

**"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (1Jn 4:16)**

"God is love" is perhaps the most luminous definition of God found in Scripture. It appears only twice and is found in this text which is a letter or perhaps an exhortation that echoes the message of the Fourth Gospel. The author is in fact a disciple who bears witness to the spiritual tradition of the apostle John. He is writing to a first century Christian community which, unfortunately, is already facing a very difficult trial, namely discord and division both in terms of faith and of witness.

God is love: in himself he lives the fullness of communion as Trinity and this love overflows, onto his creatures. To those who accept him he gives the power to become his children, with his own DNA, capable of loving. His love is gratuitous and frees us from all fear and timidity.

In order for the promise of reciprocal communion – we in God and God in us - to be fulfilled, it is essential to "remain" in this same active, dynamic, creative love. This is why Jesus' disciples were called to love one another, to give their lives and to share their goods with anyone in need. With this love, the community remained united, prophetic and faithful.

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This is a strong and clear proclamation for us too. Nowadays we sometimes feel overwhelmed by unpredictable events that are difficult to control, such as the pandemic or other personal or collective tragedies. We may feel lost and frightened and be tempted to close in on ourselves, to build walls to protect ourselves from those who seem to threaten our security, rather than build bridges to meet each other.

Is it possible to continue to believe in God's love in these circumstances? Is it possible to continue to love?

Josiane from Lebanon was far from her country when she heard about the terrible explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020. She confided to those who, like her, live the word of life: "I felt pain, anger, anguish, sadness and bewilderment in my heart. I kept asking if all that Lebanon had been through already was not enough? I thought of the neighbourhood where I was born and grew up, now razed to the ground; the relatives and friends who were dead, injured or displaced; the buildings, schools and hospitals that I know very well, all destroyed.

I tried to stay close to my mother and brothers and to answer the many messages from so many other people. I wanted to support them with affection, prayer and by listening to everyone as they spoke of the suffering that had opened up. I wanted to believe - and I DO BELIEVE - that these encounters with those who suffer are a call to respond with the love that God has placed in our hearts. In spite of the tears, I discovered a light in the actions of many Lebanese people: it was often the younger generation who rose up, looked around and brought help to those in need. I felt a great sense of hope seeing the young people who are willing to seriously engage in politics

because they are convinced that the solution is the path of true dialogue, of harmony and of discovering that we are brothers and sisters."

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Focolare founder, Chiara Lubich, offers us a valuable suggestion to help us live this word of the Gospel *"We can no longer separate the cross from glory, we cannot separate the Crucified Lord from the Risen One. They are two aspects of the same mystery of God who is Love. ... Let us try to fulfil what God wants from us, wherever we are: ... let us try to love the people around us. If we do this, the effect will be surprising and more than we could hope for: our soul will be filled with peace, love and even pure joy and light. ... And, enriched by this experience, we will be able to help all our brothers and sisters more effectively to find happiness amidst their tears and to transform all that is troubling them into serenity. In this way we will become instruments of joy for many people, instruments of that happiness for which every human heart yearns."*

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