

WORD OF LIFE | DECEMBER 2023

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1Thes 5:16-18)

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians at a time when many of Jesus' contemporaries were still alive. They had seen and heard him and had witnessed the tragedy of his death and the wonder of his resurrection and ascension. They recognized the mark he had left upon others and expected his imminent return. Paul loved the Thessalonian community who were exemplary in the way they lived and in their fruitful witness. He wrote this letter to them, imploring them to share the content of his letter with everyone (1Thes 5:27) and he recommended that they should be "imitators of us and of the Lord" (1Thes1:6). He summarized this as follows:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The common theme in all of Paul's exhortations is not only *what* God expects of us, but also *when*, that is, always, constantly and repeatedly.

And yet, how can we be commanded to rejoice? Everyone experiences that at times life may assail us with problems, worries, suffering and anguish and that society around us may be dreary and unwelcoming. Yet for Paul there is a reason that could make it possible to "rejoice" as he suggests. In this letter, he is speaking to Christians and he advises them to take Christian life seriously, so that Jesus can live in them with the fullness promised after his resurrection. Jesus lives in those who love and we have certainly experienced this. We can follow the *pathway of love* when we are not closed in on ourselves, but rather love others, and when we welcome the support of friends, keeping alive faith that "love conquers all." ⁱ

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Dialogue among believers of different religions and beliefs leads to the even deeper understanding that praying is a profoundly human action; prayer constitutes and elevates all human beings.

How can we pray without ceasing? The Orthodox theologian Evdokimov wrote, "It's not enough to *have* prayers to say, and have rules and habits regarding them; we should *be* prayer incarnate. Our life should be liturgy; prayer concerns the most ordinary and everyday things."ⁱⁱ

Chiara Lubich emphasized that "we can love (God) as children and our hearts can be filled with the Holy Spirit of love and trust in our Father. Such confidence makes us speak to him often and tell him everything that we are doing, all our intentions and plans for the future." ⁱⁱⁱ

There is a way to pray without ceasing that is accessible to everyone: you can do this by pausing before each action, focusing on the intention and saying, "This is for You, Jesus." It is a simple practice that transforms our activities from within and makes our entire life a constant prayer.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Giving thanks in all circumstances is an attitude that flows freely from gratitude and love for God who silently sustains and accompanies individuals, peoples, history and the entire cosmos. It also includes gratitude for others who journey with us and who make us aware that we are not self-sufficient.

Rejoicing, praying and giving thanks are three actions that bring us closer to becoming as God wants us to be, enriching our relationship with him. We trust that "the God of peace will sanctify us entirely" (1Thes 5:23).

By living this way, we prepare to enter more deeply into the joy of Christmas. We contribute to making the world a better place and we become creators of peace within ourselves, in our homes, our workplaces and wherever we live. And nothing is more necessary and urgent today.

Prepared by Victoria Gómez and the Word of Life Team

ⁱ P. Vergilius X 69

ⁱⁱ P. Evdokimov "La Preghiera di Gesù" in *La Novita' dello Spirito* Milan 1997

ⁱⁱⁱ C. Lubich *Conversazioni*, Citta Nuova, Rome 2019