

Word of Life Resources

No. 01-2025

January 2025

Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

Proximity is the strong idea we want to deepen this year in the Work of Mary, and Jesus is a witness to this way of living for us as we see in his affectionate and understanding response to Martha when she “dared” to tell him: “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” “Do you believe this?” was his response.

This question of his is the Word of Life for January. With it, he asks her to maintain her trusting and personal relationship with Him, as the commentary published in this Booklet explains.

If Jesus is a witness of proximity, we can learn from Him to be “dead to ourselves so that the Risen One may shine among us”, as Chiara says in the Conference Call from January 1986 which you find in the In-depth section.

“Dilexit nos”, 'He loved us', is the title of the new encyclical of Pope Francis of which you can read a brief report in NEWS. “He did not treat us as strangers, what he proposes is mutual belonging, he shows us that God is closeness, compassion, and tenderness. By being close to us he gives his love with all possible tenderness.

In the EXPERIENCES section, the story of simple events in a center for welcoming and accompanying migrants allows us to see how it is possible to discover in proximity what others need and, at the same time, what others can give, to meet their needs.

The Word of Life Workbook Team

Conference Call Rocca di Papa, January 2, 1986

To Be His Witnesses

We begin the new year with another splendid Word of Life: 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

'You will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.' With these words Jesus concluded one of his last encounters with the apostles after the resurrection.

He had probably spoken to them about the coming of the Holy Spirit and was now explaining to them that he would come not to perform a spectacular change in society, as they might expect, but to transform them so that they might give witness to him, bringing the risen Lord within themselves to the ends of the earth.

Bringing the risen Lord. Yes, because in order to bear witness to God, we must show that he exists, that he lives, and that he is the living one. Nothing then is more useful to bear witness to God, the living one, than to bring him alive in ourselves, as the risen Lord.

Once they received the Holy Spirit, this is what the apostles did.

But, as we know, the Holy Spirit has been given to us as at our baptism. Therefore, these words are also for us: 'You will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.' Witnesses. Do you know what the Greek word for 'witness' is? *Martyrion*. The martyrs, in fact, are considered to be the first witnesses.

But other ways of bearing witness to Jesus that we know of also require martyrdom.

We must die to ourselves by embracing Jesus forsaken so that the risen Lord may live in each one of us.

We need to be dead to ourselves so that the risen Lord can shine forth in our midst. And we know that when he is among us, he himself gives witness. Didn't Jesus pray that they may be one so that the world may believe (Jn 17:21)? In other words: that they may be one so the world may see a witness of Me and then believe.

Allowing the risen Lord to live in us and in our midst are the two main ways that the Holy Spirit has taught us to bear witness.

During these next weeks we should aim at the first way. How then can we live in such a way that this becomes true? What aspect of our lives can we give special attention to?

If we take a look at our lifestyle according to the Ideal that God has given us, we should see that every day each one of us follows our planned program and our various tasks as best we can.

And if we live in the tension towards holiness, we try to do everything to perfection, recognizing Jesus in the neighbors we meet, keeping him alive among all.

However, each day always brings something unforeseen: small or big changes that alter our plans; and these too are the will of God for us. No day passes which does not find one or more unforeseen elements being added into our program which can partially or even entirely change it.

Naturally, if we are truly attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit within us, we know how to receive with love each piece of news, each circumstance, each encounter, each event.

If, instead, we are not very attentive to the voice of the Spirit, we remain attached to our programs and we do not know how to allow our own wills to die in front of the will of God. In moments like these, the light of the risen Lord dies out in us.

Therefore, in order to be able to bear witness to Jesus always, we must pay special attention to what may arrive outside of our established program. Our constant reminder that we have all offered ourselves to Jesus forsaken will be of great assistance to us.

The abandonment on the part of the Father was not in Jesus' program, at least as far as we know. Yet, it was foreseen by the Father to complete the passion of his Son so that he might free humankind from sin.

But Jesus, after his cry 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt 27:46), immediately accepts this frightening circumstance that was not in his expectations and trustingly says, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (Lk 23:46).

Likewise, we must also be ready for all the unforeseen things that could happen during the day, and – whether it be something pleasant, or painful or indifferent – we must make it immediately our own so that the risen Lord, the living one, may shine incessantly within our hearts.

In this way we will truly bear witness to him.

Chiara Lubich

“Do you believe this?” (Jn 11:26)

Jesus was on his way to Bethany, the town where Lazarus had died four days earlier. When Martha, Lazarus' sister, heard that Jesus was coming, she was filled with hope and ran out to meet him. John's Gospel states that Jesus loved her very much, as he did Lazarus and their sister, Mary. Even in the pain of her loss, Martha demonstrated her full trust in Jesus. She told him that if he had been present, her brother would not have died, but that nevertheless she was certain that anything he asked of God would be granted. Jesus affirmed, “Your brother will rise again,” and then asked her:

“Do you believe this?”

Jesus clarified that he was not referring to the life that awaits every believer after their death, but rather to bring Lazarus back to life right then and there. He asked Martha if she believed in him, not only that he could perform a miracle, but also, to give her and all believers, a sense of a new life in resurrection when he tells her, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

The faith he asks of her is rooted in a deep personal relationship, an active and dynamic relationship. Believing is something that transforms and permeates our daily lives. Faith is something that requires us to examine constantly.

“Do you believe this?”

How do we answer this question? Jesus invites us to live a new life now. He invites us to experience it every day knowing that he brought this life to us. First, by seeking us out and then he came to dwell among us.

Let's look at Martha, the sister of Lazarus. In dialogue with Jesus, she made a full profession of faith. The original text in Greek expresses this very powerfully. The Greek words used for “I believe” signify “I have come to believe” or “I firmly believe” that “you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world,” with all the consequences this faith entails.

The Lord asks us the same question. He asks us, too, to trust firmly in him, and to fully accept his way of life, based on generous and concrete love towards all. Our faith will mature through perseverance and will grow stronger. Each day, as we put into practice the words of Jesus, we will see how true they are. Furthermore, this will positively impact our daily actions towards others. At the same time, we can pray as the apostles did: "Increase our faith!"

"Do you believe this?"

"A government agency had closed causing my daughter and all her colleagues to lose their jobs. As a form of protest, they set up an encampment in front of the main office. I tried to support them by participating in some of their activities, bringing them food or simply stopping by to talk to them.

On Holy Thursday, a group of priests who supported them decided to hold a ceremony, during which there was time to listen to one another, followed by a reading from the Gospel and an enactment of washing the feet of others, as Jesus did the night before his death. The majority of those present were not practicing any religion, but it was, nevertheless, a moment of deep unity, fraternity and hope. All felt welcomed, and were moved by this act, as they thanked those priests who had accompanied them in their uncertainty and suffering." (Patricia, from South America)

This Word of Jesus was chosen for the theme of the 2025 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Therefore, let's pray and work to ensure that our common belief as Christians may be the driving force in the search for fraternity among all people. This is what God desires – and proposes – for all humankind, yet it requires that we play our part. Prayer and action will be effective if they are based on our firm trust in God and by living in a way that is consistent with our belief.

Prepared by Silvano Malini and the Word of Life Team

Points for reflection

- Jesus is arriving at Bethany, where Lazarus has been dead for four days. Informed of this, his sister Martha runs to meet him in hope. Jesus loved her, her sister Mary, and Lazarus very much, as the Gospel underlines.
- The faith he asks of her is a personal relationship with him, an active and dynamic adherence. Believing is not like accepting a contract which is signed once and never looked at again, but a fact that transforms and permeates daily life.
- Jesus invites us to live a new life here and now. He invites us to experience it every day, knowing that, as we rediscovered at Christmas, he himself has brought it to us, taking the initiative to come to us and among us.
- The Lord also addresses his question to me. He also asks me for a generous trust in him and adherence to his way of life, founded on a generous and concrete love for all.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What does the Word of Life chosen for this month say and what does Jesus lead us to?
- Even amidst of pain, what does Martha manifest to the Lord and what does Jesus affirm to her?
- What does Jesus ask Martha after having clarified that he is referring to the return of Lazarus to physical life here and now, and not only to that which awaits the believer after death and what does Jesus affirm to her?
- How do we respond to her question?
- What will mature my faith and begin to make our own the prayer of the apostles to Jesus how can we say to him? Did you like the experience that Patricia has given us in this Word of Life?
- Do you have any similar experiences that you want to share?
- What did the group of priests, who accompanied these unemployed, do?
- This word of Jesus has been chosen for what and what is asked of us?

ANGELUS

Saint Peter's Square, Sunday, August 23, 2015

Pope Francis: Who is Jesus for you?

All that we have in the world does not satisfy our infinite hunger. We need Jesus, to be with him, to be nourished at his table, on his words of eternal life! Believing in Jesus means making him the center, the meaning of our life. Christ is not an optional element: he is the "Living Bread", the essential nourishment. Binding oneself to him, in a true relationship of faith and love, does not mean being tied down, but being profoundly free, always on the journey.

Each one of us can ask him- or herself: who is Jesus for me? Is he a name, an idea, simply an historical figure? Or is he truly that person who loves me and gave his life for me and walks with me? Who is Jesus for you? Are you with Jesus? Do you try to comprehend him in his word? Do you read the Gospel, each day a passage from the Gospel to learn to know Jesus? Do you carry a small Gospel in your pocket, to read it, in whatever place? Because the more we are with him the more the desire to be with him grows.

Now I ask you, please, let us have a moment of silence and let each one of us silently, in our hearts, ask ourselves the question: "Who is Jesus for me?". Silently, each one, answer in your heart.

Believing in Jesus means making him the centre, the meaning of our life. Christ is not an optional element: he is the "Living Bread", the essential nourishment. Binding oneself to him, in a true relationship of faith and love, does not mean being tied down, but being profoundly free, always on the journey. Each one of us can ask him- or herself: who is Jesus for me? Is he a name, an idea, simply a historical figure? Or is he truly that person who loves me and gave his life for me and walks with me? Who is Jesus for you? Are you with Jesus? Do you try to comprehend him in his word?

Full text here:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20150823.html

ACTIONS AND WORDS OF LOVE

On October 24, 2024, Pope Francis presented his new Encyclical Letter "Dilexit Nos"

("He loved us," wrote St. Paul in his letter to the Romans 8:37, referring to Christ): in his interactions, Jesus not only spoke, but also acted: his love was not an abstract idea, but a tangible love, made up of concrete gestures. From healing the sick to forgiving sinners, Christ showed a sensitive and human love that reflected God's mercy. The Pope invites us to look at these gestures to remember that Christian love must go beyond words, it must be a love that reaches out and touches the lives of others.

32. The heart of Christ, as the symbol of the deepest and most personal source of his love for us, is the very core of the initial preaching of the Gospel. It stands at the origin of our faith, as the wellspring that refreshes and enlivens our Christian beliefs.

ACTIONS THAT REFLECT THE HEART

33. Christ showed the depth of his love for us not by lengthy explanations but by concrete actions. By examining his interactions with others, we can come to realize how he treats each one of us, even though at times this may be difficult to see. Let us now turn to the place where our faith can encounter this truth: the word of God.

34. The Gospel tells us that Jesus "came to his own" (cf. *Jn 1:11*). Those words refer to us, for the Lord does not treat us as strangers but as a possession that he watches over and cherishes. He treats us truly as "his own". This does not mean that we are his slaves, something that he himself denies: "I do not call you servants" (*Jn 15:15*). Rather, it refers to the sense of mutual belonging typical of friends. Jesus came to meet us, bridging all distances; he became as close to us as the simplest, everyday realities of our lives. Indeed, he has another name, "Emmanuel", which means "God with us", God as part of our lives, God as living in our midst. The Son of God became incarnate and "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (*Phil 2:7*).

35. This becomes clear when we see Jesus at work. He seeks people out, approaches them, ever open to an encounter with them. We see it when he stops to converse with the Samaritan woman at the well where she went to draw water (cf. *Jn 4:5-7*). We see it when, in the darkness of night, he meets Nicodemus, who feared to be seen in his presence (cf. *Jn 3:1-2*).

We marvel when he allows his feet to be washed by a prostitute (cf. *Lk 7:36-50*), when he says to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you" (*Jn 8:11*), or again when he chides the disciples for their indifference and quietly asks the blind man on the roadside, "What do you want me to do for you?" (*Mk 10:51*). Christ shows that God is closeness, compassion and tender love.

36. Whenever Jesus healed someone, he preferred to do it, not from a distance but in close proximity: "He stretched out his hand and touched him" (*Mt* 8:3). "He touched her hand" (*Mt* 8:15). "He touched their eyes" (*Mt* 9:29). Once he even stopped to cure a deaf man with his own saliva (cf. *Mk* 7:33), as a mother would do, so that people would not think of him as removed from their lives. "The Lord knows the fine science of the caress. In his compassion, God does not love us with words; he comes forth to meet us and, by his closeness, he shows us the depth of his tender love". [27]

37. If we find it hard to trust others because we have been hurt by lies, injuries and disappointments, the Lord whispers in our ear: "Take heart, son!" (*Mt* 9:2), "Take heart, daughter!" (*Mt* 9:22). He encourages us to overcome our fear and to realize that, with him at our side, we have nothing to lose. To Peter, in his fright, "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him", saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (*Mt* 14:31). Nor should you be afraid. Let him draw near and sit at your side. There may be many people we distrust, but not him. Do not hesitate because of your sins. Keep in mind that many sinners "came and sat with him" (*Mt* 9:10), yet Jesus was scandalized by none of them. It was the religious élite that complained and treated him as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (*Mt* 11:19). When the Pharisees criticized him for his closeness to people deemed base or sinful, Jesus replied, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (*Mt* 9:13).

38. That same Jesus is now waiting for you to give him the chance to bring light to your life, to raise you up and to fill you with his strength. Before his death, he assured his disciples, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me" (*Jn* 14:18-19). Jesus always finds a way to be present in your life, so that you can encounter him.

Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, of the Holy Father Francis, on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ, nn. 32-38.

Full text can be found here:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>

Experiences

The Gospel lived: “Lord, it is good for us to be here” (Mt. 17:4)

The Gospels tell how the disciples experienced unforgettable experiences of joy and light with Jesus, and treasured them, drawing strength from them in times of difficulty. We too may have experienced God's presence and action in our lives with wonder and excitement. It gives us joy to discover His intervention of Love in our daily lives. This is what happened in Peru in a center that has been working for years welcoming and accompanying migrants, mainly coming from Venezuela.

At the right time

One day a co-worker of our center received a gift of a pair of new sports shoes size 10. But who could have possibly needed them? That same day we learned that a 14-year-old boy we know needed shoes in that size! His mother, a friend of ours, was in the hospital at the time. Her daughter had also visited our center that day and we had learned that they needed clothes and medicine. She made us understand that she needs a cell phone to keep in touch with her mother in the hospital. And...we had received a phone a few days earlier! It is impressive to see how there is always “Someone” who provides us with just those *ad hoc* things we can donate!

A bed in two minutes

We were at the final goodbyes of a Sunday spent “as a family” (so to speak because we were surrounded by hundreds of people) with activities to raise funds for our youth. A Venezuelan friend had introduced me to an 18-year-old young man – Jesús. He had told me some of what he had experienced having left Venezuela alone at the age of 16. Two years of adventures, enough to make an action film, with many moments of suspense. For 15 days he had been in Peru. Talking with him I discovered that he was sleeping on a mat on the floor! Diligently he had planned with his first paycheck (he had in fact found a job in Peru immediately) to solve the problem of documents and then think about the bed. At that time, I had no solutions, but we promised to stay in touch. Shortly after saying goodbye to him, I met one of our co-workers who, without knowing anything about Jesús’ needs, asked me, “So what do we do with that bed?” “But how? Do you still have it?” I was surprised. “Yes!” he said to me. I immediately called back Jesús who was leaving the Center. He joined us immediately, and upon hearing that there was already a bed for him, his eyes lit up. It had not been two minutes since I told him I would try to find a solution!

Experiences

Free ultrasound scans

Many of the migrants who arrive at our center need medical care and sometimes even diagnostic tests. Recently, another blessing from Heaven occurred: a medical center near us offered us the possibility of performing ultrasound scans for free. They want to give this opportunity to those who do not have the possibility of paying for these examinations. Truly, a gift for so many of our patients.

Silvano R. – Perù

Originally published here:

<https://www.focolare.org/en/the-gospel-lived-lord-it-is-good-for-us-to-be-here-mt-174/>