

August 2020

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rm 8:35)

Paul’s letter to the Romans is extraordinarily rich in content. It speaks of the power of the Gospel in the lives of all those who welcome it, and of the revolutionary effect its message has: God’s love sets us free!

Paul has experienced this and wants to bear witness to it, both through his words and his actions. His faithfulness to God’s call will lead him all the way to Rome, where he will give his life for the Lord.

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Shortly before this, Paul had affirmed, “God is for us” (Rm 8:31). For Paul, God’s love for us is like the faithful love of a spouse who would never abandon his bride — a bride he has freely chosen and eternally bound himself to, for whom he has given his life.

God is not a judge, but rather one who takes upon himself our defense.

Therefore, nothing can separate us from God, encountered through Jesus, his beloved son.

To the love of God, there is no difficulty — large or small, within or around us — that is an insurmountable obstacle. In fact, Paul says that whoever puts their faith in God in such situations and entrusts themselves to him conquers all.

In the world today there are people of power who dominate with arrogance, whereas the Gospel proposes active meekness and openness toward the ideas of others.

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A suggestion made by Focolare’s founder Chiara Lubich in August 1987 may help us put this phrase into practice.

“Certainly we believe, or at least say we believe, in God’s love,” she wrote. “Nonetheless, our faith ... is often not as courageous as it should be ... when faced with difficulties, such as during times of illness or temptation. It is very easy to allow ourselves to be overcome by doubt. ‘Does God really love me?’

“However, we should not doubt. We should trustingly abandon ourselves to the Father’s love, without hesitation. We should overcome the darkness and emptiness that we may feel by embracing the cross, then do all we can to love God, by doing his will and loving our neighbor.

“If we do this, with Jesus, we will feel the strength and joy of the resurrection. We will experience for ourselves how true it is that everything changes if we abandon ourselves to his love: everything that is negative becomes positive, death becomes the source of life, and a marvelous light will break through the shadows.”

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Even amid the darkness of war, by continuing to believe in God’s love, glimmers of humanity can break through a tragic situation.

“Here in the Balkans, our country has been caught up in an absurd armed conflict. Soldiers who had previously been on the front line were joining my squadron. They were often traumatized because they had witnessed the death of their relatives and friends. The only thing I could do was try to love them one by one.

“During the quieter moments — which were very rare — I used to talk to them about what they were feeling. Even though many of them were not religious believers, we even spoke about God.

“At one point, I suggested asking a priest to come and celebrate Mass. They all agreed and some of them went to confession for the first time in 20 years. I feel I can say that God was with us.”

Letizia Magri