

Words that bring hope

December 2022

Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock (Is 26:4).

The Word of Life that we want to live this month is taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah, a wide ranging and rich text which is very dear to the Christian tradition. It contains greatly loved writings, such as the announcement of Emmanuel, 'the God with us' ⁱ and the figure of the Suffering Servant ⁱⁱ who forms the background to the accounts of Jesus' passion and death.

This verse is part of a song of thanksgiving that the prophet puts on the lips of the people of Israel when, having overcome the terrible ordeal of exile, they finally return to Jerusalem. His words bring hope because God's presence beside Israel is faithful and unwavering as a rock; God himself will sustain every effort made by the people as they rebuild their civil, political and religious life.

While the city believed to be 'lofty' will be razed to the ground ⁱⁱⁱ because it was not built according to God's plan of love, the one built on the rock will enjoy peace and prosperity.

How can we overcome the temptation to let ourselves be brought down by the difficulties we face nowadays which can make us close in on ourselves and cultivate feelings of suspicion and mistrust towards others?

As Christians, the answer is certainly to 'rebuild' with courage by firstly trusting in our relationship with God who in Jesus, became our neighbour as we journey through life, even when we travel along the darkest, narrowest, steepest and most winding pathways.

But this faith does not mean being passive. On the contrary, it asks us to be active, creative and responsible protagonists in building a 'new city', founded on the commandment of mutual love. This city has open doors and welcomes everyone, especially 'the poor and oppressed' ^{iv} who have always been the Lord's favourites.

As we travel along this path, we will enjoy the companionship of the many men and women who hold dear the universal values of solidarity and the dignity of every person, as well as respect for creation, our 'common home'.

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In the Spanish village of Aljucer, an entire community is committed to building fraternal relationships based upon open and inclusive forms of participation.

They tell us: 'In the summer of 2008, we set up a cultural association, with the aim of carrying out activities of various kinds, both of our own initiative as well as in collaboration with other associations in the area. Our goal was to promote spaces for dialogue and international humanitarian projects.'

For example, every year since it started, we have promoted a solidarity dinner for the Fraternity with Africa project, to finance scholarships for young Africans committed to working in their country for at least five years. These are dinners that bring together about two hundred people and are supported by shopkeepers and other groups.

We have also been very happy to work with another association for many years. Together we organise an annual event which is open to people from the worlds of culture, music, painting and literature, as well as representatives engaged in politics, business and medicine. It is an opportunity for all of them to share experiences from their working lives and the deeper reasons for the choices they have made.’^v

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We are looking forward to Christmas. Let us already begin to prepare for it by welcoming Jesus in his word. He is also the rock on which to build the city for all people: ‘Let us be the very embodiment of this city. Let us make it our own. Let us experience the power it unleashes in us and around us, if we live according to the Word. Let us fall in love with the Gospel to the point of allowing ourselves to be transformed by it and thus enable it to overflow onto others... It will no longer be we who live: Christ will be formed in us. We will be free from ourselves, from our limitations, from all that enslaves us. In addition, we will see the revolution of love explode – the revolution that Jesus who lives in us, will kindle in society around us.’^{vi}

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ⁱ Cf. Is 7:14 & Mt 1:23.

ⁱⁱ Cf. Is 52:13-53:12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Is 26:5

^{iv} Cf. Is. 26:6

^v Experience taken from www.focolare.org.

^{vi} C. Lubich, *Word of Life* September 2006,