the Word, the Word of God made flesh?

Since Jesus, the Word, took upon himself our human nature, we will be true Christians and become saints if we allow the whole of our lives to be permeated with God's Word. The Word of Life that we are considering this month is: "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor." And we know that following Jesus means denying ourselves and embracing the cross. Any goal we want to reach, even in this world, requires discipline, sacrifice, effort, and training. It's the same with Christian perfection. It requires self-denial and the cross. These are hard words, but we know that the holy journey is demanding. And besides, that's what Christianity means: to live the death of Jesus so that he will rise in us in every moment.

Therefore, let's prune away our old self, so that the tree of our lives will not remain a useless little shrub, but instead will give tasty fruits. We don't want to wait until the last moment of our lives, when our death is inevitable, to offer it to God. No, love for him tells us to die every day, with his help, so as to rise again in every moment of every day.

Chiara Lubich

Conference Call CH Sierre, Switzerland,
March 18, 1982

You are all children of light and children of the day; we do not belong to the night, nor to darkness (1 Thess 5:5).

Light has always symbolized life. Every day we await the dawn as the harbinger of a new beginning.

The theme of light has often featured in the histories of peoples and in ancient religions.

Jewish tradition celebrates *Hannukah*, the festival of lights, which commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem and the liberation from pagan cults.

Some Muslims light candles on the day of the prophet's birth, known as *Mawlid* in Arabic or *Mevlid Kandili* in Turkish.

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, is also celebrated in other Indian religions and symbolizes the victory of good over evil.

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the light that illuminates the darkness of the world.

Light, therefore, is charged with strong symbolism and represents the presence of the divine and is a gift for humanity and the earth.

You are all children of light and children of the day; we do not belong to the night, nor to darkness.

But what are the characteristics of the children of the day? One of them is "not belonging to the night, nor to darkness." The renunciation of lethargy and apathy lies in the decision to remain in a state of wakefulness. It means choosing to love and to live each moment fully.

In this letter, the apostle's pressing invitation to the Thessalonian community is to keep watch together, renouncing all kinds of stupor and indifference. During a time when humanity is particularly in need of light, as Paul writes (cf. 1 Thess 5:8) those who "do not belong to the night" have the task of bringing greater clarity to all human relationships through a process of continuous self-giving that, through faith, love and hope, makes visible the presence of the Risen One.

Furthermore, we need to cultivate a closer and more sincere relationship with God by searching our hearts deeply and finding moments of dialogue in prayer, and by living out his word that makes this light shine out.

You are all children of light and children of the day; we do not belong to the night, nor to darkness.

Sometimes we can become accustomed to living in the darkness of our hearts and be content with the many false lights around us and the world's various promises of happiness. However, God always calls us to allow his light to shine within and to look carefully at people and all that is happening so we can recognize signs of radiance.

Effort is needed to continually choose to begin afresh and turn from darkness to light. Chiara Lubich wrote, "The Christian cannot escape from the world and hide or consider religion to be a private affair. He or she lives in the world because each person has a responsibility, a mission, to be the light that illuminates. You, too, have this task, and if you do not do this, your ineffectiveness is like salt that has lost its flavor or light that has become shadow." ⁱ [...] "The task of all Christians is, therefore, to let this light shine through them and be the 'sign' of this presence of God among all people." ⁱⁱ

You are all children of light and children of the day; we do not belong to the night, nor to darkness.

God is light and can be found by those who seek him with a sincere heart. No matter what happens, we will never be separated from his love because we are his children. If we are sure of this, we will not be surprised or crushed by upsetting events.

This year's earthquake in Turkey and Syria, which claimed more than 50,000 victims, turned the lives of millions of people upside down. Those who survived the catastrophe found that entire communities there and in other countries have been points of light that worked to bring immediate aid and provide relief to those who have lost loved ones, homes ... everything.

Darkness can never overwhelm those who choose to live in the light and to generate light. For us Christians, this means a life with Christ in our midst, a presence that makes it possible to catch a glimpse of life that restores hope and allows us to continue to dwell in God's love.

Edited by Patrizia Mazzola and the Word of Life team.

ⁱ Cf Matt. 5:13-16

ⁱⁱ C. Lubich, Word of Life Aug. '79

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- Light has always symbolized life. Every day we await the dawn as the messenger of a new beginning. The theme of light has been present in the stories of peoples and in ancient religions.
- At a time when humanity is especially in need of light, those who do not belong to the night have the task of illuminating relationships between people, in a continuous self-giving to make visible the presence of the Risen One with faith, love, and hope, as Paul writes (cf. 1 Thess 5:8).
- At times, we can even get used to living in the darkness of our hearts or be content with the many artificial lights, with the various promises of happiness in the world. But God always calls us to make his Light shine within us and to know how to look at people and events with attention, to catch reflections of light in them.
- God is light, and he can be found by those who seek him with sincere love. Whatever happens, we will never be separated from his love, because we are his children. If we are convinced of this, we will not allow ourselves to be surprised or overwhelmed by events that could upset us.

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What do the Hebrew tradition, Muslims, and Hindus tell us on the subject of light? For Christians, who is the light that illuminates the darkness of the world?
- What are the characteristics of the sons of the day?
- What does the invitation addressed by the Apostle to the community of Thessalonica consist of? What needs to be cultivated?
- How can the writing of Chiara Lubich help us with the Word of Life that we are studying in depth this month?
- What is the task of the Christian according to this Word of Life?
- Will the darkness be able to overcome those who choose to live in the light? Why?
- Concerning the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, did you experience the contagious love that all that is done out of love remains? Do you have experiences in donating money or time, did you find it difficult to donate, did they have any initiatives in your community? did they represent points of light?

Pope Francis to Synod: The Holy Spirit guides us toward harmony and respectful listening

Pope Francis reminds the Synodal Assembly that the Holy Spirit is the Synod's protagonist, no one else, and calls for expressing oneself freely, while respectfully listening to all, as he addressed the Opening of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality, which opened today in the Vatican.

By Deborah Castellano Lubov

"The protagonist of the Synod isn't us, but the Holy Spirit," says Pope Francis, insisting that if the Spirit is in charge, it is a good Synod, and if He is not, "it is not."

The Pope gave this powerful reminder during the Opening of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in his opening remarks.

The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be held in two moments, that is, in two sessions, spaced one year apart: the first from October 4 to 29, 2023, and the second in October 2024.

The Holy Father began his remarks by welcoming those before him and thanking them for their work, as he recalled Pope St. Paul VI's initiative to set up the General Secretariat of the Synod after the Second Vatican Council to facilitate the Synod of Bishops' consultations. He acknowledged that the Church had not always been ready to have this conversation, but that it has become more and more important to the world's bishops and people of God, now, to speak about synodality.

"It is not easy, but it is beautiful. It is very beautiful," he said.

The Holy Father made a special recommendation to the assembly to read [a collection of Patristic texts](#) that would help them as they embark on their synodal journey.

Protagonist of the Church guides us by the hand

The Pope reminded those before him that the Holy Spirit is the "protagonist of Church life" that "leads the Church forth," and is "maternal."

"The Holy Spirit," he said, "guides us by the hand and consoles us."



The Synod on Synodality

The Holy Father called for working toward "harmony," highlighting that harmony inevitably will leave a space for "nuances."

He suggested that if we finish the Synod exactly in the same way, "without a nuance, then it's not a Synod."

'Done by the Holy Spirit, not us'

"Particularity," he said, "needs to be incorporated into the Church," underscoring, "this needs to be done by the Holy Spirit, not by us."

The Pope warned against mischaracterizations of the Synod, stating it "is not a parliament," "nor a meeting for the Church's pastoral care."

While praising the press for the good work they do, he lamented that, at times, they focus on hot-button issues, and urged them to work to transmit the Church's interest in the "priority of listening."

"Everyone needs to express themselves freely," the Pope said, noting that the Holy Spirit will confirm them in their faith along the way.

'Centrality of Christ - Synod's guiding thread'

Prior to the Pope's remarks, the ceremony in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall began with a greeting from the President Delegate, the Coptic Catholic Patriarch Ibrahim Isaac Sedrak of Alexandria, Egypt, who emphasized how the Lord continues to show His love for the Church and has inspired the Synod.

Patriarch Sedrak admitted that this synodal process was not always simple, especially at the beginning, or clean-cut, because this Synod on Synodality was prepared "as a consultation of the people of God, of each baptized person, each with their own charism, in a way even more lively, real, and concrete."

The world, he acknowledged, "awaits from us the witness of the Risen Christ, of life and hope."

"Let the centrality of Christ therefore be the guiding thread of this synod. Let him be the Alpha and Omega of our discussions, let him be the light that illuminates our debates, let him be the final put of all our efforts. I am praying so the synod will succeed in achieving His own goals."

Opening Mass and Exhortation 'Laudate Deum'



The Holy Father had presided at the Holy Mass in St Peter's Square Wednesday morning for the Synod Assembly's opening, and invited the faithful to walk with the Holy Spirit, "in trust and with joy."

Also, this October 4th, which marks the Feast of Pope Francis' namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, the Pope published a second part of his 2015 landmark encyclical on the environment, *[Laudato si': on care for our common home.](#)*

Today's document, *[Laudate Deum](#)*, is an Apostolic Exhortation that Pope Francis has described as a look at the current environmental situation and what needs to be done.

Originally published here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-10/pope-synod-closing-after-voting-process-remarks1.html>

Video here: <https://youtu.be/NE6m2i2LqTo>

Pope at Audience: 'I found passion, enthusiasm in Marseille'

During his weekly General Audience, Pope Francis reflects on his recently concluded Apostolic Journey to Marseille for the conclusion of the Mediterranean Meetings.

By Deborah Castellano Lubov

"I can say that I found passion and enthusiasm in Marseille."

This was how Pope Francis during his weekly Wednesday General Audience in the Vatican, fondly remembered his recent Apostolic Journey to Marseille, France, for the occasion of the "Mediterranean Meetings", which gathered bishops and young people to reflect on migration.

The Pope observed these characteristics present in the two-day Visit's protagonists, including the French port city's pastor, Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline; priests and consecrated persons; the faithful laity dedicated to charity, to education; and the People of God "who showed great warmth" during the Mass in the *Vélodrome* Stadium.

The Pope thanked them all, as well as President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, "whose presence testified that all of France was paying attention to the event in Marseille."

Mediterranean's vocation

The dream, and the challenge, the Pope went on to say, is "that the Mediterranean might recover its vocation, that of being a laboratory of civilization and peace."

"The Mediterranean is the cradle of civilization and a cradle is for life! It is not tolerable that it become a tomb, neither should it be a place of conflict. No."

"The Mediterranean is the cradle of civilization and a cradle is for life! It is not tolerable that it become a tomb, neither should it be a place of conflict. No."

The Mediterranean Sea, the Pope stated, "is the complete opposite of the clash between civilizations, war, human trafficking." Rather, he argued, it is "a means of communication" between Africa, Asia, and Europe, between the north and the south, the east and the west, persons and cultures, peoples and tongues, philosophies and religions.

While he acknowledged that the sea is always an abyss to overcome in some way, which can become dangerous, the Holy Father recalled that 2,000 years ago, from its eastern shore, the Gospel of Jesus set out to proclaim to the peoples.

History of the Meetings

The Holy Father explained that the Mediterranean Meetings in Marseille came after similar meetings that took place in Bari in 2020, and in Florence last year. "It was not an isolated event, but a step forward," he said. These type of meetings, he suggested, began with the "Mediterranean Colloquia" organized by Giorgio La Pira, the Mayor of Florence, at the end of the 1950s.

He said they also respond today to the appeal launched by Saint Paul VI in his Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, to promote "a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others," as he examined the fruits the Mediterranean Meetings produced.

He praised the event's having contributed to building a "human" outlook on the Mediterranean, one that is not "ideological, strategic, not politically correct nor instrumental," but "that is, capable of referring everything to the primary value of the human person and his or her inviolable dignity."

In addition to this, the Pope said those days inspired hope.

"Brothers and sisters," Pope Francis insisted, "this hope cannot and must not "evaporate"; no, rather, it needs to be organized, to be concretized through long, medium and short-term actions."

"Brothers and sisters, this hope cannot and must not 'evaporate'; no, rather, it needs to be organized, to be concretized through long, medium and short-term actions."

Choice to emigrate or not emigrate

This, the Pope said, means working "so that people, in complete dignity, can choose to emigrate or not to emigrate," which - he reminded - was the theme of the recent World Day of Migrant and Refugees.

The Pope also stated that hope needs to be restored to European societies, especially to the new generations, saying Europe must rediscover its passion and enthusiasm.

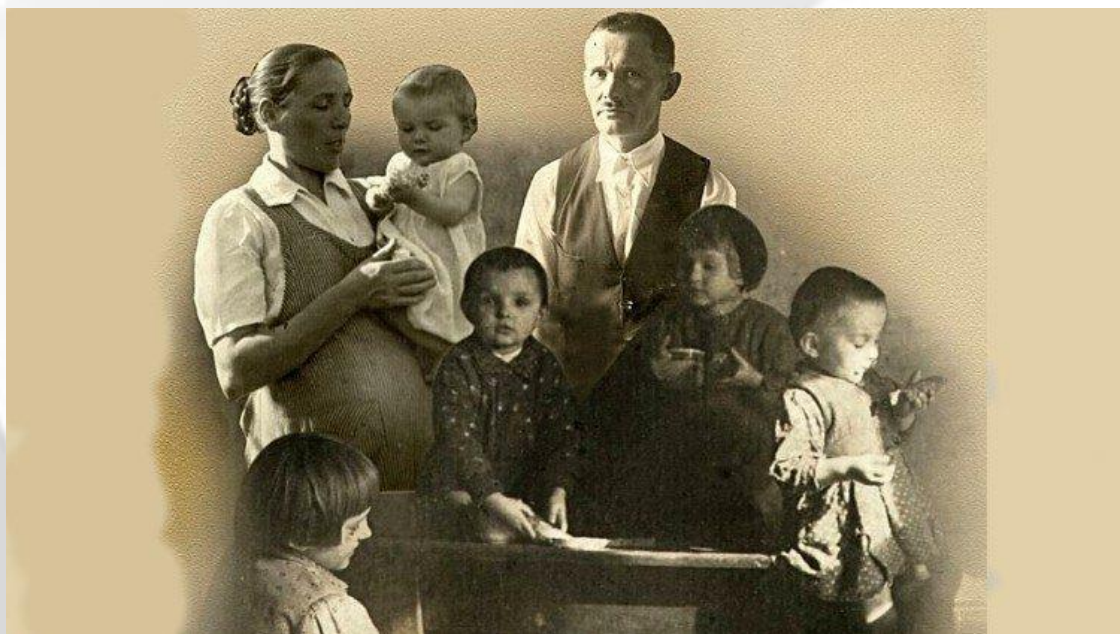
Pope Francis concluded by praying that Our Lady, "whom the people of Marseille venerate as *Notre Dame de la Garde*, accompany the journey of the peoples of the Mediterranean so that this region might become what it has always been called to be – a mosaic of civilization and hope."

Pope Francis' two-day visit to Marseille marked the Holy Father's 44th Apostolic Journey abroad, and second Visit to a French city.

Originally published here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-09/pope-at-audience-marseille-was-a-moment-of-grace.html>

Video here: <https://youtu.be/hhfmVkj2TMk>

The Ulma family: a remarkable beatification of martyrdom



Killed for having hidden eight Jews in their home in 1944, the Ulma family is due to be beatified on 10 September 2023, making it the first time an entire family will be beatified together, including the child carried in the mother's womb at the time of her death.

By Francesca Merlo and Emanuela Campanile

The upcoming beatification of the Ulma family on 10 September 2023 marks an unprecedented event in the modern canonization process.

This family, made up of parents Josef and Wiktorja Ulma and their children, including the unborn child Wiktorja was carrying, will be collectively honored. This unusual beatification stands as a testament to their sacrifice during World War II, when they sheltered and protected eight Jews from persecution.

Who were the Ulmas?

The Ulma family led an ordinary life against the backdrop of the Second World War. Josef worked in the fields, while Wiktorja managed their home and cared for their six children and another on the way. Through their simple daily routines, they exemplified the teachings of the Gospel. Family prayers, shared faith education, and Bible readings turned their household into what Pope John Paul II termed a "domestic Church," extending their warmth and support even to the most vulnerable members of society, including Jews who faced immense danger.

Journalist Manuela Tulli, in collaboration with historian Father Paweł Rytel-Andrianik, uncovered the Ulma family's story, and together they published a book entitled "Martyred and Blessed Together: The Extraordinary Story of the Ulma Family".

During a trip to Ukraine, Tulli stumbled upon their tale, a discovery that resonated deeply. The Ulmas' images were scattered throughout Poland, portraying a young couple with numerous children. This poignant image prompted reflection on contemporary and historical wars, friendships, and the Ulmas' remarkable act of opening their humble abode – consisting of just two rooms – to eight Jews seeking refuge.

The journey towards beatification

The Ulma family's journey towards beatification began with the postulator of their cause, who introduced Tulli to their story. Tulli then embarked on a quest to better understand their history. Through her research, she delved into the life of this family that would soon be beatified.

Embedded within their family Bible, a word was underlined: "Samaritan," accompanied by a resounding "yes." This choice epitomized their commitment to aiding others, a commitment that persisted amidst a world fraught with violence and division. Captured in numerous photographs taken by Josef Ulma, an amateur photographer, their industrious and harmonious life stood in stark contrast to the chaos of the era.

The betrayal

Tragedy struck when the Ulmas were denounced and betrayed. Nazi forces stormed their home, and their attic, where they had concealed their Jewish friends, became a site of horror. Josef and Wiktorina were executed in front of their children, with Wiktorina being seven months pregnant. Even the children were not spared. The house was set ablaze, marking the tragic event on March 24, 1944.

A Jewish-Christian martyrdom

Father Paweł Rytel-Andrianik noted that the Ulmas' martyrdom extended beyond a Christian context; it was a Jewish-Christian martyrdom. This perspective emphasized the senseless killing of innocent lives – the Ulma family and eight Jews – including a chilling detail where the dripping blood of victims stained a photo of two Jewish women hidden beneath, preserved as a relic of their martyrdom. This heartrending story showcased the duality of horror and hope, with the Ulmas attempting to embody the Gospel's light within the challenges of daily existence.

Recognized as Righteous among the Nations by the State of Israel and soon to be Blessed by the Catholic Church, the Ulma family's light continues to shine. Their story defies the darkness of war, and their beatification – including the beatification of their unborn child –

is a remarkable affirmation of their sacrifice. Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, likened this exceptional case to a "Baptism of Blood," echoing the tragic narrative of the Holy Innocents. In their entirety, the Ulma family's legacy underscores the power of love, compassion, and sacrifice amid the darkest of times.

Originally published here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-08/ulma-family-remarkable-beatification-martyrdom-jewish.html>

Experience

To infinity and beyond

Pierina was born on June 11, 1990 in Cusco (Peru), the eldest of three daughters, in a family where she learned gentleness, love, strength and willingness to serve. Her father tells that, in a social event for children, a toy was missing for a little girl. Pierina noticed and gave the girl her favorite doll, which she carried with her. In the donation, she was forming her character, becoming a woman full of energy, joy, with great taste for dancing, interest for others, which she expressed in every hug, deep listening, words of encouragement, motivating many to believe in themselves.

A friend shares that Pierina, approaching her with simplicity and respect, helped her to get out of herself, encouraging her to open up to others, thus discovering her value and the meaning of friendship. Pierina loved the Portuguese language and was a Portuguese teacher. In 2015 she came to know the Focolare Movement through a focolarina working in the same educational center, who invited her to a mission in a small town in the interior of the country.



Pierina Luz Velasquez Cano (11/06/90- 27/02/23).

Although she did not yet know anything about the Movement, she announced God with enthusiasm, even in a market with a megaphone and a loudspeaker. In 2016 she participated in a meeting which had as its theme Jesus forsaken: it marked a milestone in her life. Listening to the experience of a gen3 who had transcended pain with full trust in God, she felt transformed. She understood that, even in pain, it was possible to recognize the presence, the love and sustenance of God. In the same way, knowing the story of Chiara Luce, she had this great understanding, which made her from then on a

Experience

reference of self-giving, trust and courage in the midst of difficulties and sickness.

When she decided to go to Brazil to the Focolare Movement's youth school, her radical decision led her whole family to meet God in the midst of this community. On her return, Pierina was a channel of union among all, always inviting new young people and lending herself to concrete activities, such as welcoming migrants in times of pandemic, collecting food and shelter for the needy, distributing food to the street people, etc.

She wrote: "It is not time that strives to keep us together, it is love in an ideal that exists between us." On another occasion, he added: "When the happiness of living an ideal comes from within, smiles appear on the outside." One of her favorite phrases to express her affection: "To infinity and beyond." A phrase from a writing of Chiara Lubich, "Late I loved you," brought out in her the desire to donate more to those in need. Only a few days later, during a trip in the mountains, Jesus in his abandonment became present through her severe headaches. Operated on three times for an aneurysm, she began a deeper experience of love and union with her family, friends, and the local and worldwide community.

She remained in the hospital for eight months, where she continued to be light, in a silent apostolate that united many through the daily community rosary for her recovery, which gave rise to experiences of generosity among people who did not even know her.

On February 27, Pierina departed for Paradise, leaving us in a silence filled with her peace, her joy, and her presence.⁷⁶

The gen of Arequipa (Peru)