

Word of Life Resources

No. 05-24

May 2024

Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

St. John, in his First Letter addressed to the Christians of a community, to encourage them to improve their interpersonal relationships, which were being damaged for ideological reasons, writes: "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). This phrase, which is the same as this month's Word of Life, reminds those in that community, and also those in ours, of the love that his first disciples saw, heard and felt from Jesus. This is also confirmed by the previous **Word of Life**, which affirms that the apostles, with great power, "bore witness to the Resurrection" (Acts 4:33) and "enjoyed great sympathy" (Acts 4:34). Thus, in order to proclaim God to the world and, in particular, to the environment of our community, it is enough to love like Jesus and to try to live the commandment of reciprocal love. This way of living, which, as Chiara affirms, is "the great revolution" that the world expects of us, will help us to prepare ourselves to celebrate with Jesus the feast of the Ascension and Pentecost.

Now, as **May is the month of Mary**, we propose as a theme the deepening of some passages of the message of Chiara Lubich in the Basilica of Guadalupe where she speaks of the close relationship that this invocation has with our Movement because "she is the Virgin of love and love is our spirituality". When we read this message in the **In-depth** section, perhaps we will be able to understand better that love that Jesus' disciples have been able to see, hear and feel, and that Mary lived in its fullness.

For the same reason, we transcribe in the **News** section what the Pope said in the audience of August 23 of last year when, speaking of Juan Diego, he exhorted us to invoke "Mary, our Mother" in difficult moments. And, in addition, noting how she "incarnates herself in the life of the people", he takes the opportunity to thank mothers and grandmothers because they are "the first to announce the faith to their children and grandchildren"; on the other hand, in the audience the Pope makes an important allusion to the function of the Marian sanctuaries.

We conclude with two **Experiences**: the first is of a husband who, in order to be with his wife who had woken up ill, wasn't able to go to Church to visit Jesus, and then He gave him the opportunity to welcome Him in one of the poor who came to his house.

In the second, a son speaks of his mother who, although he was seriously ill, did not hesitate to offer him protection, even at the cost of her life, in the face of a serious accident.

Let us not forget, then, that because God is Love, the best way to love Him is to love our brother and to live in reciprocal love. Thus, living as Mary, who is the Virgin of love, we can honor her in this month of May.

Warmest greetings to each one of you,
The Word of Life Workbook Team

Ask Yourself with each action: Am I Evangelizing?

In this month of May, dedicated to Mary, we publish some passages of the message pronounced by Chiara Lubich in front of the Virgin of Guadalupe, where she helps us to walk in the evangelization of cultures and traditions.

I can certainly state that being here, I immediately felt a deep certainty in my soul that Our Lady of Guadalupe has much to do also with us, with the Focolare Movement, with the Work of Mary.

Why do I say this? Because Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Lady of Love, and love is the very essence of our spirituality. In fact, Our Lady of Guadalupe reveals, explains, and teaches, in a sublime way, the art of loving that we have learned from the Gospel.

We know that divine, supernatural love has very precise demands. Above all, it requires us to love everyone. We cannot consider whether a person is pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly, fellow countryman or foreigner, Asian or African. The love that Jesus brought on earth requires that we love everyone. And what did Our Lady of Guadalupe do? She gave an extraordinary example! She loved both the indigenous people and the Spaniards.

Furthermore, true love requires that we take the initiative in loving, just as Jesus did. He gave his life for us when we were still sinners. This is what the heavenly Morenita¹ did. She unexpectedly appeared to an indigenous man, thus underlining, among other things, Jesus' preferences.

In times when the indigenous people were living their terrible Good Friday,² she did not appear to a member of the ruling party of that time, but to an indigenous man, speaking his language. And she didn't only appear, she brought relief and happiness, and with heavenly gentleness she led millions of people on both sides to convert to her son, Jesus.

Divine love in our hearts is certainly not a matter of nice feelings, or a little bit of benevolence, or merely solidarity, or only giving alms. It's the love that Jesus bore witness to, making himself one with us by becoming a man, and then with his passion and death.

In fact, another attribute of true love is knowing how to make ourselves one with others in order to understand them and share their joys and sufferings. It is this attribute of love - making ourselves one with others - that is the basis for true inculturation, which is so greatly needed today, and which the Church strongly emphasizes as the way to an authentic evangelization. Mary of Guadalupe is really the Mother of true love, the Mother who can teach us how to make ourselves one.

From a talk by Chiara Lubich at Guadalupe Basilica, Mexico City, June 7, 1997

¹ Our Lady of Guadalupe is commonly also called La Morenita which literally means “the little brown lady,” since she appeared as a person of mixed blood (indigenous and white). Morenita can also mean the mother of the family.

² Referring to the suffering they endured under the oppression of the Spanish conquerors.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 Jn 4:8)

The first letter of John is addressed to Christians who live in a community in Asia Minor and it encourages them to restore fellowship because they are divided by different doctrines. The author exhorts them to keep in mind what has been proclaimed 'from the beginning' of Christian preaching and repeats what the first disciples saw, heard and touched when they lived together with the Lord. By doing this, the community will be in communion with the first disciples and, therefore, with Jesus and the Father.ⁱ

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The author gives a reminder of the very essence of the revelation received by believers: he emphasizes that, in Jesus, God first loved us and totally took upon himself human existence with all its limitations and weaknesses.

On the cross, Jesus shared in our separation from the Father, experiencing it in his own flesh. He brought healing through the total gift of himself, in loving without limits or conditions. His words and his life show us what love truly is.

From Jesus' example we understand that to truly love involves courage, hard work and the risk of facing adversity and suffering. But those who love in this way, participate in God's life and experience his freedom and the joy of self-giving.

By loving as Jesus loved us, we become aware that we become free from ourselves and from the selfishness that closes the door to communion with our brothers and sisters and with God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The human heart has always longed, perhaps unconsciously, to know God who created us and who knows us in the deepest way possible.

If God is love, by loving like him we can glimpse something of this truth. We can grow in the knowledge of God because we essentially live his life and walk in his light.

And this is fully accomplished when love is mutual. For if we love one another, 'God abides in us.'ⁱⁱ When this happens, it is similar to two electric poles coming into contact and producing light.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Chiara Lubich said, 'To witness that God is love is the great revolution we are called to offer to the modern world which is experiencing extreme tension just as the early Christians bore testimony to this in the pagan world of their time'.

How can we do this? How can we live this love that comes from God?

‘By learning from his Son to put it into practice... in particular, let us focus on serving our neighbors, especially those closest to us, beginning with little things, with the most humble kinds of service. Let us make the effort, following Jesus’ example, to take the initiative in loving, being detached from ourselves and embracing all the small or big crosses that this might entail. In this way, we too will soon reach that experience of God, that communion with him, that fullness of light, peace and inner joy which Jesus wants us to have.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. Santa often visited a care home for the elderly that was run by a Catholic association. One day she and a colleague called Roberta met Aldo, a tall, very cultured and very wealthy man. Aldo looked sternly at the two young women and said, ‘Why do you always come here? What do you want from us? Why don’t you just let us die in peace?’ Santa didn’t lose heart and told him, ‘We are here for you, to spend some time together, to get to know each other and become friends.’ They continued to visit the home regularly. Roberta recounts, ‘That man was particularly closed in on himself and dejected. He did not believe in God. Santa was the only one who was able to get close to him, gently listening to him for hours. She prayed for him and, on one occasion, gave him a rosary which he accepted.’ Later, Santa learnt that he had spoken her name as he was dying. The pain of his death was lessened by the fact that he died peacefully, holding the rosary she had given him.’

Edited by Silvano Malini and the Word of Life Team

ⁱCf. 1Jn 1:1-3

ⁱⁱCf 1Jn 4:12

ⁱⁱⁱC. Lubich Word of Life May 1991

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- The First Letter of John is addressed to the Christians of a community in Asia Minor to encourage it to reestablish communion among them, for they are divided by various doctrines.
- To recall the essence of the revelation received, the author underlines that, in Jesus, God loved us by taking the initiative, adopting human existence with all its limitations and weaknesses to the core.
- To know God, the One who created us, who knows us and knows the deepest truth of all things, has always been a longing, sometimes unconscious, of the human heart.
- Witnessing that God is love - affirms Chiara Lubich - is the "great revolution that we are called to offer today to the modern world, in extreme tension [...], just as the first Christians showed it to the pagan world of that time".

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What does the author exhort us to keep in mind and what does he repeat?
- Where did Jesus share and feel in his flesh, our separation from the Father?
- By the example of Jesus, what do we understand?
- What do we free ourselves from by loving as Jesus has loved us?
- Loving as He did, what can we glimpse and when is it fully fulfilled?
- How to live this love that comes from God, how to witness that God is Love?
- To what does Santa motivate us in her experience in this word of life?
- Santa was not discouraged: are we ready not to be discouraged and to witness to God Love?
- In a theatrical representation, can you tell us about the experience of Santa?

Pope Francis: Gospel is passed on through one's mother tongue.

Pope Francis thanked mothers and grandmothers who hand on the faith to their children and grandchildren, saying the faith is passed on in one's mother tongue.

By Christopher Wells

Pope Francis looked to the example of Our Lady of Guadalupe to emphasize the importance of transmitting the faith in one's native language, as he continued his series of catecheses on "the passion for evangelization."

Although the faith had already arrived in the Americas when Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego, the Pope noted, the first evangelization of the new continent had not been without problems. "Instead of the path of inculturation, too often the hasty approach of transplanting pre-constituted models had been taken, lacking respect for the indigenous peoples, the Pope said.

Faith transmitted through our mother tongue.

When Mary appeared to Juan Diego, though, she came "dressed in the clothing of the native peoples, speaking their language, welcoming and loving the local culture.

"She is a Mother, and under her mantle, every child finds a place," he continued. "In Mary, God became flesh; and through Mary, He continues to incarnate Himself in the lives of peoples."

The Holy Father highlighted Mary's proclamation of God in the native language of the people. "Yes, the Gospel is transmitted through the mother tongue."

The Pope thanked mothers and grandmothers, especially, for handing on the Gospel to their children and grandchildren, explaining that faith is passed on with life. "This," he said, "is why mothers are the first evangelizers." And he invited those present to offer a round of applause for mothers.

Inculturating the Gospel and evangelizing cultures

Turning to St. Juan Diego, Pope Francis noted that he was already married when he embraced Christianity. Despite difficulties, including resistance from Church leaders, Juan Diego persisted in the mission Our Lady gave him.

“Even today,” the Pope said, “in so many places inculturating the Gospel and evangelizing cultures requires constancy and patience, not being afraid of conflict, not losing heart.” We must not be discouraged, he continued, knowing that Mary is there to console us and help us to grow, “like a mother who, while following her child’s steps, launches him into the world’s challenges.”

Our Lady confirmed her message to Juan Diego with a miracle, the “extraordinary and living image” that appeared on the *tilma*, or cloak, of the saint. This is “the surprise of God,” the Pope said. “When there is willingness and obedience, He can accomplish something unexpected, at times and in ways that we cannot foresee.”

Even today, at Marian shrines, pilgrimage destinations, and places of proclamation, we see the welcome and evangelization that marked the life of Saint Juan Diego. “Faith is welcomed in these places in a simple and genuine, popular way,” the Pope said, concluding, “We need to go to these oases of consolation and mercy, where faith is expressed in a maternal language; where we lay down the labors of life in Our Lady's arms and return to life with peace in our hearts.”

Originally published:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-08/pope-francis-gospel-is-passed-on-through-one-s-mother-tongue.html>

Video: <https://youtu.be/L75ctDT-LRE?si=wgih0rrGu66lnc4ps://youtu.be/L75ctDT-LRE>

Jesus came to visit me

Today, Holy Thursday, I was planning to visit and spend a lot of time before Jesus in the Eucharist, without any other activities.

Maria Ofelia, my wife, did not have a restful night and woke up feeling ill. Therefore, I stayed at home while she rested. I sent a WhatsApp to a priest friend: "May we always have the basin, the pitcher and the towel ready to bow before each brother and to be at his service".

Then someone rang the doorbell insistently several times, also knocking loudly. I did not want Maria Ofelia to wake up, and I ran out to see who it was. It was one of the poor people that we always help, and she was desperately hungry. Our refrigerator was almost empty (end of the month). No bread was in the cupboard, except for a little piece of sweet bread that I had saved for my wife's breakfast. I offered our guest mate, tea or coffee. "I never drink coffee, but I would like to," she said. I made her a frothy latte and gave her the sweet bread. She devoured it and enjoyed the latte, repeating over and over again "Yummy, yummy!". I also found a small piece of roast beef and gave it to her with 1 kg of rice. She hugged me for a long time and left.

I was thinking of going to visit Jesus and instead He came to visit me!

P.G. (Argentina)

Love that desires the good of the other

I have many memories of my mother, a person who lived through tragic situations in her life but who knew how to make "sour lemons into good lemonade", because of her faith-based, secular and spiritual sense of life.

At the age of 13, I became seriously ill. The doctors and the parish priest of the town, in the Argentinean Patagonia where we lived, already considered me "departed" with one or two days, at the most, to live. To relieve my breathing, Dad brought an industrial oxygen tank from the factory where he worked. Together with a technician, they placed it at the foot of the bed. Because of an involuntary movement I made with my leg, the oxygen tank fell. The valve opened and oxygen began to flow out, almost like a mini hurricane. A lot of things were flying. There could have been an explosion that would have "blown up" the house.

Mom, without a moment's hesitation, literally threw herself on top of me with her body to protect me. She would have given her life to save mine. I see this image today, as if it were yesterday... luckily Dad and the technician were on the sidewalk just outside the house, and they sensed something was going on. They entered the room and jumped on the tank, managing - not without difficulty - to reconnect the valve and thus shut off the almost "hurricane-like" flow of oxygen.

Experiences

From that day on, my relationship with Mom changed profoundly. I knew she loved me, as all mothers do, but that day she showed me that she was willing to give her life for me, even though it seemed that I had little time left to live. Instead, little by little I recovered and overcame that illness that seemed fatal. Now, surely she, like so many mothers in heaven, looks at me with immense tenderness and benevolent love, that is to say, "love that wants the good" of others.

Miguel, Mexico