

*Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement,
on occasion of the beatification of Pope John Paul II*

A life for God and for us human beings

Joy and gratitude from the Focolare Movement for the beatification of John Paul II

The beatification of Pope John Paul II is by now imminent and together with the whole Church we feel enveloped by an immense joy and profound gratitude. Joy and gratitude for the gift She is giving to us in recognizing the holiness of this great Pope, expressed in his well-spent and consumed life, up to the last moment, for God and for us human beings.

The extraordinary richness of his teachings continues to amaze, as well as his witness of love which has aroused gratitude worldwide both in Christians and faithful of other religions, and in people with no religious faith.

On occasion of the 25th anniversary of his pontificate, he had confided to us the source from which everything derived: the intimate secret of that relationship – as successor of Peter – which connected him to Jesus: *«Twenty-five years ago I experienced the divine mercy in a particular way. Christ said also to me, as he once did to Peter: 'Do you love me more than these?' Every day in the depths of my heart the same dialogue takes place between Jesus and Peter. In the spirit, I fix my eyes on the benevolent gaze of the risen Christ. He, despite knowing my human frailty, encourages me to respond with trust like Peter: 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you'»*¹

Today, this event of the Church makes us penetrate into the dimension of that “something more” lived out by John Paul II day after day, with heroism.

Together with all the other Movements, we have experienced the special love of John Paul II in his recognition of the role they have in the Church, an expression of its Marian dimension. Already in 1987, in speaking to the Roman Curia, he had highlighted the importance of this dimension: *«The Church lives in this authentic 'Marian profile,' this 'Marian dimension' The Immaculate Mary precedes all the others, including Peter himself and the Apostles. ... This link between the two profiles of the Church, the Marian and the Petrine, is profound and complementary. This is so even though the Marian profile is anterior not only in God's design but also in time, as well as being supreme and pre-eminent, richer in personal and communitarian implications ...»*²

Opening wide the doors to the novelties brought about by the Holy Spirit in the historical meeting in St. Peter's Square of the ecclesial movements and new communities on the vigil of Pentecost 1998, John Paul II acknowledged that the two profiles *«are co-essential as it were to the Church's constitution. They contribute ... to the life, renewal and sanctification of God's People.»*³

Beyond the important public events, Chiara Lubich was connected to this great Pope by a personal and deep relationship: the private audiences, often granted with lunch invitations, his presence in many public events of the movement, personal letters and phone calls on special occasions, were *«milestones in our movement's history,»* urging Chiara to express herself like this in 2005, at the moment of his death: *«I too can personally bear witness to his saintliness.»*⁴ *«He made himself so 'nothing,' that sometimes, coming out of our audiences with him, we felt an intense direct union with God alone. Therefore the Pope led you to God, like a*

true mediator, annulling himself when he has reached this aim.»⁵ «We are filled with awe and gratitude for so great a love. At the same time, we are grateful to God for having been able to be close to him, to help him as sons and daughters, and, as a 'sister,' as he referred to me in his last letter.»⁶

«The Focolare Movement's experience,» wrote Chiara on that occasion «during these last 27 years is proof of that 'greater love' dwelling within John Paul II's heart. This 'greater' love of his called for our love in return; thus the Pope entered into the depths of each member of the movement's heart. Simple human words, therefore, cannot express who he was for us.»⁷

How can we forget the visit of the Holy Father to the international Centre of the Movement at Rocca di Papa on August 19, 1984? On that occasion he explicitly acknowledged the presence of a charism in Chiara's spiritual experience. He affirmed: *«In the Church's history there have been many radicalisms of love There is also your radicalism of love, of Chiara, of the focolarini Love opens the way. My wish is that this way, thanks to you, may always be more open for the Church!»⁸*

And how can we forget some of his expressions about us? During his speech at the Familyfest in Rome, on May 3, 1981, he improvised saying: *«Your spirituality is open, positive, optimistic, serene and conquering... You have even conquered the Pope... I said that I wish all of you to be Church. Now I want to say that I wish the Church be you.»⁹* And in 1983, on March 20th, during the New Humanity Day: *«Many times, when I am sad, what comes to me is... 'focolarini.' And I find a consolation, a great consolation!»¹⁰*

During his numerous trips as a pilgrim all over the world, he had learnt to recognize our *"focolarino people,"* as he used to call it, drawing – as Chiara once said – comfort and support from it.

In the course of his long pontificate, more than once we felt a special love from him, the profoundness of his paternal glance and nearly his predilection. We remember with gratitude the warm affection shown to Chiara and to a number of us in many circumstances, but also his determining role in recognizing the particular charism given by God to the Church and to humanity through Chiara.

An aspect of particular spiritual affinity between Chiara and John Paul II can be recognized in feeling and living the Church as communion, the expression of God's love for all people. From here came his proposal, expressed in the apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, for the Church of the third millennium: to live the spirituality of communion in order to bring the Risen Jesus back in the heart of the world.¹¹

So, in this moment in which we celebrate with immense joy the beatification of John Paul II, we feel once more strongly called by him and by Chiara, with one voice, to fully live the spirituality which God has given us.

Maria Voce

¹ John Paul II – Homily for the 25th anniversary of his pontificate – 16.10.2003

² To the cardinals and officials of the Roman Curia – 22.12.1987

³ John Paul II – To the ecclesial movements and new communities – 30.5.1998

⁴ Chiara Lubich – *A Greater Love* – Living City, May 2005 – Vol.44, No.5, p. 5

⁵ Mariapoli n. 4-5/2005

⁶ Chiara Lubich – *A Greater Love* – cit.

⁷ Chiara Lubich – *A Greater Love* – cit.

⁸ Speech of John Paul II to the members of the Focolare Movement – 19.8.1984

⁹ Speech of John Paul II to the married couples participating at the meeting "Family and Love" - 3.5.1981 (*expression not quoted in the published speech*)

¹⁰ Speech of John Paul II to the participants of the international meeting of the «New Humanity Movement» – 20.3.1983 (*expression not quoted in the published speech*)

¹¹ See *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n.43