

## Chiara, spouse of “Jesus forsaken”



The best way to reach into the depths of her soul and understand the abundance of light, joy, and fruits that characterised her life, is to see her as she herself wished to be remembered: “the spouse of Jesus forsaken”, the spouse of Jesus on the cross who felt forsaken even by God.

Chiara herself said this in one of the monthly conference calls in which she gathered together the focolare communities around the world as one global family.

*“I would like to be remembered solely as the spouse of Jesus forsaken”. She added: “The fact that it might be possible to define my life in this way (may God help me!) seemed wonderful to me, even though it is so high and even though it is still ‘what I must become’. Yet I perceived it as my vocation”.*

History and the Church will decide whether Chiara was right and if she reached this goal, but many signs tell us that her “marriage with Jesus forsaken” was the golden thread woven through her entire life and that gave it meaning.



Watercolor by Annemarie Baumgarten

While she was still young, she confided in her mother a prayer that she often said to Jesus in the depths of her heart, *“Grant that I may experience something of your sufferings, especially a little of your terrible forsakenness, so that I can be close to you and more like you, who in your infinite Love have chosen me and taken me with you”*.

In the summer of 1949 Igino Giordani asked to make a vow of obedience to Chiara. She transformed his request into a plea to Jesus in the Eucharist to establish between them the kind of relationship He wanted, and said to Giordani, *“You know my life: I am nothing. In fact, I want to live like Jesus Forsaken, who made himself completely nothing”*.

The pact then sealed in Jesus in the Eucharist marked the start of a period filled with such abundant light that Chiara called it Paradise '49. When it drew to an end and Giordani convinced her to leave that heaven and go back to the city where humankind was awaiting her, what came direct from her heart was her most ardent declaration of love, *“I have only one spouse on earth: Jesus forsaken”*.

In 1980, when thoughts of death troubled her, she asked Jesus to give her a decisive push forward to be able to end her life well. He reminded her how she had begun: seeing and loving

no one else but Him forsaken. It seemed to Chiara that he said to her, *“Look, I have waited 20 centuries to reveal myself to you in this way; if you don’t love me, who will love me?”*

And in the year 2,000, when she wrote a book summing up her life story, she described it as being, *“Like a love letter to Jesus forsaken”* explaining, *“Naturally, I will not be able to express all that I feel or ought to feel for the one whose love I have often affirmed has given my life a second name: Thank You.”*

For decades Chiara saw the face of this her Spouse in her own personal sufferings and in all parts of humankind most struck by suffering, and sought to console him. Finally, during the last three years of her life, she was completely united to Him in a dark night that was so deep she described it as the “night of God”. *“God has gone far away. He, too, goes out towards the far horizon of the sea.” We had followed him up to that point, but at the far edge of the sea, he disappears beyond the horizon, and one can no longer see him at all. At least this is how the person feels. Therefore, while we had believed previously that the nights of the spirit ended by embracing Jesus Forsaken, we realize that in this instance we enter into Jesus Forsaken.”*

*Michel Vandeleene*