

Word of Life Resources

No. 08-24

August 2024

Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

In this month's workbook, Chiara asks: "What should we do with the Word of Life we receive each month?" She answers: "Live it ourselves and then generate occasions for encounter everywhere"; this way you will see "a living Christian community that grows for the good of many and the glory of God". This is a good idea to propose in this month's meetings with the Word of Life that speaks to us of the phrase of Peter to Jesus in the encounter of the "transfiguration" when Peter says excitedly: "How good it is that we are here". As the commentary says, perhaps, at some time we too have experienced a similar grace and it is not possible to keep it to ourselves, but, rather, generate occasions of encounter to seek to live it everywhere with others; thus, as Chiara suggests, living Christian communities will emerge for the good of all and the glory of God.

As Pope Francis says in the NEWS section, what we have received freely, we must give freely. In what way? The Pope says in this message that Jesus asks us to remain with Him and, at the same time, to go out and proclaim Him, which is an apparent contradiction that, according to him, is important to point out to avoid thinking that we are the protagonists, and to let Him be the one who shapes us.

The booklet concludes with two beautiful experiences, one from Peru and the other from Mexico, which are a living testimony of a God who is close to us.

Committed to living with you the words of Peter to Jesus at the transfiguration and to live them also in our encounters, we greet you affectionately.

Assuring you of our unity, we send you our warmest greetings.

The parable of the Word

There is a characteristic of the “new evangelization” which Pope John Paul II highlights in his Magisterium: “The new evangelization will be effective if it knows how to proclaim from the rooftops what it has previously lived in intimacy with the Lord”¹. I think it refers to our duty to not only live, but also proclaim the Good News to others. On the other hand, in another speech, John Paul II underlines: “You cannot evangelize” if you do not evangelize yourself first, “if you are not personally the object of evangelization”².

However, the expression “to proclaim from the rooftops” can lead us to think of places of greater irradiation, as more important and prestigious places, and above all, to evangelize with the most powerful modern means of communication.

We have been sowing the Word for 70 years in simple settings, as in the Word of Life meetings, and we proclaim it everywhere. Moreover, we use modern means of communication both inside and outside the Movement. From the beginning we have taken the Word - and we continue to take it - to places like for example, Parliaments, or world institutions; or else Universities.

For example, every month we receive a commented Word of God. What should we do? First of all, to live it ourselves, and then to generate everywhere occasions of encounter with people, also with those whom we have just met. Then it will happen, as in the early days of the Movement, when people were amazed to see - almost like a miracle - arise instead of a Word read and perhaps meditated on, a living Christian community that continues to grow for the good of many and the glory of God. Let us think about it during this month and let us get down to work: it is a “new evangelization.” We will realize that we are doing something great, pleasing to God and awaited by humanity. Indeed, we can affirm that the Word of God, when it is sown in good soil, not only takes root in a splendid way, but it does so in a surprising and lasting way. I had a confirmation of this in recent days.

A priest of ours from PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, Milan, Italy) had been for many years in Brazil, in a village of Mato-Grosso, a place deep in Amazonia, where he had communicated our Ideal to the people, and obviously, the Word. Having been transferred some years later to another city, he had to return for a few days to Mato-Grosso, and he thought that the enthusiasm for the Word that he had noticed in those people would have

diminished over time. And what did he find instead? A community of 70 people welcomed him with joy, preparing for him a weekend with a series of meetings. On the wall, there was a big sign: “Mariapolis”. Some recounted their experiences, including that of an 80-year-old chieftain of an indigenous tribe who regularly participated in the Word of Life meeting. And this is not the only experience of its kind.

Source: Chiara Lubich, *Conversazioni*, a cura di M. Vandeleene, Città Nuova, Roma 2019, pp. 671-673.

- 1 Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 25/03/1996, n.81, in EV 15,684.
- 2 John Paul II to the pilgrims of the Diocese of Torun (Poland), 19/02/1998, in “La Traccia” 2 (1998), p. 174-175.

Lord, it is good for us to be here (Mt 17:4).

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem with his disciples.[1] When he told them that in Jerusalem he would suffer, die and then rise from the dead, Peter rebelled against it, expressing the dismay and bewilderment all of them felt at that moment. The Master then took him aside, together with James and John, and went up on “a high mountain.” There he showed himself to them surrounded by a new and extraordinary light. His face “shone like the sun,” and Moses and the prophet Elijah were also there, conversing with him. The Father himself spoke from a bright cloud and told them to listen to Jesus, his beloved Son. Faced with this astonishing experience, Peter didn’t want to leave that place, and exclaimed:

Lord, it is good for us to be here

Jesus had invited his closest friends to have an unforgettable experience, so that they would treasure it in their hearts forever.

We too may have experienced with wonder and excitement the presence and action of God in our lives, in moments of joy, peace and light that we wished would never end. We often experience these moments when we are together with other people, living in love and unity with them. In fact, mutual love attracts God’s presence, for as Jesus promised, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”[2] Sometimes, in these moments of intimacy with him, he helps us to see ourselves and to understand the events of our life in the way he sees them.

These experiences are given to us so that we will have the strength to face the difficulties, trials and fatigue we encounter on our journey through life, because we are convinced that God has looked upon us with love and has called us to be part of salvation history.

Indeed, once they descended from the mountain, the disciples went with him to Jerusalem, where a crowd full of hope awaited them, but also many people who were opposed to Jesus. They faced intimidation, hostility, hatred and great suffering. They would “be scattered and sent to the ends of the earth to be witnesses that our permanent dwelling is the kingdom of God.”[3] They were able to build his home among people here on earth because they had experienced living in “his home” up on the mountain.

Lord, it is good for us to be here

“Get up and do not be afraid” is Jesus’ invitation at the end of this extraordinary experience. He addresses the same words to us, enabling us, as his disciples and friends, to face with courage whatever lies ahead for us.

This was also the case for Chiara Lubich. She was having a period of rest in the mountains above Trent with some of her companions and she experienced such great divine light that this period is called “the paradise of 1949.” God’s presence was so powerful in that small community and she experienced such extraordinary contemplation of the mysteries of faith that she too had no desire to return to everyday life. She did so with new impetus when she understood that it was precisely because of that experience of divine light that she had to “come down from the mountain” and set to work as Jesus’ instrument for the realization of his kingdom, injecting his love and light precisely where it is lacking, facing even hardship and suffering.

Lord, it is good for us to be here

Instead, if there are times when we feel we don’t have the light, we need to call to mind, in our heart and soul, the moments when God enlightened us. And if we never experienced his nearness to us, let’s go in search of it. We will have to make the effort to “go up on the mountain,” to meet him in our neighbors, to worship him in our churches and also to contemplate him in the beauty of nature.

He is always there for us. It is enough that we walk with him and, being silent, humbly listen to him, as Peter, John and James did.

Edited by Silvano Malini and the Word of Life team.

[1] See Mt 17:1-14.

[2] Mt 18:20.

[3] Rev Timothy Radcliffe, OP, second meditation to the participants of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality, October 1, 2023.

Points to reflect on and Points for dialogue

- The Father himself makes his voice heard from a luminous cloud and invites them to listen to Jesus, his beloved Son. In the face of this amazing experience, Peter would not want to leave, and exclaims, "Lord, how good it is that we are here!"
- Once they have descended from the mountain, the disciples will go together to Jerusalem, where a crowd full of hope awaits them, but also dangers, confrontations, rejection, and suffering. There "they will be scattered and sent to the ends of the earth to be witnesses of our definitive dwelling place, the Kingdom" of God 4. They will be able to begin to build already on this earth the house of God among men because on the mountain they have been "at home" with Jesus.
- Chiara Lubich also would not have wanted to return to everyday life after a vacation period so full of light that it was called "the paradise of 1949" because of the perception of the presence of God in the small community with which she was spending a time of rest and because of an extraordinary contemplation of the mysteries of faith.
- For us, He is always there: it is enough for us to walk with Him and, in silence, to humbly listen to Him, like Peter, John, and James (cf. Mt 17:6).

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What does the Word of Life chosen for this month say? Do you also share the same sentiment?
- Where is Jesus going? with whom? to announce what? who is rebelling? and where is the Master taking him?
- Have we also experienced God's presence and action in our lives? Do you want to tell us about it?
- Why do we have these experiences?
- What is Jesus' invitation that he also addresses to us?
- Can you enlighten us on Chiara Lubich's "paradise of 1949"?
- How did Chiara return after the so-called "paradise of 1949"?
- Where should we return to with our hearts and minds when we miss the lack of light?

Pope Francis at Audience: Preach God's nearness with our meekness

By Devin Watkins

At the weekly General Audience, Pope Francis reflects on the Christian proclamation of God's nearness and urges us to draw strength from our relationship with Jesus in order to preach the Gospel together in meekness.

Pope Francis continued his catechesis series on the passion of evangelizing—apostolic zeal—at the Wednesday General Audience. He reflected on the “missionary discourse” which Jesus gave to His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew (10:7-16) soon after He called them.

Coming or going?

The Pope noted that Jesus called the 12 Apostles “so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach.”

He pointed to the dual action of “being with” and “going out” in Jesus’ call, saying Christian missionary activity begins with the encounter with Christ and moves outward.

“Bearing witness to Him means radiating Him. But, if we do not receive His light, we will be extinguished. If we do not attend Him, we will bear ourselves instead of Him, and it will all be in vain.”

He added that Jesus sends His disciples out soon after calling them, which shows that missionary experience is an integral part of Christian formation.

God's freely-given love

Pope Francis went on to reflect on three aspects of the Christian proclamation: why, what, and how to proclaim.

Jesus, he said, lays out the “why” in a few succinct words: “Freely you have received, freely give.”

God's freely given love fills us and we are naturally impelled to share that love with others, said the Pope.

Nearness of God

He noted that the “what” of our proclamation has to do with the nearness of the kingdom of heaven.

The most important aspect of preaching, said Pope Francis, is that “God is near”.

"It is easier to exhort people to love God than to allow ourselves to be loved by Him."

The Pope said the Christian proclamation must give God the first place, while we allow ourselves to be molded by His love and action.

Meekness in preaching

Pope Francis then spoke at length about “how” to proclaim, which he noted formed the lengthier part of Jesus’ own missionary discourse.

"He tells us that the manner, the style, is essential to bearing witness. Let's listen to how He wants us to be: 'I send you out as sheep among wolves.'"

Jesus, added the Pope, never asks us to face the wolves with counter-arguments or well-prepared defenses of the faith.

Rather, Jesus tells His disciples to be “meek and innocent, willing to sacrifice”. And He will in turn protect His lambs from the wolves, but only if they remain meek as lambs.

Missionary unity

In conclusion, Pope Francis noted that Jesus says to go out on mission together without any material provisions or worldliness, trusting only in God’s Providence.

"The apostolic Church is completely missionary, and it finds its unity in the mission," he said. "So: go forth, meek and good as lambs, without worldliness, together."

Originally published: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-02/pope-francis-general-audience-first-apostolate-disciples.html>

The video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRL93bvARj0>

A loving parent

Usually, we get clothes, medicine, household and personal hygiene items donated, and even food and furniture. But not bicycles, at least hardly ever. Last week I got an unusual request for a bike from a teenager; Javier Abraham, son of Victoria Janet, a 16-year-old boy, dutifully accompanied the request with an “ad hoc” explanation: with a bike, he could better help his mother to make urgent deliveries, because for now he was doing it with a borrowed bike. He actually asked me three times! I could only whisper to him: “Look, let's ask Jesus to send it to us because I can't tell you if someone will give us a bicycle, providence, which always comes, has surprises in store, but rest assured that if it arrives I will call you immediately”. It so happens that that same day a person from the Focolare community called me and wanted to donate some “little things”, but he could only deliver them in the evening. Punctually at 10.30 p.m. the family showed up with the car loaded with all kinds of “things”, including toys, and two bicycles in very good condition!

My joy was great, truly the Father answers our prayers! I immediately let Javier Abraham know that the bicycle had arrived! His mom came running to pick it up, the expression on her face halfway between surprise and joy! We told this experience to the family who had given us the bicycles and in a low voice they let us know that “their children (teenagers) are happy to help, even though it was hard for them to donate them, but now they are happy to see the joy of others!”.

By Ofelia, Peru

Source: YEAR XXXVIII, No 44, April 2023. www.ciudadnueva.co