

'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'

Why are these words of Jesus so dear to us and why do they come back time and again in the Words of Life we choose each month? Perhaps it's because they are the heart of the Gospel. They are what the Lord will ask us when in the end we find ourselves in front of him. On these words will hinge the most important exam of our lives; and we can get ready for it every single day.

The Lord will ask whether we have given food and drink to whoever was hungry and thirsty, whether we have welcomed the stranger, whether we have clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner... It is a question of little acts, which yet have the value of eternity. Nothing is small if done for love, if done for him.

Jesus indeed did not just come close to the poor and marginalized; he healed the sick and comforted the suffering. But he loved them with a preferential love, to the point of calling them members of his family, of identifying himself with them in a mysterious solidarity.

Today too Jesus is still present in whoever suffers injustice and violence, in whoever is looking for work or living in a risky situation, in whoever is forced to leave his or her homeland because of war. How many people are in pain around us for all sorts of other reasons and call out, even without words, for our help! They are Jesus who asks for concrete love, a love capable of inventing new 'works of mercy' in keeping with new needs.

No one is excluded. If a person who is old or sick is Jesus, how can we not seek what could give the necessary relief? If I teach my language to an immigrant child, I teach Jesus. If I help my mother clean the house, I help Jesus. If I bring hope to a prisoner or consolation to someone who is afflicted or forgiveness to someone who has hurt me, I build a relationship with Jesus.

And every time the fruit will be not only giving joy to the other person, but I too will feel a great joy. By giving we receive, we sense an inner fullness, we feel happy because, even though we do not know it, we have met Jesus. The other person, as Chiara Lubich wrote, is the archway we pass under to reach God.

This is how she recalls the impact of this Word of Life from the first moments of her experience:

'The whole of our old way of thinking about our neighbours and loving them collapsed. If Christ was in some way in everyone, we could not discriminate, we could not have preferences. Our human notions that classified others were thrown up into the air: compatriot or foreigner, old or young, good-looking or ugly, nice or nasty, rich or poor, Christ was behind each one, Christ was in each one. And in reality each brother or sister was 'another Christ'...

Living like this we realized that our neighbour was for us the path to God. Or rather, our brother or sister was like an archway that we had to go under to meet God.

We experienced this from the earliest days. What union with God in the evening, when we prayed, or when we recollected ourselves after having loved him all day in our brothers and sisters! Who gave us that consolation, that inner union that was so new, so heavenly, if not Christ who lived the 'give, and it will be given to you' of his Gospel? We had loved him all day in our brothers and sisters and here he was now loving us.'

Fabio Ciardi

Mariapolis 2016

*Dates: From Wednesday 6th July
to Sunday 10th July 2016*

Place: Gold Coast Hotel, Dungarvan, Co Waterford

For more information visit the website:

www.focolare.org/Ireland