

April Word of Life

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (Jn 10:11)

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Images of biblical culture and references to the slow pace of nomadic and pastoral life seem far removed from our daily needs for efficiency and competitiveness. Yet we too sometimes feel the need to pause, to find a place to rest and to encounter someone who welcomes us just as we are.

Jesus presents himself as the one who, more than anyone else, is ready to welcome us and offer us rest: indeed, he is ready to give his life for each one of us.

This word of life is taken from a long passage of John's Gospel in which Jesus assures us that he is the presence of God in the story of each person, just as the prophets promised to the people of Israel.

Jesus is the shepherd and guide who knows and loves his sheep; that is, he knows and loves his weary and sometimes lost people. He is not a stranger who ignores the needs of the flock, nor a thief who comes to steal, nor an outlaw who kills and scatters, nor a mercenary who acts only out of self-interest.

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The flock that Jesus considers to be his own certainly consists of his disciples and all those who have already received the gift of baptism, but there are others too. Jesus knows every human creature; he calls them by name and tenderly cares for each one.

He is the true shepherd who not only guides us towards life and searches for us whenever we go astray but he has also already given his life in order to accomplish God's will. This will is for us to experience the fullness of personal communion with him and, though mortally wounded by sin, to rediscover our brother and sisterhood.

Each of us can try to recognize God's voice, hear his word addressed to us and trustingly follow it. Above all, we can be sure that we are loved, understood and forgiven unconditionally by the one who tells us:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

When we experience, even in a small way, this silent but powerful presence in our lives, the desire begins to burn in our hearts to share this presence, to grow in our capacity to care for

and welcome other people. Following Jesus' example, we can try to know and better understand the members of our family, our colleagues and our neighbours: we can begin to allow other people's needs to disturb our peaceful lives.

Love can give us great imagination: we can find ways of involving others in what we do and new ways of engaging with them. In our own small way, we can contribute to building fraternal and open communities that are capable of patiently and courageously accompanying many people on their journey through life.

Meditating on this same phrase from the Gospel, Chiara Lubich wrote: *"Jesus will openly say of himself: 'No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15:13). And he lives his offering to the full. His love is a self-giving love, that is, a love which contains a real willingness to offer, to give one's life. God also asks for acts of love from us that have the measure of his love (at least in intention and decision) ... Only a love like this can be called a Christian love. It is not any old love. It is not a veneer of love, but a love so great as to put its life on the line... Acting in this way, our lives as Christians will take a qualitative leap forward, a great qualitative leap. And then we will see men and women from every corner of the earth gather around Jesus, attracted by his voice."*

Letizia Magri