

July Word of Life

“You received without payment; give without payment.” (Mt 10:8)

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In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus addresses these powerful words to his followers, to those he 'sends out'.

He had encountered a lost and suffering humanity and had felt compassion for them.

That is why, through the apostles, he wanted to extend his work of salvation, healing and liberation. They had gathered around him, heard his words and received a mission and purpose for their lives. They had then set out on this path: to bear witness to God's love for every person.

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But what did they receive 'without payment' that they ought to give back?

Through Jesus's words and deeds, through the choices he made and his whole life, the apostles experienced the mercy of God. Despite their weaknesses and limitations, they received the new law of love, of mutual acceptance.

Above all, they received the gift that God wants to give to all people: he himself; his being with them on the path of life; and his light to help them make their choices. These priceless gifts, which go far beyond our ability to repay, are given freely.

These gifts were given to the apostles but they are also given to all Christians, so that they can become channels of these same gifts for the people they meet day by day.

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In the Word of Life for October 2006 Chiara Lubich wrote:

“Throughout the Gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to give: to 'give to the poor' (Mk 10:21). 'Give to the one who asks of you and...to one who wants to borrow' (Mt 5:42). 'If anyone wants... your tunic, hand them your cloak as well' (Mt 5:40); to give without payment. Jesus was the first to give, restoring health to the sick, forgiving sinners and giving his life for us all.

To counteract our instinct to hoard, Jesus calls for generosity; to overcome our inclination to worry about our own needs. He shifts the focus to our neighbours, and in place of the culture of having, he puts the culture of giving.

This month's word of life can help us rediscover the value of everything we do. This might be household chores, factory work or farming. It might be office administration or school homework, or it might be our civic, political, and religious duties. Everything can be transformed into attentive and thoughtful service for others. Love will help us see what other people need, and love will show us how to respond creatively and generously.

What will be the outcome? Gifts will circulate, because love generates more love. Joy will be multiplied since, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35)."

This is exactly what happened to Vergence, a little girl from the Congo. She said, "On my way to school, I was really hungry. Then I met my uncle who gave me money to buy a sandwich, but a little further on I saw a very poor man. At once I thought of giving him the money. My friend, who was with me, told me not to do it and that I should think of myself. But I said to myself: I will find food tomorrow, but will he? So I gave him my sandwich money and I felt great joy in my heart."

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The logic of Jesus and of the Gospel is that we always receive in order to share and never hoard things for ourselves. It is also an invitation to all of us to recognize what we have received: energy, talents, skills and material goods, and put them at the service of others.

According to the economist Luigino Bruni, "Gratuitousness meaning 'being free of charge', is an attitude that can accompany any act. It is not that something has no value; quite the opposite. Gratuitousness does not mean that something costs nothing but rather it represents an infinite cost, to which we can only respond by doing the same ourselves."

Therefore, giving freely overcomes the logic of the market, of consumerism and individualism and opens us up to sharing, to social interaction, to a sense of family and the new culture of giving.

Our experience confirms that while selfless love is a real challenge, it is also one that has positive and unexpected consequences that spread throughout society.

This is what happened in the Philippines, through a project that began in 1983.

At the time, the political and social situation in the country was very difficult and many people were committed to finding positive solutions. A group of young people decided to make their contribution in a different way: they opened their cupboards and took out everything they no longer needed. They sold it all in a jumble sale and, with the little capital that they had raised, they opened a social centre called *Bukas Palad*, which means 'with open hands' in the local language. The sentence in the Gospel that inspired them was: "You received without payment; give without payment" (Mt 10:8)", and it became the project's motto from then on.

Some doctors joined in, offering their professional services without wanting anything in return, and there were many others who opened their hearts, their hands or the doors of their homes.

That was how a wide-ranging social action developed helping the poorest people. It still offers various types of service in a number of cities in the Philippines today. However, the most important goal that has been achieved and consolidated over the years is that of enabling those who receive help to become the very ones who free themselves from enslavement to poverty.

In fact, they rediscover their dignity as people and thus build relationships of esteem and solidarity. Their example and commitment helps many others to escape from poverty and take on responsibility for a new way of life for themselves and their families, for their neighbourhood and their communities, and for the world.

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