

*"I am with you always, to the end of the age"
(Mt 28: 20).*

Matthew ends his gospel with the final events of Jesus' life on earth. Jesus has risen from the dead, having fulfilled his mission. He had proclaimed God's healing love for all and reopened the way that leads to fraternity in human history. Matthew sees Jesus as Emmanuel, 'God with us', the one promised by the prophets and awaited by the People of Israel.

Before returning to the Father, he gathered together his disciples, the group who had shared in his mission most closely. He entrusted to them the continuation of his work. It was a tough assignment! But Jesus reassured them. He would not leave them on their own. Indeed, he promised to be with them every day, to support, accompany and encourage them 'to the end of the age'.

With his help, they will bear witness to their encounter with him, to his word and his acts of welcome and mercy towards all. In this way, many others will meet him and together form the new people of God, founded upon the commandment of love.

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We could say that God's joy is to be with me, with you, with us every day to the end of our individual lives and to the end of all human history.

But is this really so? Can we truly encounter him?

'He is around the corner; he is next to me and to you. He hides himself in the poor, in the despised, in little ones, in the sick, in the person seeking advice, in the one deprived of freedom. He is in the ugly and the marginalized... As he said, "I was hungry and you gave me food..." (Mt 25:35). Let's learn how to find him where he is.' (Chiara Lubich – Word of Life for June 1982)

He is in his Word, which, if put into practice, renews our lives. All over the world he is in the Eucharist. He also works through his ministers, the servants of his people. He is present when we bring about agreement among us (see Mt 18:20). Our prayer to the Father then becomes more effective, and we find light for our daily decisions.

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How much hope this promise gives us! It encourages us to find him as we go along our way. Let's open our hearts, and our arms too, to be welcoming and to share. Let's do this personally and as communities, in our families and our churches, in our

work places and on festive occasions, in our civil and religious associations. We will meet Jesus, and he will amaze us with joy and with light, the signs of his presence.

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If we start each morning thinking, 'Today I want to discover where God wants to meet me!', we too will have wonderful experiences like this:

'My husband's mother felt deeply about her son, even to the point of being jealous. A year ago she was diagnosed with cancer, and her only daughter was not able to give her the level of care and help she needed. In that period, I went to a summer gathering of the Focolare called a Mariapolis, where I encountered God-Love in a way that changed my life. The first fruit of this conversion was the decision to ask my mother-in-law to come and live with us, setting aside all my fears about it. The light that had been lit in my heart made me see her with new eyes. Now I knew that it was Jesus I cared for and helped in her.

To my surprise, she responded to all I did with just as much love.

Months of sacrifice went by, but when my mother-in-law passed gently on to the next life, she left us all with a deep sense of peace.

It was around that time that I realized I was pregnant, after nine years of waiting! This child was the tangible sign of God's love for us.'

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