

*"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
(John 20:21).*

In the days following Jesus' crucifixion, his disciples stayed indoors, out of fear and confusion. They had followed him in his travels through Palestine, where he proclaimed God's tender love for each and every person. Jesus had been sent by the Father to give witness to this love, but also to show humanity the path to God. The God he revealed is the Trinity, a God who is communion of love in himself and who wants to gather all people into this embrace. During the time of Jesus' mission, many people saw, heard and experienced his good works, his words of welcome, forgiveness and hope. Then, he was condemned and crucified. This is the context in which St John's Gospel recounts Jesus' appearing to his disciples after rising on the third day, in order to send them out to continue his mission.

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He seemed to be saying, 'Do you remember that I shared my life with you and how I satisfied your hunger and thirst for justice and peace? Did you see the healing of hearts and physical ailments in so many marginalized and outcast people? Did you see how I defended the dignity of the poor, widows and foreigners? Now, you must continue: proclaim the Gospel to everyone. Tell them God wants all peoples to come to know him; and that we are all brothers and sisters.' Each person, created in the image and likeness of God who is Love, longs for this encounter. All cultures and societies strive to build relationships of community. Yet how challenging it is to reach this goal – and how many difficulties and obstacles there are on the way! Despite our deepest aspirations, we find ourselves face to face with our own limitations, our narrow-mindedness and fears, our mistrust and judgements of others. Yet the Lord, with great trust, continues to invite us as he did in the past:

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How can we respond to such a bold invitation? Doesn't the mission of creating fraternity in a fractured world seem like fighting a losing battle? On our own, we will never manage. That is why Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit, as a special gift, who sustains our efforts to love each person, even enemies.

'The Holy Spirit, given to us through Baptism [...], is the spirit of love and unity who made all believers one in the risen Lord and with one another, overcoming every difference of race, culture and social class [...]. Our selfishness builds barriers of isolation and excludes those who are different from us. [...] So let us try, by listening to the Holy Spirit's voice, to grow in this fellowship [...] overcoming the seeds of division carried within us.' (Chiara Lubich – Word of Life for January 1994)

This month, with the Holy Spirit's help, we too can remember and practice these words of love in every opportunity we have to interact with others, no matter what it is. We can be welcoming; we can listen, empathize, dialogue and encourage; we can include others, care for them, appreciate them and forgive. In this way, we accept Jesus' invitation to continue his mission and become channels of the life He has given us.

This was the experience of a group of Buddhist monks visiting the international town of Loppiano, in Italy, where its 800 inhabitants strive to live the Gospel faithfully. They were deeply touched by experiencing Gospel love for the first time. One of them said, "I put my dusty shoes outside the door: in the morning I found them clean. I put my dirty clothes outside the door: in the morning, I found them washed and ironed. Others knew that I was cold, because I was from South-East Asia: they raised the heating and brought me blankets... One day, I asked, 'Why are you doing this?' 'Because we love you, because we love you very much', was the answer." This experience paved the way for genuine dialogue between Buddhists and Christians.

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