

Word of Life Resources

No. 06-24

June 2024

Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

In order to remember our being "**called and sent**", we begin this workbook with a short thought of Chiara Lubich in which she refers to two events, *Genfest and World Youth Day*: in them, she says, thanks to modern means of communication, it has been possible to proclaim to the world how *our Movement*, if lived seriously, is the "*new evangelization*" in progress.

In order to work in this way, this month's **Word of Life** offers to us as an example the parable of the sower who, sowing the seed in abundance, allows it to sprout and grow, tends his field, and then confidently places all his hope in God.

Pope Francis, in the excerpt published in **NEWS**, on the occasion of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, which the Church celebrates this month, encourages us to imitate *their strength, generosity and humility. They were two great sowers who serve as an example of our being "called and sent"*.

At the end, three brief **experiences** motivate us to advance along the path of "the *new evangelization in progress*", and with it, in the synodal journey of the Church.

We send you our affectionate greetings,

The Team of the Word of Life Workbook

Evangelize

We propose this spiritual thought written by Chiara Lubich, on August 24, 2000, which we will publish in two parts and will help us to deepen the reality of being "called and sent by Jesus".

I'm speaking to you from Switzerland where I have just returned, as you know, from two appointments in Rome: the Genfest at Flaminio Stadium, and the World Youth Day at Tor Vergata.

Neither one of the events was limited to those locations. They reached many parts of the world, wherever the modern means of communication were able to bring them, means which we use very willingly because we instinctively feel drawn towards accomplishing Jesus' prayer 'That they may all be one' – ['ut omnes'] (Jn 17:21).

What did these two moments leave in my heart?

The very consoling rediscovery that our Movement, wherever there are people who live the Ideal with total commitment, is the 'new evangelization' in act; it is Mary queen of the apostles who continues to give Jesus to the world, mystically present in this Work of hers.

At Tor Vergata, I was asked to recall the words of Jesus which the Pope had addressed to the youth in 1995: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (Jn 20:21). In practice, I had to underline evangelization.

Therefore, in order to comment on these words and to teach the young people how to live them, I invited those who were present (at that hour there were about a million) to take four successive steps in the following order: first of all, to live mutual love among themselves so perfectly that people would also be able to repeat of them: 'See, they say, how they love one another ... how they are ready even to die for one another.'¹²

Then to love all the neighbors they meet, without distinction; to show this love concretely, with facts; and finally, but only in the end, to speak, announcing the Gospel.

While I was proposing this 'method', I realized with some surprise that I was simply explaining to the young people the lifestyle that the Holy Spirit suggested to our Movement. In the focolares, in the nuclei, in the Gen units, in our permanent communities (for example, the little towns) or temporary communities (the summer Mariapolises), we must, first of all, always love one another, assuring

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ourselves of the presence of Jesus in the midst; then we must love all our neighbors in a concrete way, and finally, only in the end, speak.

On the other hand, two days earlier, in the talk at the Genfest in which I narrated the miracle of Fontem, the validity of this procedure was clearly evident. As a matter of fact, in Fontem, because we had acted in this way, we have come to the point of using the spoken word in great abundance.

Therefore, our lives are identified with the 'new evangelization'. And the brief annual reports on your zones, which I am reading with great interest, confirm the general effort on the part of the Movement to continue along these lines.

Nonetheless, I feel that I must say a few words about that final step: 'and then, finally, speak'. Speaking is essential to evangelization.

¹² Tertullian: *Apologetic*, 39:7.

Published in: Lubich, Chiara. "2022." *Conference Calls*, New City, UK, pp. 547-548.

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This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. (Mk. 4:26-27)

Mark's Gospel wants to share the good news of Jesus' message and the kingdom of God lies at its very heart.

Here it is described in a short parable by likening it to the image of a seed that once cast into the earth releases its life force and bears fruit.

But what is the kingdom of God for us today? What does it have in common with our personal and collective history and the constant sense we may have of feeling suspended between expectation and disappointment? If it has already been sown, why do we not see its fruits of peace, security and happiness?

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

This Word conveys to us Jesus' own total confidence in God's plan for humanity: '... Since Jesus came into the world and was victorious over it, this kingdom is already present here on earth and its fulfilment at the end of history is already assured. The Church is the community of those who believe in this kingdom and is its foundation.'ⁱ

To all who welcome her, she entrusts the task of preparing the ground to receive God's gift and cherish hope in his love.

'... For there is no human effort, no exercise in self denial, no intellectual study or research that will give you the right to enter the Kingdom of God. It is God himself who comes to meet you, who reveals himself with his light and who touches you with his grace.

And there is no merit you can boast of or rely upon that will entitle you to such a gift from God. The kingdom is freely offered to you.'ⁱⁱ

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

The parable speaks of scattering the seed, in other words, not holding onto it but confidently sowing it over a large area. 'By night or by day': the kingdom grows silently, even

in the darkness of night.

We can also ask every day, 'Thy Kingdom come.'

The farmer does not need to constantly control the seed but needs to wait patiently for nature to take its course.

This word of life directs us towards trust in the power of love which will bear fruit in its own time. It teaches us the art of patiently accompanying what can grow of its own accord, without anxiety about results; it sets us free to welcome the other person in the present moment, valuing his or her potential while respecting his or her time.

'... A month before the wedding, our son phoned us in a state of alarm because his girlfriend had started using drugs again. He asked for advice about what to do. It wasn't easy to know what to say. We could have taken advantage of the situation and persuaded him to leave her but that didn't seem right. So we suggested he listened to what his heart was saying ... A long silence followed, then he said, 'I think I can love a little more.' After the wedding, they managed to find an excellent rehabilitation center with outpatient support. Fourteen long months passed during which she managed to keep her commitment to 'no more drugs'. It is a long road for everyone, but the evangelical love we try to have between the two of us – even though there are times when we are reduced to tears - gives us the strength to love our son in this delicate situation. A love that perhaps also helps him understand how to love his wife.'

Edited by Letizia Magri and the Word of Life team

ⁱ C. Lubich Word of Life Aug 1983

ⁱⁱ C. Lubich Word of Life Oct 1979

Points to reflect on and Points for dialogue

- The core of Jesus' message is the Kingdom of God, of which the Gospel of Mark wants to give the good news. In this Word of Life, it is announced by means of a parable, with the image of the grain that, once cast into the earth, gives off its vital force and bears fruit.
- There is no human effort, ascetic attempt, study or intellectual research that can help you enter the Kingdom of God. It is God himself who comes to meet you, who reveals himself with his light or touches you with his grace. And there is no merit of which you can boast or on which you can rely to be entitled to such a gift from God. The Kingdom is offered to you freely.
- Casting grain: not keeping it for oneself but sowing it with abundance and confidence. "Night or day": the Kingdom grows silently, even in the darkness of our nights. We can also ask every day: "Thy Kingdom come".
- The grain does not require a continuous work of supervision on the part of the tiller, but rather the ability to wait patiently for nature to take its course.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What is the Word of Life chosen to live this month of June?
- What is the Kingdom of God for us today? What does it have in common with our personal and collective history, constantly suspended between expectations and disappointments? If it is already sown, why do we not see its fruits of peace, security and happiness?
- What does this Word of Life communicate to us?
- What does it entrust to all those who receive it?
- What does this Word of Life open us to trust, what does it teach us and what does it set us free?
- What did you think of this family's experience with their son who was getting married?

Pope at Angelus: Peter shows how God works in our weakness

At the Angelus prayer on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, Pope Francis reflects on the example of the Apostle Peter, saying he points a path to Christ in his generosity and weakness.

By Devin Watkins

As the Church celebrated the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Francis prayed the Angelus with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square.

Ahead of the traditional noon-day Marian prayer, he reflected on the example of the Apostle Peter, whom Jesus told: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church." The Pope focused on three meanings of the Greek word for "rock", which can signify rock, stone, or pebble.

Courageous as a rock

First, he noted, Peter is a rock, shown in moments when he is "strong, steady, genuine, and generous."

"He leaves everything to follow Jesus," said the Pope. "He recognizes Christ, the Son of the living God; he dives into the sea to go quickly toward the Risen One. Then, he boldly and courageously proclaims Jesus in the Temple, before and after being arrested and flogged. Tradition tells us also about his steadfastness when facing martyrdom."

Reliable as a stone

Secondly, Peter's name can also be understood as "stone", a man who offers support to others.

Pope Francis said Peter sustains his brothers and sisters in the work of building up the Church.

The Gospels depict him as responding generously to Jesus' call, confirming others' desire to follow Christ, and encouraging the community's proclamation of the Gospel.

"He is 'stone'," said the Pope, "a reliable point of reference for the entire community."

Weak as a pebble

At the same time, added the Holy Father, Peter's littleness emerges, revealing him also to be a "pebble".

"At times he does not understand what Jesus is doing," he said. "When confronted with Jesus's arrest, Peter allows fear to overtake him and denies Jesus, then repents and weeps bitterly, but he does not find the courage to stand under the cross."

Peter, added the Pope, also seeks to flee Rome when initially faced with his own martyrdom, according to the *Quo vadis* tradition.

Real person with strong and weak points

Peter encompasses each of these three aspects, with which each Christian can identify.

"In Peter," said Pope Francis, "we find the strength of the rock, the reliability of the stone, and the littleness of a simple pebble. He is not a superman – he is a man like us, who says 'yes' generously to Jesus in his imperfection."

In the Apostle, God reveals that it is He who makes "Peter strong with His grace, unites us with His love, and forgives us with His mercy."

Saints Peter and Paul, noted the Pope, were real people, with their own faults, strengths, and weaknesses.

Strength, generosity, humility

In conclusion, Pope Francis urged Christians to ask ourselves in what ways we identify with St. Peter and prayed that the Blessed Virgin Mary might help us to imitate his strength, generosity, and humility.

"Are we aware of our littleness?" asked the Pope, in conclusion. "And above all, in our weakness, do we entrust ourselves to the Lord who accomplishes great things through those who are humble and sincere?"

News

Originally published: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-06/pope-francis-angelus-solemnity-peter-paul-rock.html>

Video: <https://youtu.be/1TEm-jI1Fyc>

Experiences

Living the Gospel: “Do everything with love” (1Cor 16:14)

Christian love is a “Love” that has a specific, tangible form, which is experienced through actions, from the smallest to the largest. It means giving our lives for those around us in the image of the One who was the first to give His life for us, loving us with an immense love.



Failed exam

When our daughter came home in tears following an unsuccessful exam for which she had worked very hard, my husband and I made a conscious decision to turn dinner into a celebration, perhaps even more so than if the exam had gone well. Our other children embraced the idea with enthusiasm. However, the most emotional moment occurred when we parents began to openly share some of our own life failures and how we had managed to overcome them. As others at the table joined in with their “confessions”, the meal became an occasion for profound communion and mutual growth. Our daughter found solace in this unexpected turn of events and said, “Maybe this failure wasn’t just for me, but for our whole family. I never realized that setbacks could be a part of our collective growth and understanding of life. I appreciate this perspective immensely.” When we shared this experience with relatives and friends, many were inspired to replicate it with their own children, using any pretext to foster similar conversations. Ultimately, a consensus emerged that trying to understand each other’s vulnerabilities within families is essential for cultivating love and shared growth.

(W.R. – Netherlands)

Love that goes and returns

In my spare time and whenever needed, I willingly take on the role of babysitting for the two lovely girls of a Senegalese couple. The parents are always grateful and often say, “We would be lost without you!” Sometimes I proactively offer my assistance, not waiting for their request. Recently, I messaged the dad, notifying him of my availability for Sunday morning. He rang me almost immediately and said, “Lorenza, you have to tell me how you know what we

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need in advance! Your message came at exactly the right time.” I replied, “It is God who moves hearts, Tacko; we must thank Him for creating this bond of sisterhood and brotherhood.”

Thanks to this family-like bond between us, once when I had to leave for a trip at 1 a.m., I asked Tacko for a ride to the station, which was an opportunity for him to reciprocate the love. He not only obliged but stayed with me until the rest of the group arrived, showing genuine care. A few days ago, Tacko and his wife came to our home to share some rice and chicken cooked in their typical way. “Now we know your tastes; you’re a bit African too!”

(Lorenza – Italy)

Grasp the inspiration

The opportunity to be a builder of peace through respectful dialogue with people of different cultures or faiths came up during a meeting at my workplace. The air was thick with tension and voices rang out accusingly. How could I facilitate reconciliation when talking seemed impossible and maybe even counterproductive? In the face of this challenge, I tried to listen carefully to those expressing themselves, maintaining a calm and understanding demeanor even when they were using loud and confrontational tones. It wasn’t easy and it was very exhausting. During the break, the colleague who had been the most vociferous approached me and offered a sincere apology for his behavior. Without uttering a word, I embraced him, allowing him to continue sharing: “Yesterday, my wife received news of an incurable disease. I feel hopeless.” I urged him to consult with a doctor friend and he thanked me for the idea. I assured him of my ongoing support. When we returned to the meeting room, the atmosphere had changed. I realized that in every present moment it is important to grasp the inspiration that God gives us about how to act.

(E.J. – USA)

Originally published here: <https://www.focolare.org/en/2024/02/27/living-the-gospel-do-everything-with-love-1cor-1614/>
