

April Word of Life

‘Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.’ (Col. 3:2)

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The first Christian communities had only just formed but they were already experiencing internal disagreements due to false interpretations of the Gospel message. Paul, who was in prison, learned of these problems in Colossus and wrote to this community.

This month's Word of Life can be better understood if we read the whole sentence of which it forms a part. ‘Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God!’ (Col. 3:13)

To overcome such disagreements Paul invites us to turn our thoughts and our whole being to Christ who is risen. Indeed, in baptism, we have died to ourselves and risen in Christ. We can live ‘in the already and not yet’ of this new life.

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Obviously, the possibility of sharing in this new life in Christ is not obtained once and for all but must be continually sought during the challenging journey that lasts for the whole of existence. It means directing our lives towards what is ‘above’. Christ brought the life of heaven to earth, and his Easter is the beginning of the new creation, of a new humanity. Choosing ‘what is above’ seems to be the logical consequence of deciding to live the Gospel: it is a choice that totally changes our mentality and overturns the order and the agenda that the world proposes. It frees us from external conditioning and makes us experience a radical change. Paul does not devalue the ‘things of the earth’ because through the incarnation of the Son of God, heaven touched earth, and everything has been renewed.

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What are the ‘things that are above’? Chiara Lubich writes that they are ‘those values that Jesus brought to earth, and which distinguish his followers. They are love, harmony, peace, forgiveness, fairness, purity, honesty, justice, etc. They are all those virtues and riches that the Gospel offers. With them and by them, Christians maintain the reality of sharing in Christ’s resurrection.

‘And how do we keep our hearts anchored in heaven while living in the midst of the world? By letting ourselves be guided by the thoughts and feelings of Jesus whose inner gaze was always turned to the Father and whose life always reflected the law of heaven which is the law of love.’

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The presence of Christians in the world opens itself courageously to the new life of Easter. Christians are new women and men who are not of the world, but who live in the world with all its current difficulties. This is what was said of the first Christians, 'They dwell on earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven... Just as the soul is in the body, so Christians are in the world.' (Diognetus 5, 5-6 Writings of the Apostolic Fathers)

The evangelical and courageous choice of a worker who helped a colleague, who had just lost his job, led to a chain of fraternal actions by people who were moved by his example.

'In the factory, they were handing out letters of dismissal and one was addressed to Giorgio. I knew about his difficult economic situation and so I invited him to return with me to the personnel office: "I am better off than him," I said. "My wife has a job: you can fire me instead." The boss promised to review the case. When we left, Giorgio hugged me and was deeply moved. People heard about what had happened and two other workers, in roughly the same financial situation as me, offered to take the place of two other men who had been laid off. The management was forced to rethink its methods of choosing who to dismiss. The local pastor heard about this and, without using names, referred to it in his Sunday sermon. The following day, he told me that two women students had given him all their savings for the workers in need saying, "We too want to imitate what that worker has done"' (B. S. - Brazil).

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