

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's **Word of Life** is the answer Jesus gives to a group of people who, to test him, ask whether it was lawful or not to pay tribute to Caesar. He, aware of their bad faith, answers them: "... what belongs to Caesar, give it back to Caesar, and what belongs to God, to God". The team's commentary highlights, above all, the importance that Jesus wants to give to the image of God, to the primacy of his Kingdom, to the primacy of love and, with it, to the need to learn to listen to the voice of God in the depths of the heart in order to exercise a true dialogue.

The theme **in IN DEPTH**, an excerpt from a conversation of Chiara Lubich where she speaks of prayer as an expression of our love for God and fuel for our activities, she underlines the word 'Abba', which is the familiar way in which Jesus speaks to his Father, to remind us that we too can address him "with the ardor that is born in the heart of one who is certain of being loved". In this way, by refining our listening to the voice of God, as the commentary says, and by deepening our prayer life and interior life, we can begin to prepare for the new year of the Work that calls us to go out on mission, without losing sight of what Chiara's passage says, that prayer is the fuel of our activities.

The two topics of **NEWS**, the first, on the apostolic journey of the Pope to Mongolia in which he speaks of "a Church that is in the heart of God", and the second, on the Pope with the Youth in Lisbon in which he invites them to be "roots of joy" and presents Mary as "missionary of joy" could be a good contribution to respond affirmatively to the new launching of the Work that moves us to go out in mission. At the end of the booklet you will find two experiences: that of a mother who told the young people in Lisbon about her encounter with God and then also that of her husband, and that of a married couple who tried to see Jesus Forsaken in the people of the street and to live the "they did it to me", a new way of encountering God: "The God of the street".

In the month of October, without losing sight of the prayer that fuels our activities, and refining our listening to the voice of God, as suggested by the Word of Life of this month, we continue with you oriented to "that all may be one".

The Team of the Word of Life Workbook

“Abba, Father!”



The following writing by Chiara Lubich leads us to the heart of the Christian faith. “We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his or her life” [1] It is a choice that proves to be very daring in these times, but no less true for that.

This time we want to speak about prayer once again. It’s the life of our soul, the oxygen of the whole of our spiritual life, the expression of our love for God, the fuel for every activity we do.

But what kind of prayer will we speak about this time?

We will speak about the prayer that – with its infinite and divine riches – is completely contained in one word, in just one word which Jesus taught us and the Holy Spirit put on our lips.

But let us go to its origins.

Jesus prayed. He prayed to his Father. For him, the Father was “Abba” and that means “Daddy”, his “Dad”, to whom Jesus spoke with words of infinite trust and boundless love. He prayed to the Father from within the Trinity where he is the second divine person. It was

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precisely because of this special prayer that he revealed to the world who he really was – the Son of God.

But since he came on earth for us, the fact that only he could pray in this privileged way wasn't enough for him. When he died for us and redeemed us, he made us children of God, his brothers and sisters. Through the Holy Spirit he also gave us the possibility of being taken into the heart of the Trinity, in him, together with him, through him. So we too can make the divine invocation "Abba, Father" (Mk 14.36 and Rm 8:15) – "Daddy", "my Dad", "our Dad" with all that this entails.

We are certain of his protection, we feel secure, we are able to abandon ourselves blindly to his love, we have divine consolations, strength and ardor – an ardor that is born in the heart of those who are certain that they are loved.

This is Christian prayer, an extraordinary prayer. It cannot be found anywhere else, or in any other religion. At the most, if people believe in a divine being that can be venerated, adored and beseeched, they do this from outside the divine being, so to speak. For us it is different: we enter into the heart of God.

And so?

Let's remind ourselves, first and foremost, of the dizzy heights to which we are called as children of God, and, as a consequence of this, of the exceptional possibility we have of praying. Naturally, we can say "Abba, Father"; with all the depth of meaning of this word only if it is the Holy Spirit who pronounces this word in us. For this to happen, we have to be Jesus, nothing other than Jesus.

How? We know how. He is already living in us through grace, but we have to do our part. This means to love, to be in an attitude of love towards God and our neighbor. The Holy Spirit will put this word on our lips with a greater fullness if we are in perfect unity with our brothers and sisters wherever Jesus is among us.

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Let's make "Abba, Father" our prayer. ... In this way, we will fully correspond to our calling to believe in love, our calling to have faith in the love which lies at the root of our charism.

Yes, Love, the Father, loves us. He is our dad: what should we fear?

In the plan of love he has for each one of us, a plan which opens up for us day by day, we cannot fail to see the most extraordinary adventure to which we could be called.

"Abba" is the most characteristic prayer of the Christian and, in a special way, of us in the Focolare Movement.

So, if we are sure that we are living our Ideal, that is, if we are living love, let's speak to the Father in the same way as Jesus did.

What will the effects be? We will experience them in our hearts.

Chiara Lubich

(Taken from a telephone conference call, Rocca di Papa, 9th March 1989)

[1] Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas est, 1.

Originally published here: <https://www.focolare.org/en/2020/05/04/abba-father/>

Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's. (Mt. 22:21)

Jesus has entered Jerusalem and people have acclaimed that he is the “Son of David”. This is a royal title that Matthew's gospel attributes to the Christ who has come to announce that the Kingdom of God is imminent.

In this context, a unique dialogue takes place between Jesus and a group of people who question him. Some are Herodians and others are Pharisees, two groups that held differing views with respect to the power of the Roman emperor. They ask him whether or not he judges it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor and thus force him to take sides for or against Caesar and, therefore, create the basis to make possible accusations against him.

But Jesus answers with another question about the image stamped on the coinage of the time. Since it is that of the emperor, he replies:

Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.

But what is due to the emperor, Caesar, and what is due to God? Jesus recalls the primacy of God: for just as the image of the emperor was stamped on the Roman coins, so the image of God is stamped on every human being.

The rabbinic tradition itself affirms that every person is created in the likeness of God, just as Caesar's image was imprinted on coinage: “When a person stamps several coins with one seal, they are all similar to each other. But the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, stamped all people with the seal of Adam the first man, as all of them are his offspring, and not one of them is similar to another.” li Therefore, it is to God alone that we can give ourselves completely, to him alone we belong and in him we find freedom and dignity. No human power can claim the same allegiance.

"If there is anyone who knows God and can help us give him his rightful place, it is Jesus. For him ... to love meant doing the Father's will with all his mind, heart, energy and life itself: he gave himself entirely to the Father's plan for him. The Gospel shows us that his focus was always upon the Father He asks the same of us: to love means to do the will of the Beloved, without half measures, with our whole being. ... We are asked to do this wholly and completely because we cannot give God anything less than everything: our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind." iii

Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.

Often, we are faced with dilemmas or difficult choices that threaten to make us slip into the temptation of finding a loophole or easy way out. Jesus too was tested when faced with two ideological solutions but for him it was clear: the priority was the coming of the kingdom of God and the primacy of love.

This Word makes us ask if are our hearts are won over by fame or if they are given to making rapid progress in our careers? Do we admire successful people and the various influencers? Do we give things their rightful place with God?

Jesus' answer proposes a quantum leap and invites us to a serious and thorough discernment of our scale of values.

Deep in our consciences we can discern a voice that is sometimes subtle and overpowered by other voices but, nevertheless, is recognizable. It is the voice that urges us to tirelessly seek ways of creating fraternity and always encourages us to renew this choice, even at the cost of going against the tide of current opinion.

This is a fundamental exercise if we wish to build the foundations of genuine dialogue with others and try to find together adequate answers to the complexity of life.

This does not mean we shirk personal responsibility towards society but that we offer ourselves in selfless service to the common good.

During the time Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned and eventually executed for civil resistance towards Nazism, he wrote to his fiancée, "I do not mean the faith that flees the world, but the faith that endures in the world and loves and remains faithful to the earth, despite all the tribulations it brings us. Our marriage must be a 'yes' to God's earth, it must strengthen our courage to work and create something on earth. I fear that Christians who dare to stand with only one foot on earth will have only one foot in heaven too."iv

Edited by Letizia Magri and the Word of Life team.

i Cf Gen 1:26

ii Mishna Sanhedrin 4,5

iii Chiara Lubich, Word of Life, Oct 2002

iv Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Maria von Wedemeyer, "Lettera alla Fidanzata" Brescia 1992

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- In this month's Word of Life, a unique dialogue takes place between Jesus and a group of people who ask him questions. Some are Herodians and others Pharisees, two groups with different opinions regarding the power of the Roman emperor. They ask him if he considers it lawful or not to pay tribute to the emperor, in order to force him to align himself for or against Caesar and to have something to accuse him of.
- Jesus claims the primacy of God, just as on the Roman coin is imprinted the image of the emperor, in every human person is imprinted the image of God.
- The same rabbinic tradition affirms that every human being is created in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26), using the example of the image imprinted on coins: "Man mints many coins with the same stamp and they all resemble one another. On the other hand, the King of kings, the Holy One - blessed be He - minted all men with the seal of the first man, and yet not one of them resembles his fellow" (Mishnah Sanhedrin, 4, 5).
- How often we are faced with dilemmas, difficult decisions that can drag us into the temptation of an easy way out! Jesus is also put to the test when faced with two ideological options. But he is clear: the priority is the coming of the kingdom of God, with the primacy of love.
- With his answer, Jesus proposes a leap of quality, inviting us to a serious and well-founded discernment of our scale of values. In the depths of our conscience we can hear a voice, sometimes subtle and perhaps dominated by other voices. But we can recognize it: it is the one that pushes us to search tirelessly for paths of fraternity, and that always encourages us to renew this option, even at the cost of swimming against the current.
- It is a fundamental exercise for laying the foundations of an authentic dialogue with others, in order to find together adequate answers to the complexity of life. This does not mean shirking our personal responsibility towards society, but rather offering ourselves to serve the common good in a disinterested way.

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- Where has Jesus entered, how is He acclaimed by the people and what did He come to proclaim?
- How does Jesus respond?
- But what is owed to Caesar and what to God?
- To whom alone can we give our whole being and in Him, what do we find?
- Who is it that knows God and can help us to give Him His rightful place and for Him what did it mean to love?
- We too are asked for the greatest radicality in loving, why?
- As we allow ourselves to be challenged by this Word, you could ask yourself if your heart is dazzled by notoriety, by a brilliant career, do you admire successful people, influencers? Perhaps we attribute to things the place that corresponds to God?
- From Bonhoeffer's experience, what did you think of what he wrote to his girlfriend?
- Imagine yourself for a moment in seclusion, almost being executed for your civil resistance to the refusal against mining, destruction of forests, abortion, euthanasia and so many others. Would you stand with a 'Yes' to God's earth? How would you help us to strengthen our courage to act and to create something on earth, i.e. how would you encourage us to keep our hearts anchored to heaven living in the midst of this world?

VATICAN - Pope Francis: The Church of Mongolia is in the heart of God

Wednesday, 6 September 2023



Vatican Media

VATICAN

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "I had the grace of meeting, in Mongolia, a humble Church, and a joyful Church, which is in the heart of God", Pope Francis expressed his gratitude for the experiences and encounters he had during his short and intense journey apostolic meeting in Mongolia, which ended last Monday. He did so in the catechesis delivered during today's general audience, Wednesday, September 6, entirely dedicated to re-proposing images and impressions of the journey, during which he had the opportunity to embrace the Catholic Church and the Mongolian people, "a humble and wise people".

In the introductory part of the catechesis, Pope Francis shared some of the reasons that made his trip to Mongolia an important moment for every Catholic community in the world. When asked "why did the Pope go so far to visit a small flock of the faithful", the Pontiff replied: "Because it is precisely there, far from the spotlight, that we often find the signs of the presence of God, who does not look at appearances, but

at the heart. The Lord" continued Pope Francis "does not look for the centre-stage, but the simple heart of those who desire him and love him without ostentation, without wanting to tower above others". Referring to the "touching history" of the small Catholic community present in Mongolia, the Pope recalled that it "came about, by the grace of God, from the apostolic zeal – on which we are reflecting at the moment – of a few missionaries who, impassioned by the Gospel, went about thirty years ago to that country they did not know. They learned the language – which is not easy – and, despite coming from different nations, gave life to a united and truly Catholic community. " This" said the Bishop of Rome" is the meaning of the word "catholic", which means "universal". But it is not a universality that homogenizes, but rather a universality that inculturates, it is a universality that is inculturated. This is catholicity: an embodied universality, "inculturate", which embraces the good where it is found and serves the people with whom it lives. This is how the Church lives: bearing witness to the love of Jesus meekly, with life before words, happy with its true riches: service to the Lord and to brethren. The young Church in Mongolia - added Pope Francis - was born "in the spirit of charity, which is the best witness of faith". The Successor of Peter also mentioned that "at the end" of his visit he had the joy of blessing and inaugurating the "House of Mercy", which he defined as the "first charitable work that to be established in Mongolia as an expression of all the components of the local Church. A house" added the Pope "that is the calling card of those Christians, but that asks every one of our communities to be a house of mercy: that is, an open place, a welcoming place, where the sufferings of each person can enter without shame in contact with God's mercy, that lifts up and heals". In Mongolia - the Bishop of Rome recalled - there are "missionaries from various countries who feel at one with the people, happy to serve them and to discover the beauty already there. Because these missionaries" continued the Pontiff, adding some sentences to the written text of the catechesis "did not go to proselytize; this is not evangelical, they went to live there like the Mongolian people, to speak their language, the language of that people, to take on the values of that people and to preach the Gospel in the Mongolian style, with Mongolian words. They went and they were "inculturated": they took on the Mongolian culture to proclaim the Gospel in that culture".

The Pontiff also recalled with gratitude the interreligious and ecumenical meeting held during his visit last Sunday (see Fides, 3/9/2023).

“Mongolia” the Pontiff explained “has a great Buddhist tradition, with many people who live their religiosity in a sincere and radical way, in silence, through altruism and mastery of their own passions. Just think of how many hidden seeds of goodness make the garden of the world flourish, while we usually only hear about the sound of falling trees!”. In the concluding part of the catechesis, the Pope said that the fact of having been in the heart of Asia “has” done him good. It is good” he added “to enter into dialogue with that vast continent, to glean its messages, to know its wisdom, its way of looking at things, to embrace time and space. It was good for me to meet the Mongolian people, who cherish their roots and traditions, who respect the elderly and live in harmony with the environment: they are a people who contemplate the sky and feel the breath of creation”.

(GV) (Agenzia Fides, 6/9/2023)

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Pope Francis at WYD Vigil: Joy is missionary and requires training

Pope Francis portrays the Blessed Virgin Mary as a "missionary of joy" in his address to young people gathered in Lisbon for the World Youth Day Vigil celebration, and invites Christians to train our hearts to love God and our neighbor.

By Edoardo Giribaldi & Devin Watkins

As evening fell in Lisbon, young pilgrims gathered in *Parque Tejo* to celebrate the Vigil with Pope Francis on the fifth day of World Youth Day.

The location, installed in 1998 for Lisbon's World Fair and adjacent to the Tagus River Estuary Nature Reserve, hosted the first part of the event, a stage performance, and a second moment dedicated to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, with Pope Francis speaking to the pilgrims in between the two moments.

A transformative encounter

The initial artistic moment represented the story of a transformative encounter through contemporary music and dance.

The cast, members of Ensemble23, a group of 50 young people from 21 different countries, portrayed the vicissitudes of a girl caught up in a repetitive and distressing routine, allowing herself to be challenged by God. The encounter with the Lord changes her course of events, and the protagonist's life re-flourishes step by step as she "contaminates" her peers with hope and joy.

The performance traced a parallel between the protagonist and the story of the Virgin Mary's life, turned upside down by an encounter (the Annunciation), and thriving in sharing the joy she experienced, starting from her cousin Elizabeth.

Missionary of joy

The World Youth Day's motto, "*Mary set out and went with haste*" (Lk 1:39), was at the base of [Pope Francis' address](#) to the young pilgrims at the Vigil.

"Mary does something that was not asked of her, something that she really did not have to do. Why?" wondered the Holy Father.

He answered by quoting a passage from *The Imitation of Christ*: "Because she loved, and '*whoever loves flies, runs and rejoices.*'"

Setting aside his prepared remarks, the Pope spoke off-the-cuff to the 1.5 million young pilgrims assembled in Lisbon about our mission to bring the joy of the Gospel to all around us.

"Joy is missionary!" he said. "So, each of us has the duty to bring that joy to others."

Roots of joy

Pope Francis went on to consider the roots of our joy, recalling that we too received a joyful Christian example from those who came before us.

"If we look back," he said, "we recall people who were a ray of light for our lives: parents, grandparents, friends, priests, religious men and women, catechists, animators, and teachers. They are the roots of our joy."

The Holy Father then invited the 1.5 million pilgrims in *Tejo* Park to close their eyes and recall the faces of those who have impacted our lives.

After a moment of silence, he urged everyone to do the same for others, so that they too might grow "roots of joy".

Training ourselves to walk with Jesus

In order to offer joy to others, continued Pope Francis, we must first search for joy and train ourselves to be joyful.

He admitted that it can be tiring and difficult to be roots of joy for others. Even when we fall, he added, the important thing is to get back up and try again.

Pope Francis concluded his remarks to WYD pilgrims by reminding them of their duty to help each other up when they fall.

"Nothing is free in life; everything requires payment," he said. "There is only one thing that is free: the love of Jesus. Therefore, with this freely-given love that we have received and with our desire to walk, let us walk in hope, look to our roots, and strive ahead fearlessly, fearlessly. Do not be afraid!"

"Nothing is free in life; everything requires payment. There is only one thing that is free: the love of Jesus."

the full article can be found here:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-08/pope-francis-wyd-lisbon-vigil.html>

full vigil video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/WWURKpQsb7s>

The God of the street

Miguel's testimony, from Mexico, encourages us to see and love the painful faces of the humanity that surrounds us as a favorite way to grow in union with God.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Ps 22; Mt 27:46)?

The street, life, TV, constantly bring us tragic images: people suffering everywhere, violence, poverty, abuse. Every migrant who passes through our streets is a person with his or her life and dignity, but he or she is also a face of the "Abandoned". So, several times, with all that we have been collecting, we load our van to the top and take a little of everything to the reception center for migrants. And there, or every time we see a migrant on the street, we try not only to give them a few pesos, but to stop and talk to them and take an interest in their lives. Maybe that's what they need most: someone to help them and listen to them, to give them back a little dignity.

Each time, with Raya my wife, we came away enriched by human contact and also because we have tried to live the "... They have done it to me..." (cf. Mt 25:40); another encounter with God, the God of the street. We are American middle class, but since we live in Mexico, our two American pensions are enough to live on, and there is "left over" to generate funds that allow us to "make economic and life communion" with situations of emergency, of poverty, local and from other continents, in which we have friends who are in the trenches.

Today we received three messages of communion of life and gratitude: one from Ukraine, another from the Peruvian Amazon and another from Ocotlán, Mexico, where a Protestant pastor, a former addict, is opening a Youth Center to support and rescue children and young people exposed to drugs, violence and other social ills. Each message is an indirect response from God. I thank all those who, over the years, have helped me to live the experience that Jesus Forsaken, recognized and loved in these human faces of pain that are presented daily, is a fundamental path to union with God, in Christ Jesus.

Miguel, Mexico