

November Word of Life

You are all children of light and children of the day; we do not belong to the night, nor to darkness (1 Thess 5:5).

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Light has always symbolized life. Every day we await the dawn as the messenger of a new beginning. The theme of light has often featured in the histories of peoples, and in ancient religions. Jewish tradition celebrates *Hannukah*, the festival of lights, which commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem and liberation from pagan cults. Some Muslims light candles on the day of the prophet's birth, known as *Mawlid* in Arabic or *Mevlid Kandili* in Turkish. *Diwali*, the Hindu festival of lights, symbolises the victory of good over evil. It is also celebrated in other Indian religions.

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the light that illuminates the darkness of the world. Light, therefore, is charged with strong symbolism representing as it does a presence of the divine and a gift for humanity and the earth.

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But what are the characteristics of the children of the day? One of them is 'not belonging to the night, nor to darkness'. The decision to stay awake means renouncing sleep and apathy. It means choosing to love and to live each moment fully.

In this letter, the apostle's pressing invitation to the Thessalonian community is to keep watch together, giving up all kinds of sluggishness and indifference. At a time when humanity is particularly in need of light, those who do not belong to the night have the task of bringing greater clarity to all human relationships. They do this by continuously giving of themselves so that with faith, love and hope, they make the Risen one visible, as Paul writes (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8).

Furthermore, we need to cultivate a closer and more sincere relationship with God by searching our hearts deeply and finding moments of dialogue in prayer and by living out his word so as to make this light shine out.

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Sometimes we can get into the habit of living in the darkness of our hearts. We can be happy with many false lights and the world's various promises of happiness. But God always calls us to let his light shine within us and to look attentively at people and events so as to draw out from them tapestries of light.

It takes an effort to continually choose to start over and to turn from darkness to light. Chiara Lubich wrote, 'The Christian cannot escape from the world and hide or consider religion to be a private affair. He or she lives in the world because each person has a responsibility, a mission, to be the light that illuminates. You, too, have this task, and if you do not do this, you are as ineffective as salt that has lost its flavour or light that has become shadow.' [...] 'The task of all Christians is, therefore, to let this light shine through them and be the 'signs' of this presence of God among all people.'

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God is light and He can be found by those who seek him with a sincere heart. No matter what happens, we will never be separated from his love because we are his children. If we are sure of this we will not be surprised or crushed by upsetting events.

This year's earthquake in Turkey and Syria, which claimed more than 50,000 victims, turned the lives of millions of people upside down. Those who survived the catastrophe found that entire communities there and in other countries have been points of light that worked to bring immediate aid and provide relief to those who have lost loved ones, homes ... everything.

Darkness can never overwhelm those who choose to live in the light and generate light. For us Christians, this means a life with Christ in our midst. His presence makes it possible to catch a glimpse of life that restores hope, allowing us to continue to dwell in God's love.

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