

Word of Life Resources

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Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

As the Church celebrates All Saints' Day on November 1, the central theme of this booklet is holiness. In view of this, in the **IN-DEPTH** section you can read a passage from Chiara Lubich that speaks of the short prayer from the Bible: "Come, Lord Jesus", which can help us to prepare ourselves to meet Jesus at the end of our lives, but also to accept the will of God at every moment. This month's Word of Life, in which Jesus highlights the attitude of the widow in the temple who, in contrast to other characters, gave as an offering the little she had, can help us to understand what God wants from us now in the holy journey; this widow - writes Letizia Magri in her commentary - is the model of the disciple who puts all her trust in the Father.

In **NEWS** we offer a brief report on the second section of the synod held last October, which Margaret Karram attended as a special guest; we also transcribe a passage from the Pope's address to the consecrated people during his trip to Luxembourg and Belgium. Also, to keep in mind, on November 1, the celebration of All Saints' Day, we published an article about the papal audience of November 1 of the previous year in which he gives as an example the life of the saints and invites us "to unite ourselves in communion with them in a fraternal way". The experience of Alberto Fernandez, "the first focolarino martyr" who was killed while on his way to meet a group of children, and of Juan Carlos Duque who died while trying to fix the tank of the Center in Lima (which today bears his name), help us to live in communion with them in a fraternal way.

Committed with you to live our Holy Journey with greater awareness, we greet you with much affection.

The Word of Life Workbook Team

Come Lord Jesus

There is a very, very short prayer which is marvelous. The Spirit puts it on the lips of the bride, the Church, and it is addressed to Jesus, the bridegroom. It is the conclusion of the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation) the last of our sacred books. The prayer says "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

"Come, Lord Jesus". This prayer could be ours while thinking of death, awaiting death, preparing ourselves for death. Yes, because we have or should have a concept of death which is ours and which is exact: it is not the end but the beginning, it is the meeting with Jesus. And again, it is not a matter of choice, everyone has to face it. That day will come for everyone, it's God's will for everyone. Yes, it is the will of God for me, for us, for each person. If this is so, then we must learn how to welcome death in this way as God's will.

But how in general do we accept God's will? We have understood that the will of God, whatever it is, is the expression of God's love for us. It is neither logical nor just, then, to accept it solely with resignation, but we must see in it the best thing that can happen to us. Therefore, we strive to live in such a way that God's will may be our will.

And we commit ourselves to living the will of God not only with total love but with enthusiasm, because we know that, through the will of God, we are setting out on a divine adventure, which in part is known and in part has still to be discovered, and we know that this is how we fulfill God's plan for us.

Indeed, it is this way of facing God's will which is the distinguishing mark of a focolarino, because this is the point at which our conversion happened, and our lives changed direction. But if we see each will of God like this, we should also see death like this.

Beyond the illnesses, the spiritual and physical sufferings which can accompany it, death is a gift, a new gift to be accepted gratefully, the last gift before Paradise. This is why it is not right to live as if death did not exist, rather we should put it in our program and prepare ourselves in an ever-better way to welcome death with joy, to await it with a burning desire – as the saints did – helping ourselves with the prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus".

"Come, Lord Jesus". If we think about death – "Come, Lord Jesus". Through this invitation which comes from our hearts, many fears will disappear, everything will become clear. And Jesus will come at his hour. He himself will really come.

But this prayer is also good for other occasions. You can say "Come, Lord Jesus" while waiting to receive the Eucharist. You can say it before meeting a person or group in which you really want to love him. And you can say it before carrying out any other will of his.

"Come, Lord Jesus: looking at you, our love, our vocation, will be fearless. While awaiting

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your will, we will build this life well, and at once when the next life opens out, we will plunge into the never-ending adventure. You have conquered death. And through this prayer we realize that you, from now on, have conquered death in us too, in our heart. Come – then – Lord Jesus, always, in all of us. And death will not be: you, the risen Lord, will be.”

Chiara Lubich

“They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” (Mk 12:44)

This verse comes at the conclusion of chapter 12 in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is in the Temple in Jerusalem where he is both observing and teaching. Looking at the scene through his eyes, we become aware of the involvement of many different characters: people are simply passing through, some have come to worship, some are dignitaries in long robes and some are rich people throwing their substantial offerings into the temple treasury.

But here comes a widow; she belongs to a category of socially and economically disadvantaged people. Amid general disinterest, she throws two pennies into the treasury. Jesus, however, notices her and calls the disciples to him and instructs them:

They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.

‘Truly I say to you...’ These words introduce important teachings; Jesus’ gaze is focused on the poor widow, and he invites us to look in the same direction because she is a model for disciples.

Her faith in God’s love is unconditional; her treasure is God himself. She surrenders all that she is and has to him and, furthermore, she wants to give all she can to support those who are poorer than her. In a way, her trusting surrender to the Father anticipates the same gift of self that Jesus will soon make through his passion and death. It is that ‘poverty of spirit’ and ‘purity of heart’ that Jesus proclaimed and lived.

This means putting our trust not in wealth, but in the love of God and his providence. We are ‘poor in spirit’ when we allow ourselves to be guided by love for others. Then we share with those in need and give them whatever we have: a smile, our time, our possessions, our abilities. Once we have given everything out of love, we are poor, that is, we are empty, with nothing of ourselves, free and with a pure heart.¹ Jesus’ proposal turns our usual way of thinking onto its head; those who are poor, insignificant and unimportant lie at the center of his thoughts.

They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.

This Word of Life invites us to renew our total trust in God’s love and consider if our vision of life compares with his: do we see beyond appearances, do we avoid judging, do we take other people’s opinions into consideration if they are different from our own and do we see the positive in other people?

It suggests that there is an evangelical logic in freely giving to others and that doing so creates a peaceful community because it urges us to care for one another. It also encourages

us to live out the words of the Gospel in everyday life even when other people may not notice, to trust when we are generous to others and to share while maintaining an attitude of balance and clear judgement. This Word focuses our attention upon the 'least' and asks us to learn from them.

Venant was born and raised in Burundi. He recounts: 'In the village, my family had a good farm that always produced a good harvest. My mother believed that everything was providence from heaven and so, each year, she used to gather the first fruits and distribute them to our neighbours, starting with the neediest families and then allocated only a small part of what remained to us. I learned the value of selfless giving from her example. Thus, I understood that God was asking me to give him the "best part", indeed, to give him my whole life.'

Edited by Letizia Magri & the Word of Life Team

¹C. Lubich, Word of Life, Nov 2003

Points for reflection

- At the conclusion of chapter 12 of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem; he observes and teaches.
- A widowed woman; she belongs to a category of socially and economically needy people. Before the general indifference, she throws into the treasury two small coins. But Jesus notices her, calls his disciples and teaches them: "This widow, on the other hand, has thrown in everything she had, everything she had to live on".
- Jesus' gaze, focused on the poor widow woman, invites us to look in the same direction: she is the model disciple. Her faith in God's love is unconditional; her treasure is God himself. And in giving herself totally to him, she also desires to give all she can to those who are poorer.
- Jesus' proposal turns our mentality upside down; at the center of his thoughts is the little one, the poor, the last. Conflict breaks out among the apostles themselves: James and John ask to occupy places of honor "in his glory" (cf. Mk 10:37), the others become indignant and complain, and the group splits up.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- At the conclusion of chapter 12 of Mark's Gospel, what does the Word of Life chosen for this month say?
- This abandoning oneself with trust in the Father is a foretaste of what, and what does it mean?
- When are we "poor in spirit"?
- In Jesus' proposal, who is at the center of his thoughts? Does it coincide with the center of your thoughts?
- To what does this Word of Life invite us?
- What does this widow's encounter with Jesus in this Word of Life suggest to us, what does it encourage us to do and what does it call us to do?
- Would you like to tell us about Venant, born and raised in Burundi, and his experience with this Word of Life?
- What does the Word of Life chosen for this month say?

Pope to Belgian clergy: Joy and mercy must fill your ministry

Pope Francis meets with the Church's pastoral ministers in Belgium and urges them to embody the Gospel values of joy and mercy even in the face of painful experiences.

By Devin Watkins

On the third day of his Apostolic Journey to Belgium, Pope Francis met Saturday with the country's bishops, priests, men and women religious, and pastoral workers at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Koelkelberg.

In his address, the Pope focused on the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel to every sector of society.

He spoke first about the path of evangelization, saying the West is experiencing a crisis of faith.

Rather than being caught on the back foot, said the Pope, the Church must welcome this crisis as an opportunity to rouse ourselves and rediscover "the ways of the Spirit."

It "demonstrates that we have moved from a Christianity located within a welcoming social framework to a 'minority' Christianity, or better, a Christianity of witness," he said.

Pope Francis called on Belgian priests to love Jesus Christ and walk closely with God's holy people, seeking harmony in diversity.

He went on to point to the Gospel attitude of joy, which goes beyond fleeting amusement and sinks deep into the soul to sustain our Christians lives, even in moments of darkness or pain.

"Joy of heart is kindled by the Gospel," he said. "It is knowing that we are not alone on our journey and that even in situations of poverty, sin, and affliction, God is near."

At times when fidelity seems difficult, said the Pope, the Church's pastoral ministers must remember where our Christian path leads and draw strength from Christ.

The Pope went on to highlight the importance of mercy, since God is always merciful.

God the Father, he said, "never withdraws His love from us," even when we have committed a serious sin.

Seen in worldly terms, God's expansive mercy seems "unjust," but he said, God's justice goes beyond and calls everyone to "right their wrongs."

Pope Francis noted that the clerical sexual abuse crisis has caused "atrocious suffering and deep wounds and undermined even the path of faith."

"There is a need for a great deal of mercy to keep us from hardening our hearts

before the suffering of victims,” he said, “so that we can help them feel our closeness and offer all the help we can.”

The Pope concluded by thanking the clergy and religious of Belgium for always offering God’s mercy and allowing the light of faith to shine through in the darkest of times.

“Without the Spirit, nothing Christian can take place.”

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Video of highlights can be found here: <https://youtu.be/fb1BCPytydY>

Pope opens Synod General Assembly with Mass in St Peter’s Square

In his homily during Mass for the Solemn Inauguration of the Second Session of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis emphasizes the need for hearts open to dialogue and the importance of the harmony that comes from the Holy Spirit.

By Christopher Wells

Pope Francis’ homily for the opening Mass of the General Assembly of the Synod focused on the images of “voice, refuge, and a child”.

In his reflection for the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, the Pope recalled God’s command “to listen to the voice of the Angel He had sent.”

Striving to understand the path

As the Church continues to journey along the synodal path, he said , “the Lord places in our hands the history, dreams, and hopes of a great people,” the Church spread throughout the world. He invited participants to “strive to understand the path we must follow to reach the destination the Lord desires for us.”

In order to remove obstacles to the harmony intended by the Holy Spirit, the Pope continued, we must be open to the contributions of all, in order to hear the voice of God.

A welcoming embrace, a place of refuge

With the concept of refuge, Pope Francis said protecting wings of the angel of God becomes “a symbol of what God does for us, and also a model for us to follow.” The gifts of each one are a great richness to the whole Church; but at the same time, we must be willing to reach out to one another, offering one another “a welcoming embrace and a place of refuge.”

"The more we realize that we are surrounded by friends who love, respect, and appreciate us," he said, "friends who want to listen to what we have to say, the more we will feel free to express ourselves spontaneously and openly."

Like a little child

Finally, the Holy Father invoked the image of "a child," like the one Jesus placed before the disciples, "inviting them to convert and be small like him."

The paradox of the greatest in heaven being that one who becomes little, like a child, "is fundamental for us," the Pope said. Although the Synod necessarily deals with great and important issues, "it is precisely for this reason that we must not lose sight of the child, whom Jesus continues to place at the center of our meetings and work tables."

Guided "by the breeze of the Spirit"

"Brothers and sisters," Pope Francis said in conclusion, "let us resume this ecclesial journey with an eye to the world, for the Christian community is always at the service of humanity, to proclaim the joy of the Gospel to all."

And finally, after announcing his intention to lead the public recitation of the Rosary on Sunday to implore the Virgin Mary for the gift of peace; and proclaiming a day of prayer and fasting the next day for peace in the world, Pope Francis enjoined the faithful to continue to "journey together," listening to the Lord and allowing ourselves "to be guided by the breeze of the Spirit."

Originally published here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-10/pope-opens-synod-general-assembly-with-mass-in-st-peter-s-square.html>

Video of highlights can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9Zh0hDHeoQ>

Pope on All Saints: We are called to holiness, a gift and journey together

On the Solemnity of All Saints, Pope Francis speaks about the call to holiness and how it is both a gift from God and a journey to be made together with our brothers and sisters and all the Saints who are companions along the way.

By Thaddeus Jones

Pope Francis greeted visitors and pilgrims and visitors in Saint Peter's Square on Wednesday, November 1st, the Solemnity of All Saints. Before leading the recitation of the midday Angelus prayer, the Pope said that on All Saints Day we remember our call to holiness. He explained how it is a gift from God that we embrace and a journey we embark upon together, with the Saints accompanying us always along the way.

The gift of holiness

The Pope explained how the gift of holiness has come with our baptism and we need to nurture it so that it can grow and transform our lives. The Saints started out like us, the Pope pointed out, receiving the same gift we have received, and they are our friends who are very close to us, accompanying us on our journey.

We have certainly encountered some saints in our daily lives, the Pope remarked, a just person who lives out the Christian vocation with commitment and simplicity, people he likes to call "the saints next door." And holiness is a gift offered to all for "a happy life."

"When we receive a gift, what is our first reaction? It is precisely that we are happy, because it means that someone loves us; and the gift of holiness makes us happy because God loves us."

Welcoming holiness

As with any gift, when we choose to accept it and show our gratitude, the Pope explained, when we welcome God's gift of holiness, we take on a responsibility to maintain and build on the holiness we have received.

A journey in good company

"Holiness is also a journey, a journey to be made together, helping each other, united with those excellent companions who are the Saints."

The Pope emphasized how the Saints are "our elder brothers and sisters, on whom we can always count," as they can help us when we make mistakes and get on the right path again, like "sincere friends, whom we can trust because they desire our wellbeing."

Their lives and witness in faith provide us with inspiration, the Pope said, and "in their prayers, we receive help" and united with them we embrace one another in "a bond of brotherly love."

Lives of the Saints

In conclusion, the Pope encouraged everyone to know more about the lives of the Saints and learn from them how to face their own challenges in life. He also suggested personal reflection by remembering that in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit we are called to holiness and always sustained and helped along the way. And the Saints are close to us, we can turn to them in prayer, in communion with them in our gratitude to God for all He has given us and the eternal happiness He calls us to.

"May Mary, Queen of all Saints, help us feel the joy of the gift received and increase in us the desire for the eternal destination."

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Video can be found here: https://youtu.be/0PeFqRH9_AI

Experiences

Alberto Fernandez, first focolarino martyr

It was a car ride, generously offered, as was his custom, which led to the death of Alberto Fernandez, a young Uruguayan doctor, barbarously murdered. The event took place in Brazil, on October 19, 2002, on a Saturday afternoon. Alberto had been missing since he left the University of the Sacred Heart of Bauru, in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil. At 4 p.m. he was on his way by car to Votuporanga, 200 km away, where he was supposed to meet a group of children who were living the Focolare's evangelical ideal of unity. He never arrived.



While the police began the investigation, a chain of prayers began in the Movement in Brazil and throughout the world. Only on November 2, two young army soldiers, who after a week had murdered another doctor to rob him, were arrested and also confessed to the murder of Alberto. But he had with him only the equivalent of 10 euros and a huge cube, on the 6 sides of which were written the key words of the art of loving: "love everyone, be the first to love, love each other with the measure of life, love your enemies, love Jesus in everyone...". It was Alberto's way of life transformed into a game for the little ones.

Alberto's body was found in a sugar cane plantation. Chiara Lubich, communicating the news to all the members of the Movement in the world, writes:

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“He is our first martyred focolarino, killed while performing an act of love.”

He was born in Uruguay, in a very poor family. When he was 10 years old, his father died tragically. His mother worked as a maid in Montevideo to support her two children. At the age of 15 he met God. It is a powerful experience for him: he discovered His love which filled the harshness of the life he had lived until then. This happened after meeting the young people of the Focolare. With great sacrifices, working and studying, he finished his medical studies. Later he responded generously to the call to give his life to God. In 1996 he went to the town of Fontem, in the heart of the jungle, in West Cameroon, and worked as a doctor in the hospital built by the Movement to help the very high infant mortality rate. He then transferred to Brazil to pursue a Master's degree in Tropical Medicine. He conducted important research on AIDS. He was almost ready to return with joy to Cameroon.

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Juan Carlos Duque

Heaven, Heaven!

by Gustavo E. Clariá

As I have done so many times, I asked you to help me; that morning I wanted to get into an e-mail account to answer some messages. I had the password but on my own I couldn't do it. As always, and despite the fact that we were called to lunch, you took my problem and solved it with your usual speed. Lunch unfolded as it does every day: serious talk mixed with jokes, your unmistakable laughter, happy to be all together.



Juan Carlos Duque

You were the first to get up to take the dishes to be washed. And then you left in a big rush to “your” Fiore Center, to try to reactivate the big water tank, unused for a long time. I, on the other hand, went to rest.

After a few minutes my cell phone rang. It was Pacho: “Juan Carlos had a serious accident ... he placed his foot on the fake part of the ceiling and fell down ... he died on the spot” I could not believe what was being said, my whole self rejected what the hearers had heard. I only managed to say “My God,” “My God,” “My God ” ... I don't know how many times I repeated it and continued to

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do so, silently, as we ran with Mario headed to the nearby Fiore Center. Unbelieving, we ascertained with our own eyes what had happened ...

That day, February 5 at 3:15 p.m., our lives changed. Nothing was the same as before and it was necessary to accept reality. I, you know, went to the chapel three times, confused, asking for some explanation: “How is it possible?”, “we gave our lives to follow You and You, whose side are you on ...?”. Silence. On the third time you replied, “You still have so much to lose.” I came out almost humiliated, because I realized that I was very far from where, instead you, Juan Carlos, had come. We thought you were preparing for the priesthood ... actually you were preparing for the most important encounter of Life.



With Juan Carlos at lunch, together with July and Ricardo.

As the hours went by and by the strength of asking “increase our faith,” that tragic fall that we witnessed with our poor eyes, was gradually transformed in the eyes of faith into a masterful “flight” to the Highest.

Yes, friend and brother, it was not a fall but a FLIGHT. You had already announced it to us on January 25, at your diaconal ordination. You had reminded us of St. Philip Neri, that brilliant Tuscan saint who, when he was appointed monsignor, threw his hat in the air exclaiming “**Paradise, Paradise**”. He was not interested in titles, only in meeting God ... there where you are now, together with those who have gone before you.

Experiences

Farewell (= To God), dear Juan Carlos! As long as God wills that we gather again, all together, never again to part. We will miss your joy, your resounding laughter, arepas and salt chicken ... your helpfulness and thoughtfulness toward each of us, your ability to solve problems and “give flavor to life,” your transparency and radicalism as a simple focolarino, a friend of Jesus. You remain in our lives as a beacon of light that accompanies and guides us.

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