

**'As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you'**  
(Isa 66:13)

Who hasn't seen a crying child throw itself into its mother's arms? Whatever the matter is, important or not, the mother dries its tears, covers it with tenderness and, little by little, it starts to smile again. Her presence and loving kindness are enough. God behaves like this with us, and compares himself to a mother.

These words are how God speaks to his people on their return from exile in Babylon. They had seen their homes and the Temple demolished and had been deported to a foreign land where they felt lost and grief-stricken; now, returning to their homeland, the people had to rebuild from the rubble of destruction.

The tragedy Israel had lived through is repeated by many war-torn peoples, victims of terrorist atrocities or inhuman exploitation. Houses and streets ripped apart, sites symbolic of a cultural identity razed to the ground, goods pillaged, places of worship destroyed. How many people kidnapped, millions forced to flee, thousands dying in deserts or at sea! It looks like an apocalypse.

This Word of Life is an invitation to believe in God's loving action also where his presence is not felt. It is a proclamation of hope. He is beside the one who suffers persecution, injustice, exile. He is with us, with our family, with our people. He knows our personal pain and that of the whole human race. He became one of us, to the point of dying on a cross. This is why he knows how to understand us and comfort us. Just like a mother who takes her child onto her lap and comforts it.

We need to open our eyes and hearts to 'see him'. To the extent that we experience the tenderness of his love, we will be able to transmit it to those who live in pain and under trial, so that we become instruments of consolation. Paul, too, suggests it to the Corinthians: 'console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God' (2 Cor. 1:4).

This was also a deeply personal and specific experience of Chiara Lubich: 'Lord, give me all who are lonely ... I have felt in my heart the passion that fills your heart for all of the forsakenness in which the whole of the world is drifting. I love everyone who is sick and alone. Who consoles their weeping? Who mourns their slow death? Who presses to their own heart, the heart in despair? My God, let me be in this world the tangible sacrament of your love; let me be your arms that press to themselves and consume in love all the loneliness of the world.'

*Edited by Fabio Ciardi*

*This Word of Life was chosen by an ecumenical group in Germany. We are living it together with brothers and sisters from many different Churches. Our hope is that our lives throughout the year may be accompanied by the promise from God that it contains.*