

May Word of Life

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (Jn 20:21)

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After giving an account of Jesus' terrible death on the cross and describing the disciples' fear and bewilderment, St John then proclaims something completely new. Jesus has risen from the dead and come back to his people! In fact, on Easter morning, the Risen Lord was seen and recognized by Mary Magdalene. That same evening, he showed himself to some other disciples, who had shut themselves indoors because they felt so confused and defeated.

Jesus went looking for them, wanting to see them again. The fact that they had betrayed him or run away from danger did not matter. He showed them the signs of his passion: his hands and side that had been pierced and wounded during his torment on the cross. His first words were a greeting of peace, a true gift that sank into their souls and transformed their lives.

That was how the disciples finally recognized him and were filled with joy. Being with their Lord and Master again, they felt healed, consoled and enlightened.

The Risen Jesus then gave this group of imperfect men a very demanding task: to go out into the streets to bring the news of the Gospel to the world, as he himself had done. It took courage on his part! In the same way as the Father has trusted him, Jesus trusted them completely.

Last of all, John adds that Jesus "breathed on them", which means that he shared his own inner strength with them, the same Spirit of love that renews hearts and minds.

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Jesus had experienced human life, knowing the joy of friendship and the pain of betrayal, the demands of work and the tiredness of travelling. He knows what we are made of and knows the limits, sufferings and failures that accompany us every day. Just as he did with the disciples in that darkened room, he continues to seek out each one of us in our darkness and narrow-mindedness. He goes on believing in us.

The Risen Jesus offers us the experience of new life and peace with him that we can share with others. He sends us out to witness to our having met him. This means 'going out' of ourselves, beyond our fragile sense of security and our limitations, to continue the mission he received from the Father: proclaiming that God is Love. In this way his mission is extended throughout the world and down through time.

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Chiara Lubich wrote a commentary on this Word of Life in May 2005: “Nowadays, words are not enough... The proclamation of the Gospel will be effective if it is based on testimonies such as those given by the first Christians who said, ‘We declare to you what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes.’ It will be effective if what was said of them can be said of us: ‘See how they love one another, and each one is ready to die for the others.’ It will be effective if our love is practical and we give food, clothing and shelter to those who need them; if we offer friendship to those who are alone and desperate, and support people in trying times. By living in this way, others will experience the wonder of knowing Jesus and, by becoming other Christs, will contribute to the continuation of his work.”

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We too can seek Jesus out in people who are locked in suffering and loneliness. We can be available to them as respectful companions on their life journey, travelling towards the peace that Jesus gives. An example of this is Maria Pia and her friends who work in a small centre in southern Italy helping migrants. The pain of war and violence that these people have experienced can be seen on their faces.

When asked: “What am I looking for?” Maria answered, “Jesus gives meaning to my life and I know I can recognize and meet him above all in brothers and sisters who are suffering the most. In my area these are the refugees. Through our association we offered courses in Italian and helped find houses and work, providing for their material needs. We asked if they also needed spiritual support and this was accepted gladly by the Orthodox women attending the Italian lessons. Some Baptist Christians then came to the reception centre and we agreed with the Baptist minister to bring them to church on Sunday, quite a distance away. This concrete love among Christians led to friendship that grew further through cultural meetings, seminars and concerts. We realised we are a ‘people’ who can seek and find new ways of being united in diversity, to witness to the Kingdom of God.”

Letizia Magri