June Word of Life

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses. (Acts 1:8)

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The Acts of the Apostles written by the evangelist Luke opens with the promise Jesus made to the apostles before his return to the Father: God will give them the strength they need to continue proclaiming and building his kingdom in history. It does not mean they will have the power to organize a military coup or set up political and social groups that work in opposition to one another. Instead, Jesus' words refer to the profound work of God's spirit in the hearts of those who have received him, making them become "new people". Shortly afterwards, the Holy Spirit was to descend on the disciples who were gathered together with Mary. The disciples would then spread Jesus' message starting from the holy city of Jerusalem to the "ends of the earth".

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The apostles and indeed all Jesus' disciples are sent as "witnesses". In fact, once Christians discover through Jesus what it means to be a child of God, they also realize they have been "sent out". Our vocation and identity as children of God are fulfilled in mission, in going out towards other people, seeing them as brothers and sisters.

We are all called to be apostles who bear witness with our lives and then, if necessary, do so with words too. We become witnesses when we make Jesus' lifestyle our own. This means having an attitude of acceptance and sharing towards the people we meet every day: in the family or at work, when studying or relaxing. It means having at heart the Father's plan for all people - to live as one family.

Marilena and Silvano told us their experience: 'When we got married, we wanted our family to be open to others. One of the first experiences happened just before Christmas. Instead of hurriedly wishing people happy Christmas as we came out of church, we decided to visit our neighbours bringing them small gifts. They were all surprised and pleased, especially one family that everyone else avoided. They opened up to us, telling us about their difficulties and the fact

that no-one had come to their home for many years. We spent over two hours with them and were moved by how happy they were.

Little by little, just by making the effort to be open, we got to know many people. It wasn't always easy because if someone came round unexpectedly we had to change our plans. However, we didn't want to miss any opportunity to develop relationships. Once we were given a cake, and decided to share it with a lady who had brought us toys to send to Brazil. She was very happy and we had a chance to meet her family. As we were leaving, she said, "I really wish I had the courage to go and visit other people!"'

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All Christians receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when they are baptized. But the Spirit also speaks in the conscience of all those who sincerely seek what is good and true. That is why all of us can make room in our lives for the spirit of God and allow ourselves to be guided.

How can we recognize and listen to the Holy Spirit?

This thought by Chiara Lubich can help us: "The Holy Spirit dwells in us as in a temple, giving us light and guidance. He is the spirit of truth who enables us to understand the words of Jesus, making them come alive and showing their relevance. The Holy Spirit helps us fall in love with wisdom and suggests what we might say and how to say it. The Holy Spirit of Love kindles God's own love in our hearts, enabling us to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, and love the people we meet on our journey. He is the Spirit of fortitude who gives us the courage and strength to be consistent with the Gospel and always bear witness to the truth. [...]

"God's love in our hearts can reach out to many other people with whom we can share our discovery. … The "ends of the earth" are not only geographical. They can be found, for example, in people close to us who haven't had the joy of truly knowing the Gospel. Our witness must reach that far. [...] Out of love for Jesus, we can "make ourselves one" with everybody, forgetting ourselves so that they feel the gentle power of God's love in us. Then they too will want to "make themselves one" with us, in an exchange of ideals and projects, help and affection. Only then can we speak and that too will be a gift, in mutual love".

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