

# Word of Life Resources

No. 12-23

December 2023

Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare  
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

This month's **Word of Life**, taken from the Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, a community he admired so much for its exemplary life, witness, and fruits, invites us *to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all circumstances*. By living in this way, *for - as the Letter says - this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*, we, too, will be able to be, both individually and collectively, a living witness to Him, wherever we are.

The Booklet offers some thoughts by **Pope Francis on the Season of Advent** which can help us prepare for Christmas, and to them can be added what the Word of Life for this month says; *Surely, joy, constant prayer, and an attitude of permanent thanksgiving will make easier the living presence of Jesus in our midst, which is the essence of Christmas*. In this atmosphere, we can also celebrate the eightieth anniversary of our Movement, from which we have received so much, and which has contributed so much to the Church and to humanity. To this end, you will find a very brief review of December 7, 1943, when Chiara "married" God, which has been considered the day of the beginning of the Movement.

In **NEWS**, you find a reflection by Margaret Karram who speaks of her "profound experience" in the three-day opening retreat for the participants of the Assembly of the Synod on Synodality, and a synthesis of the Closing report approved and published by that Assembly. Then, a short piece about Pope Francis' exhortation on the "little spiritual way" of Saint Therese of Lisieux.

And, finally: an **EXPERIENCE** lived in a parish in Slovakia during the war in Ukraine, which can serve as an example of how to welcome Jesus in those who are most needy and thus celebrate Christmas, and an excerpt of an article about Marco Tecilla who, making small repairs in the house of Chiara and the first women focolarine, felt the attraction to live like them and became the first man focolarino.

With joy, we celebrate with you the eighty years of our Movement by living mutual love to live a true Christmas with the presence of Jesus in the midst.

*The Team of the Word of Life Workbook*

## Advent

*These **phrases of Pope Francis on Advent** will help us prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus. In his Pontificate, Pope Francis has on many occasions delved into the theme of Advent, the Church's period of preparation for celebrating Christmas:*

### **An Advent prayer**

"Come, Lord Jesus, we need you. Come close to us. You are the light: awaken us from the sleep of mediocrity, awaken us from the darkness of indifference. Come, Lord Jesus, make our hearts, which are now distracted, vigilant: make us feel the desire to pray and the need to love." (Advent 2022)

### **A concrete commitment**

"Let's make a concrete commitment, even if it is small, that fits our life situation, and let's carry it forward to prepare for this Christmas. For example: I can give a call to someone who is alone, visit that elderly person, or that sick person, or do something to serve the poor, the needy. Perhaps I have neglected prayer and after a long time, it is time to approach the Lord's forgiveness. Let's find a specific thing and do it! May the Virgin, in whose womb God became flesh, help us." (Advent 2021)

### **The manger**

"The manger is a living Gospel - let us not forget it - which reminds us that God has become man. It is beautiful to stop in front of the manger and entrust to the Lord the people, the situations, the worries that we carry within." (Advent 2019)

### **Prepare the way of the Lord**

"May the Virgin Mary help us to prepare the way of the Lord day by day, starting with ourselves, and to sow around us, with tenacity and patience, seeds of peace, justice, and fraternity." (Advent 2018)

### **Pay attention**

"The person who is attentive is the one who, in the noise of the world, does not allow him- or herself to be carried away by distraction or superficiality, but rather lives, fully and consciously, with an attitude that is directed first of all to others. Living with this attitude, we will be aware of the tears and needs of our neighbor, and we will also be able to grasp human and spiritual capacities and qualities." (Advent 2017)

*Source: 1/12/22 Desde la Fe Magazine [www.desdelafe.mx](http://www.desdelafe.mx)*

### Chiara Lubich: December 7, 1943



Imagine a young girl in love, in love with a love which is the first love, the purest one, a love which is still undeclared, but which begins to enflame her heart. A joy which is so special, difficult to experience again in a lifetime, a secret joy.

A few days before December 7, I was told to make a vigil the night before, beside a crucifix,

to prepare myself the best way I could for my marriage with God, a marriage which was to take place in the most secret manner.

That evening I tried to make this vigil, kneeling beside my bed before a metal crucifix which my mother has now.

The next morning, I woke up at about five o'clock.

I put on the best dress I had, a simple dress, and I set out on foot crossing the city towards the church.

A storm was raging, so that I had to walk my way pushing my umbrella ahead of me.

I felt that it expressed the fact that in the step I was taking I would meet obstacles.

When I reached the church, the scene changed.

An enormous door opened. I felt a sense of relief and welcome, almost like the open arms of that God who was waiting for me.

The little church was beautifully decorated.

Against the background stood out the statue of Mary, the Immaculate.

## In-depth

Before Communion I saw, in an instant, the meaning of what I was about to do.

I could never turn back to the world.

I was getting married. I was marrying God.

I remember that opening up my eyes to what I was doing was something immediate and brief, but so strong that I shed a tear which fell on my missal.

I made a long thanksgiving.

I think I ran all the way home.

I only stopped, I think, near the bishop's house to buy three red carnations for the crucifix which was waiting for me in my room.

They were to become the sign of the feast day for all of us.

This was it.

Even with the most promising predictions on December 7, 1943, I could never have imagined what I see today.

Praise to God, glory to Mary, Queen of a Kingdom which has literally invaded the whole world.

Chiara Lubich

(Extract from "Today the Opera turns thirty," Rocca di Papa, 7 December 1973)

Originally published here: <https://www.focolare.org/en/2022/12/07/december-7-1943-the-day-of-yes-to-god/>

**Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1Thess. 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 with all (5:27) and he recommended that the latter should be "imitators of us and of the Lord" (1:6). 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.

However, can someone command others 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 experience this. We can follow a *pathway of love* when we are not closed in on ourselves but love others and when we welcome the support of friends and keep alive faith that "love conquers all".<sup>i</sup>

**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 an 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."<sup>ii</sup>

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, our intentions and plans for the future."<sup>iii</sup>

There is a way to pray without ceasing that is accessible to everyone: you can do this by pausing before each action, focusing upon the intention and saying, "For You." It is a simple

practice that transforms our activities from within and makes our entire lives into 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 the One who silently sustains and accompanies individuals, peoples, history, and the entire cosmos. There is also 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 sees and wants us to be and they enrich our relationship with him. We trust that "the God of peace will sanctify us entirely". Iv

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 in ourselves, our homes, our workplaces, and the areas where we live. Nothing is more necessary and urgent today.

*Edited by Victoria Gómez and the Word of Life Team*

- i. Vergilius X 69;. Musical setting Gen Rosso, <https://music.apple.com/es/album/lamore-vince-tutto-single/1595294067>
- ii. Evdokimov "La Preghiera di Gesu" in *La Novita' dello Spirito* Milan 1997
- iii. Lubich *Conversazioni*, Citta Nuova, Rome 2019
- iv 1Thess 5:23

## Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- Paul writes to the Thessalonians when many of Jesus' contemporaries who had seen and heard him were still alive, witnesses of the tragedy of his death and the stupor of his resurrection and then his ascension. They recognized the mark that Jesus had left and waited for his imminent return.
- The common thread of these compelling exhortations refers not only to what God expects of us, but to when: without interruption, always, constantly.
- Dialogue between believers of different religions and between people of diverse convictions leads to an even deeper understanding that praying is a deeply human action; Prayer builds the person and elevates them.
- Before anything, give thanks. It is the attitude that springs freely and sincerely from grateful love for Him who, silently, sustains and accompanies individuals, peoples, history, and the cosmos. With gratitude to others who walk with us, which makes us aware that we are not self-sufficient.
- Let us prepare to deeply live the joy of Christmas to make a better world, to become weavers of peace within ourselves, at home, in the workplace, and in the middle of the squares. Today there is nothing more necessary and urgent.
- 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.



## Points for dialogue during the meeting

- Who did Paul love, what did he write to them, what did he plead with them and why?
- What are the recommendations that Paul summarizes to continue being “imitators of ourselves and of the Lord?”
- Can we be ordered to be happy?
- According to this Word of Life, as the Orthodox theologian Evdokimov says, is it prayed uninterruptedly?
- And Chiara Lubich, what does she underline?
- What is the way of praying that is always accessible to everyone, according to Chiara?
- What are the three actions that bring us closer to being how God sees us and loves us and enrich our relationship with Him?

### **Margaret Karram: In prayer and listening to look at the Synod with confidence**

The spiritual retreat that involved the participants in the Synodal Assembly for three days has been "a profound experience of union with God and friendship with the brothers and sisters present." This is how Margaret Karram, president of the Focolare Movement, defines it among the Special Guests at the Synod.



Three days of retreat for the 464 participants in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that begins today in the Vatican. Among the nine personalities summoned for the work as Special Guests is Margaret Karram, president of the Focolare

Movement or Work of Mary, one of the most relevant expressions among the ecclesial realities of spiritual and social renewal that emerged in the 20th century.

"I do not deny the emotion I feel, above all I have the great joy of being able to participate in person in this moment of grace," Karram wrote to the members of the Focolare on September 26 announcing his participation in the October Assembly. This has placed in my heart a great desire: to commit ourselves – as Focolare Movement - to improve, to go one step further, to strengthen and refine our relationships of unity, to be builders of fraternity in every environment in which we live or work. Finally, I ask you the most important thing: to pray!"

**Karram: a deep spiritual experience and friendship**

Almost at the end of the three-day retreat that preceded the work of the Synod, Margaret Karram recounts the experience lived as something very profound, "these three days," she says, "first of all brought us closer to each other as brothers and sisters, beyond of our roles in the Church, precisely as people of God who belong to the same Church. It was a very important intuition to precede the work of the Synod with this retreat, because it immediately took us to the essence, in my opinion, of the Synod, which is above all "to be silent" and at the same time "to listen" to capture what the other says and perhaps change or enrich my reflection."

## **Human friendship in the Church**

Hope, home, friendship, authority, are some of the themes proposed in the reflections of Father Timothy Radcliffe. The word that most impacted Margaret Karram was friendship, and she explains why: "It impacted me because I discovered that in our relationships we do not give enough importance to human friendship, which can also be divine friendship. I think that sometimes, even in our relationships in the Church, we stop at the spiritual level and forget that even a human friendship can help us grow. Jesus himself called his disciples friends. It seems to me that this dimension must also be discovered in the Church.

## **Like Mary, we can look at the greatness of God**

In her introduction to the lauds on the final morning of the retreat, Mother Ignazia Angelini offered a reflection on the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise. "This reflection," commented Karram, "has made me realize to what extent Mary must be present in my life, and especially in this path we are traveling because she looks at the greatness of God, not at what she knows how to do, she adheres to his will

with her "here I am" and then acts. This has given me so much hope because I believe that each of us will be able to give our contribution to the Synod and that it will be something very rich, but with this attitude of Mary.

## The presence of Jesus as in Emmaus

Hope, then, is the word with which Karram prepares to live the Synod Assembly, also thinking about the Gospel passage of the disciples of Emmaus. "As he did with them," he says, "I am sure that Jesus will accompany us and will be among us on this path of the Synod and will explain to us the steps we must take. I feel that I should not be afraid because I am sure that God will help us." will guide and enlighten us."

Adriana Masotti Vatican City

Translated from the original Spanish language article here:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/es/vaticano/news/2023-10/sinodo-retiro-espiritual-sacrofano-karram-focolares.html>

## Synod Report: A Church that involves everyone and is close to the wounds of the world

The Synthesis Report at the conclusion of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality is published. Looking ahead to the second session in 2024, the text offers reflections and proposals on topics such as the role of women and the laity, the ministry of bishops, priesthood and the diaconate, the importance of the poor and migrants, digital mission, ecumenism, and abuse.

By Salvatore Cernuzio

Women and the laity, diaconate, ministry and magisterium, peace and the climate, the poor and migrants, ecumenism and identity, new languages and renewed structures, old and new missions (including the "digital" mission), listening to all and probing everything more deeply,

even the most 'controversial' issues. In the Synthesis Report approved and published today by the 16th General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality, there is a renewed look at the world and the Church and its demands. After four weeks of work, which began on 4 October in the Paul VI Hall, the General Assembly concluded its first session today in the Vatican.

The document of some forty pages is the result of the work of the assembly that took place “while wars both old and new have raged in the world, with dramatic consequences that are impacting upon countless victims.” The report continues, “The cry of the poor resounded among us, of those forced to migrate and of those suffering violence and the devastating consequences of climate change. We heard their cry not only through the media but also through the voices of many present who were personally involved in these tragic events whether through their families or their people” (Foreword). To this challenge and many others,

the universal Church has tried to offer a response in the Small Circles and in the interventions. Everything came together in the Synthesis Report, which is divided into a preface and three parts, and which traces the path for the work to be done in the second session in 2024.

### **Listening to all, beginning with victims of abuse**

As in the Letter to the People of God, the synod assembly reaffirms an “openness to listening and accompanying all, including those who have suffered abuse and hurt in the Church,” which “addressing the structural conditions that abetted such abuse, remains before us, and requires concrete gestures of penitence.”

### **The face of a synodal Church**

Synodality is a first step. It is a term that the participants in the Synod themselves admit is “a term unfamiliar to many members of the People of God, causing some people confusion and concern” (1 f), including

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fears of a departure from tradition, a debasement of the hierarchical nature of the Church (1 g), a loss of power or, on the contrary, immobility and a lack of courage for change. “Synodal” and “synodality” are instead terms that “speak of a mode of being Church that integrates communion, mission, and participation.” Therefore, a way of living the Church, valuing differences, and developing the active involvement of all. This begins with deacons, priests, and bishops: “A synodal Church cannot do without their voices” (1 n), we read. “We need an understanding of the reasons for resistance to synodality by some of them.”

### **Mission**

The document continues explaining that synodality goes hand in hand with mission. Hence, it is necessary that “Christian communities are to enter into solidarity with those of other religions, convictions, and cultures, thus avoiding, on the one hand, the risk of self-referentiality and self-preservation, and on the other hand the risk of loss of identity”

(2 e). In this new “pastoral style,” it would seem important to many to make “liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures” (3 l).

To read the full article see:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-10/the-synod-report-a-church-that-involves-everyone.html>

# Apostolic Exhortation on Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face



15/10/2023

Speaking after the recitation of the Angelus Prayer, on Sunday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, Pope Francis reminded the faithful of the publication of the **Apostolic Exhortation dedicated to St. Thérèse of Lisieux**.

"Today, an Apostolic Exhortation on St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is published, entitled "C'est la confiance": in fact, as this great Saint and Doctor of the Church testified, it is trust in God's merciful love that is the way to the heart of the Lord and his Gospel," he said.

Read the full article here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-10/pope-angelus-say-yes-to-god-s-invitation-to-joy-communion.html>

The Exhortation can be found here:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/20231015-santateresa-delbambinogesu.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231015-santateresa-delbambinogesu.html)

# Experiences

## Living Gospel: rediscovering gratitude through the mystery of Christmas

*Advent is a time for recollection, a time of waiting, a time that awakens us from our slumber, surprising us with the incarnation of a God who becomes “small” to come and dwell among us. The mystery of Christmas brings us back to the essential, to welcome Baby Jesus as a child who into our lives opens the possibility to convert ourselves again and to look at our daily life with gratitude.*

### **A charity that is always new**

Ever since the conflict broke out in Ukraine, we have been involved in collecting food and clothing and welcoming refugees. A prayer chain for peace started in the parish. We took in a Ukrainian mother with two children. Since the Ukrainian language has Slavic roots, there were no problems there, even if English is practically our common language... but how were we going to organize the lives of people who are completely disoriented? There are already five of us in our family, so we asked relatives and friends if they would help with our guests. We also had to organize the spaces, something we had never done before. After the first few days, which were easy in some ways because of the novelty of the situation but difficult in other ways, we noticed in our children, all teenagers, a sense of responsibility that they had not shown before. They began helping with the household chores, shopping, accompanying someone to the doctor, teaching a few Slovakian words, cooking, and ironing. We understood the pain our guests were feeling, the uncertainty, the lack of a horizon. We found that embracing this silent pain was not only a good way to help someone else, but it also helped us to live our faith better and transform it into ever new charity.

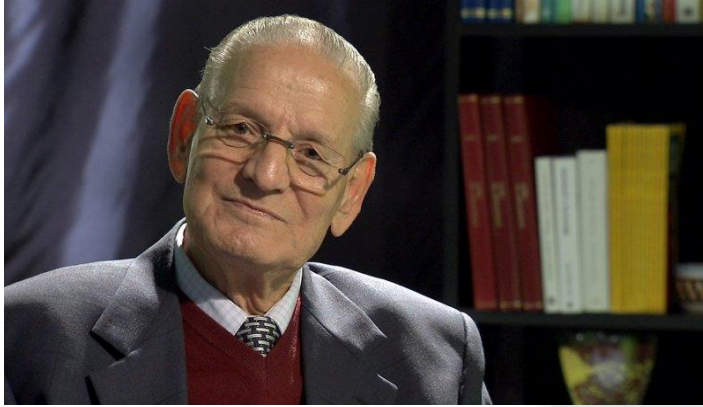
(J. and K. – Slovakia)

(Taken from “Il Vangelo del Giorno”, Città Nuova, year VIII, n.2, November-December 2022).



# Experiences

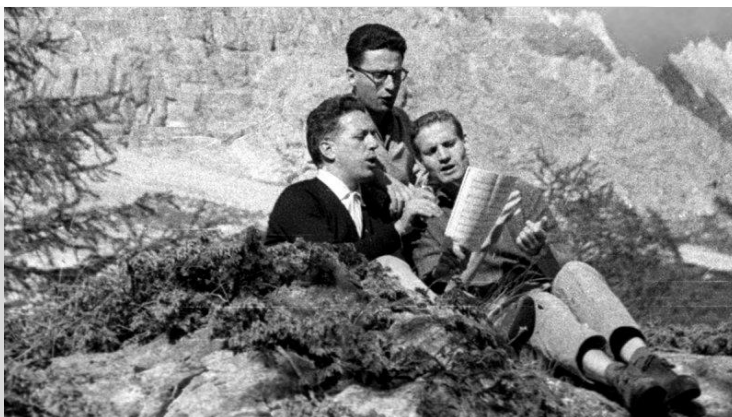
## Marco Tecilla, the first man focolarino



It was the end of 1945 in Trent, [Italy](#), when the war had just ended. Marco was 19 years old and going through a very deep spiritual crisis. A friend who belonged to a community of Men Religious had invited him to a meeting. A young woman, a little

older than himself, *“spoke about God with such fervor and conviction that there wasn’t any room for doubts,”* he later recalled. That young woman was [Chiara Lubich](#). She was surrounded by a group of girls who, like her, had chosen God as the ideal of their lives. In no time, Marco became the first young man to follow her. He was the first man focolarino.

**The Tecilla family were simple people**, his father a baker, his mother a nurse, a sister and three brothers. With the Great Depression of 1929, his father lost his job. “I remember him in the cold winter months wrapped in a mantle,” Marco recounts, “and me accompanying him from one bread shop to the next, knocking on doors and asking for work, or something to feed us. Only later I discovered that as he held me by one hand, with the other hand he counted the beads of his Rosary.”



**From the moment he met Chiara and [the first group of young women](#), he often went to do odd jobs at the “little house” in Cappuccini Square, where the women focolarine lived.** He was drawn by the supernatural atmosphere that

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he found in that place. “One evening,” he recalls, “I had to work a little longer than usual, to finish some repair work. Chiara was working on some sewing, sitting at the table nearby. Suddenly she turned to me and said: “If Jesus were to come today, he would be Jesus 24 hours a day, whether working, praying, eating, resting . . . in today’s world he’d be an electrician like you . . .” Marco was quite struck by “this new vision of the Christian life. I saw a new horizon opening before me, overflowing with light. When I left the “little house” the sky was all dotted with stars. A new life began for me, and I had to turn the page and abandon myself to the arms of the God who had manifested himself to me as LOVE.” **Marco felt that Jesus was calling him:** If you want to be perfect go and sell what you have and give it to the poor; then, come and follow me. Following Jesus, that’s my path.”

The original article can be found here in full length:

<https://www.focolare.org/en/2017/05/15/marco-tecilla-the-first-focolarino-3/>