

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,

“Nothing is impossible with God.” This is the Word of Life for December, taken from the Gospel of St. Luke, and we find it very appropriate for the preparation of Christmas Day. “If we love one another, every day can be Christmas” as Chiara says in the beautiful poem published in the **In-depth** section. The poem is followed by an excerpt from the same author where she affirms that Mary, because she said 'yes' to the archangel's announcement, became the Mother of God, and later adds that to do the will of God is to insert oneself in the history of humanity and to become its protagonists.

From the official commentary of this Word of Life, it should be emphasized that the community, in this intervention of God, plays a decisive role because it is He in our midst who accomplishes the impossible, and if we remain faithful to our motto, the world will see the Unity, the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

In **News**, you can read an article about the Bull with which the Pope convokes the “Ordinary Jubilee of Hope”; likewise, what Margaret Karram said in an interview at the end of the Synod of Synodality, and also an excerpt in which Paul VI speaks of the “house of Nazareth” as a “school of the Gospel”.

At the end, two **Experiences** that show us how to do the will of God insert us in the history of humanity and make us its protagonists.

With you, as we look forward to Christmas and try to make it come alive with mutual love, we wish you a beautiful celebration.

The Word of Life Workbook Team

It is Christmas

It is Christmas!

The Word has become man and has kindled love on earth.

It is Christmas!

And we would like this day to never pass away.

Teach us, Lord, to perpetuate your spiritual presence among men.

It is Christmas!

May your love kindled on earth embrace our hearts, so that we may love one another as you wish!

Then you will be among us.

And if we love one another, every day can be Christmas!

Chiara Lubich

Mary, the Mother of God

From an interview in the Italian magazine 'Cittá Nuova'. Question to Chiara Lubich: "The Focolare Movement considers Mary as the model from which to draw inspiration to 'do the will of God'. Why?" And here we transcribe her answer:

The focolarini see in Mary that person who, because she was faithful to her own particular task, participated in the life of all humanity. Mary did not found anything in the Church, but she gave life to her Founder, and she is considered Mother of the Church. She did no particular works to radiate her faith, she brought into the world the Word made flesh and is considered Queen of the Apostles. She did not exercise - as far as is known - particular actions in favor of the poor, the disinherited, the sick, but she is called "health of the sick", "consolation of the afflicted", "refuge of sinners", "help of Christians", and all those who know her have recourse to her as to a mother.

Mary did not erect a contemplative order, but she contemplated Heaven in her womb. One of her nicknames is: "Gate of Heaven". Because she said yes to God and not to herself, she became the Mother of God. For having said yes to God, knowing how to lose even her own son God on the cross, she was associated by Christ to his redemption. Mary, who, like all the young Jewish girls, meditated in her heart about the one who would be the Mother of the Messiah, teaches us that the one who grafts his or her own heart into the heart of Christ is the Mother of God.

For nothing will be impossible with God. (Lk 1:37)

This sentence is taken from the story of the Annunciation. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary of Nazareth and makes known God plans for her: she will conceive and give birth to a son, Jesus, who 'will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.'¹

The episode is in continuity with other events in the Old Testament whereby barren or very old women gave birth to children who were to play an important role in salvation history. Here, Mary, while wishing to fully and freely adhere to the call to become the mother of the Messiah, wonders how this will happen because she is a virgin. Gabriel assures her that it will not come about through the work of man: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'² And he adds: 'For nothing will be impossible with God.'³

For nothing will be impossible with God.

Such reassurance, which means that no declaration or promise made by God will remain unfulfilled - because nothing is impossible to him - can also be expressed in this way: nothing is impossible with God. In fact, the nuance of the Greek text 'with, or near, or together with God' highlights his closeness to men and women. In fact, when human beings are together with God and freely adhere to him, nothing is impossible.

For nothing will be impossible with God.

How can we put this word of life into practice? We can do so by being confident in the belief that God can act even within and beyond our limitations and weaknesses and during the darkest periods of our lives.

This was the experience of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While in prison before being tortured, he wrote: 'We must immerse ourselves again and again in the living, speaking, acting, suffering and dying of Jesus in order to recognize what God promises and fulfils. It is certain [...] that for us nothing impossible exists anymore, because nothing impossible exists for God; [...] it is certain that we must not expect anything and yet we can ask everything; it is certain that in suffering our joy is hidden and in death our life... To all this God has said 'yes' and 'amen' in Christ. This 'yes' and this 'amen' are the solid ground on which we stand.'⁴

For nothing will be impossible with God.

In trying to overcome the apparent ‘impossibility’ of shortcomings and in striving to reach the ‘possibility’ of a sound and consistent life, the community dimension plays a decisive role. This developed when, as a group, the disciples lived Jesus’ new commandment and allowed the power of the risen Lord to dwell within them, both collectively and individually. In 1948, Chiara Lubich wrote to a group of young members of religious communities: ‘Let’s go ahead, not relying on our own strength which is petty and weak but with the omnipotence of unity. I have seen and touched with my own hands that God among us does the impossible: he performs miracles! If we are faithful to our task [...] the world will see unity and with it the fullness of the Kingdom of God.’⁵

Years ago, when I was in Africa, I often met young people who wanted to live as Christians and who told me of the many difficulties, they faced each day in trying to be faithful to the commitments of faith and the teachings of the Gospel.

We would talk about this for hours and, in the end, we always came to the same conclusion: ‘It is impossible if we are alone but not if we are together.’ Jesus himself guarantees this when he promises: ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name (in my love), there am I in the midst of them.’⁶ And with him all things are possible.

Edited by Augusto Parody Reyes and the Word of Life Team

¹ Lk 1:32

² Lk 1:35

³ Lk 1:37

⁴ D. Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran Pastor, protagonist in resistance against Nazism

⁵ C. Lubich, “Letters of the Early Times”

⁶ Cf Mt 18:20

Points for reflection

- In the story of the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel visits Mary of Nazareth to let her know God's plans for her: she will conceive and bear a son, Jesus, who "will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:32).
- This episode follows in the wake of other Old Testament events that led barren or very old women to prodigious births, whose children were to develop an important task in the history of salvation.
- This certainty, which means that no declaration or promise of God will remain unfulfilled - for nothing is impossible for Him - can also be formulated in this way: nothing is impossible with God.
- It is to the human being or human beings, when they are close to God and freely adhere to Him, that nothing is impossible.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What does the Word of Life chosen for this month say? Do you truly believe in this Word of Life?
- What is Gabriel's guarantee to Mary, when even though she wants to adhere with full freedom to the mission of becoming the mother of the Messiah, she wonders how this can happen, since she is a virgin? What does Gabriel add?
- How can this Word of Life be put into practice?
- What did Dietrich Bonhoeffer write during his imprisonment that would lead him to his torture?
- What did Chiara Lubich write in 1948 to a group of young religious?
- From the experience of the person who was in Africa years ago, what was the conclusion reached by the young people who wanted to live as Christians in the face of the many difficulties they encountered every day in trying to remain faithful to their faith commitments and to the teachings of the Gospel?
- Can you tell us about an experience you have had in your life in relation to the title of this Word of Life, "Nothing is impossible for God"?

Margaret Karram at the conclusion of the Synod

Oct 31, 2024

The Focolare President participated in the Synod in October 2024 as a Special Invitee.

'It has been an immense grace for me, a gift from God that is not only a personal gift, but I consider it a gift for the whole Focolare Movement' with these words President Margaret Karram opens some reflections on the Synod experience and the final document of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2-27, 2024) "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission".

See her video message here:

https://youtu.be/B_kXnguig2E

From Tourist to Pilgrim': Let yourself be transformed!

As we prepare to live and celebrate the 2025 Jubilee Year, Vatican Media presents a 16-episode series of podcasts entitled "From Tourist to Pilgrim" featuring art historian Liz Lev, who highlights the hidden beauty of Rome through the lens of pilgrimage.

By Linda Bordoni

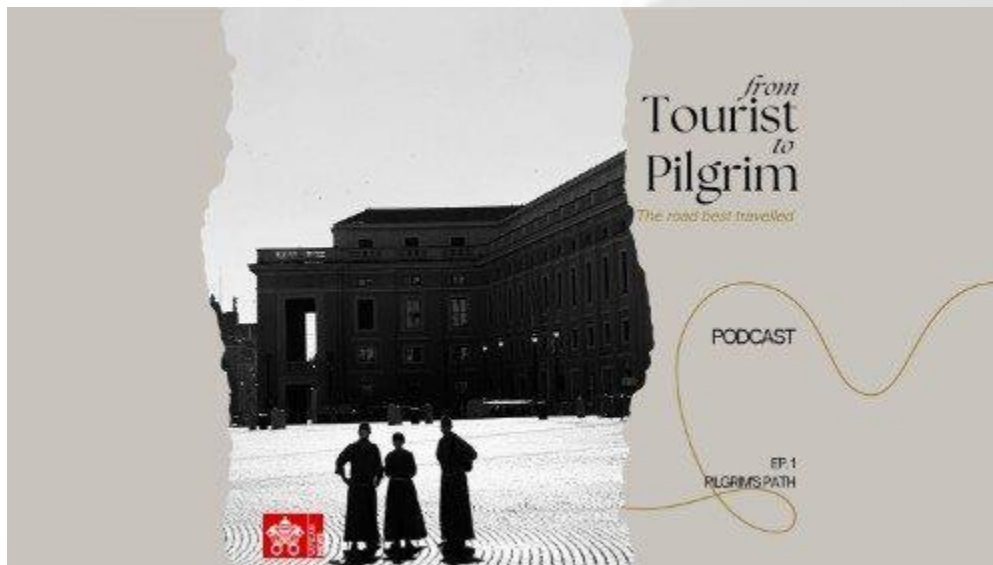
"From Tourist to Pilgrim" is Vatican Media series of [podcasts](#) featuring the knowledge, insights and presence of Liz Lev, designed to help us prepare for the 2025 Jubilee by accompanying pilgrims along their journey through Rome's Basilicas, holy places and works of art.

The original music score was composed by Vatican Radio's Mara Miceli and by Umberto D'Auria. Mara also produced the podcasts directed by Johana Bronkova.

But for more about what's in the 16 podcasts that make up the series, Liz Lev agreed to pop into Vatican Radio to explain how she hopes to help visitors to Rome to journey with the eyes of a pilgrim and experience this coming Jubilee Year as true Pilgrims of Hope.

Seeing with the eyes of a pilgrim

Liv told me she is so honored and excited to have been asked "transform some of the many, many, many visitors, as they come to Rome and help them see with the eyes of a pilgrim."



The hidden beauty of Rome seen through the eyes of a Christian pilgrim.

She explained that one of the reasons she found this project so intriguing lies in the fact that much of it had to do with her own journey to and within the eternal city.

"I suppose I was a tourist when I first came here, but I was also an art historian," she said, and the way she was taught to study art and to understand art "really precluded looking at its spiritual side."

But living here in Rome and being part of this world led her to try to see the works of art in the light in which they were made and for whom they were made.

This perspective, she said, opened up “a whole new beauty to this work.”

Seeing beyond the surface

Liz said her podcasts aim to help the pilgrim see beyond the surface.

“Being able to open up the work of art and get lost in all the spectacular facets within,” she explained, is something she feels privileged to be able to promote.

The art historian told me that the podcasts, with a new episode released each Tuesday, take us on a pilgrimage inside the Papal Basilicas as well as before fountains and frescoes, into squares, up and down steps and roads.

One of the reasons why this project intrigued her so much, Liz said, is that so many people who come to Rome don't realize how many of these spectacular things we come to see were made specifically for pilgrims: “Everything from the placement of the obelisks in the piazzas around the city, Michelangelo's *Pietà* - it was made for a Jubilee - Caravaggio got his start for a Jubilee!”

She explained that at the heart of a pilgrimage is the concept of renewal, rebirth:

“This idea of coming to Rome to renew oneself, to become new once again, has been reflected in the art, and by looking at it with the lens of a pilgrim, we can see this art with new eyes,” she said.

The experience, she added, was meant to help us “transform in an interior spiritual fashion.”



Michelangelo's La Pietà

Hope and beauty

The theme of this Jubilee Year is “Pilgrims of Hope,” a poignant subject in a time of global conflict and darkness. I asked Liz whether she thinks beauty, art, can save us.

“Absolutely...,” she said, and “What a great idea: “Pilgrims of Hope” recalling that when half the things on this list were made, Rome had undergone terrible things.

“There was a Jubilee Year during wars, there have been Jubilee years during plagues, during floods, during disaster after disaster.... And the disasters are always going to be there,” she said emphasizing that what we have left is not the memory of the bad things that happened in that span of time, “but the work of beauty that we were able to put forth, even in our darkest moments.”

It's a great reminder, Liz continued, that "beauty helps us to see beyond, and while it's important to address the terrible things that happen in the world right now if we get too lost in them, we lose hope. But when we look beyond and we see greatness and we have this glimpse of a grander story, that is part of what gives us hope."



The Deposition by Caravaggio

Let yourself be transformed

As a Roman, Liz concluded, she looks forward to seeing throngs of pilgrims coming through the city, even though it's going to be busy. And she had words of encouragement for pilgrims and Romans alike:

"I would say that it's a moment of transformation: let yourself be transformed! The great graces that will be flowing through the city, the beauty of the art, so many people side by side are experiences to be shared: Make sure you get the most out of this Jubilee Year!"



Sistine Chapel – Michelangelo

Originally published here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-06/from-tourist-to-pilgrim-podcasts-vatican-jubilee-liz-lev-art.html>

Podcast Episodes in English:

- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/07/episode-7-michelangelo-pieta-saint-peters.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/07/episode-8-roman-obelisks-pilgrimage.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/07/episode-9-image-good-shepherd-jesus.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/07/episode-10-saint-john-lateran.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/08/episode-11-saint-teresa-in-ecstasy.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/08/episode-12-saint-paul-outside-the-walls.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/08/episode-13-madonnelle-rome.html>

- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/08/episode-14-rome-spanish-steps.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/09/episode-15-rome-colosseum-passion-christ.html>
- <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/from-tourist-to-pilgrim/2024/09/episode-16-altar-chair-saint-peter-basilica.html>

An Address of Pope Paul VI at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth

(taken from “The Pope Speaks”, Vol. 9 #3, 1964)

At Nazareth, our very first thoughts must be turned toward Mary Most Holy, to offer her the tribute of our devotion and to nourish that devotion with reflections that will make it genuine, profound and unique, in conformity with the plan of God. It is Mary who is full of grace, who is the Immaculate, the ever-virgin, the Mother of Christ and hence God’s Mother and ours, she who was assumed into heaven, our most blessed Queen, the model for the Church and our hope.

Before all else we offer our humble filial promise to venerate her with that special devotion which recognizes the wonders God has accomplished in her; with singular homage manifesting the most holy, pure affectionate, personal and confident movements of our heart; with such devotion as causes her encouraging example of human perfection to shine upon the world from on high.

Then we present to her our requests for what is closest to our heart, because we wish to honor both her goodness and the power of her love and intercession. We pray that she may preserve in our hearts a sincere devotion to her. We beg her to give us understanding, desire, and then the peace of possessing purity of body and soul, purity in thought and word, art and love; the purity that the world of today attempts to shock and violate; the purity to which Christ has linked one of His promises, one of His beatitudes, that of penetrating into the vision of God Himself.

We ask therefore the favor of joining Our Lady, mother of the home at Nazareth, and her humble but courageous husband St. Joseph, in their intimacy with Jesus Christ, her human and divine Son.

Nazareth – school of the Gospel

Nazareth is the school in which we begin to understand the life of Jesus. It is the school of the Gospel. Here we learn to observe, to listen, to meditate, and to penetrate the profound and mysterious meaning of that simple, humble, and lovely manifestation of the Son of God. And perhaps we learn almost imperceptibly to imitate Him. Here we learn the method by which we can come to understand Christ. Here we discover the need to observe the milieu of His sojourn among us – places, period of time, customs, language, religious practices, all of which Jesus used to reveal Himself to the world. Here everything speaks to us; everything has meaning. Everything possesses twofold significance.

“The letter” ...

The first is exterior, that which the spectators’ senses and perceptiveness can immediately derive from the Gospel scene. It is the impression gained by those who look merely at externals, who study and examine only the philological and historical trappings of the holy books, that part of which in Biblical terminology is called “the letter.” This study is important and necessary, but it is opaque to one who stops there, and even capable of engendering illusions and intellectual pride in the observer who approaches the external elements in the Gospel without clear vision, humility, a good intention, and a prayerful spirit.

... and “the spirit”

There is also an interior significance – that is, the revelation of divine truth, of supernatural reality – which the Gospel not only contains but also manifests, though, to be sure, only to the person who puts himself in harmony with its light. This harmony is due partly to uprightness of spirit, that is of mind and heart – a subjective and human condition which depends on the personal initiative of each person. At the same time, it flows from the mysterious, free, and unmerited outpouring of grace, which, in keeping with the mystery of mercy governing mankind’s destiny, is never lacking; indeed, at the proper time and in the appropriate manner it never fails any man of good will. This second element, distinct from “the letter” of the Gospel, is called the “the spirit.”

It is here, in this school, that one comes to grasp how necessary it is to be spiritually disciplined, if one wishes to follow the teachings of the Gospel and to become a follower of Christ. Oh, how we would like to repeat, so close to Mary, our introduction to the genuine knowledge of the meaning of life, and to the higher wisdom of divine truth!

But our steps here are hurried, and we must take leave of our desire to pursue here this never-ending education in understanding of the Gospel. Nevertheless, we cannot depart without recalling briefly and fleetingly some fragments of the lesson of Nazareth.

The lesson of silence...

The lesson of silence: may there return to us an appreciation of this stupendous and indispensable spiritual condition, deafened as we are by so much tumult, so much noise, so many voices of our chaotic and frenzied modern life. O silence of Nazareth, teach us recollection, reflection, and eagerness to heed the good inspirations and words of true teachers; teach us the need and value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of interior life, of secret prayer seen by God alone.

... of domestic life

The lesson of domestic life: may Nazareth teach us the meaning of family life, its harmony of love, its simplicity and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable

character; may it teach us how sweet and irreplaceable is its training, how fundamental and incomparable its role on the social plane.

... of work

The lesson of work: O Nazareth, home of “the carpenter’s son,” we want here to understand and to praise the austere and redeeming law of human labor, here to restore the consciousness of the dignity of labor, here to recall that work cannot be an end in itself, and that it is free and ennobling in proportion to the values – beyond the economic ones – which motivate it. We would like here to salute all the workers of the world, and to point out to them their great Model, their Divine Brother, the Champion of all their rights, Christ the Lord!

And so our thoughts leave Nazareth and range those mountains of Galilee which once provided the natural backdrop for the words of the Divine Teacher. We lack time and sufficient strength to proclaim at this moment the divine message intended for the entire universe. But we cannot neglect to glance at the nearby mount of the beatitudes, which are the synthesis and summit of evangelical preaching, and to listen to the echoes of that discourse which, in this mysterious atmosphere, now seem audible to Us.

The motive of love

It is the voice of Christ promulgating the New Testament, the new law which both absorbs and surpasses the old, and raises human endeavor to the very peak of perfection. The great motive of man's activity is a sense of duty which controls the exercise of his freedom. In the Old Testament it was fear; and at all times including our own it is instinct and self-interest. But for Christ, who is the Father's gift of love to the world, the motive is love. He taught us to obey through love; it is love that moved Him to set us free. According to the teaching of St. Augustine, "God gave less difficult precepts to those who had still to be bound by fear; through His Son He gave more difficult ones to those whom He had deigned to free by love."

Christ in His Gospel has spelled out for the world the supreme purpose and the noblest force for action and hence for liberty and progress: love. No goal can

surpass it, be superior to it, or supplant it. The only sound law of life is His Gospel. The human person reaches his highest level in Christ's teaching. Human society finds therein its most genuine and powerful unifying force.

We believe, O Lord, in Thy word; we will try to follow and live it.

Echoes of the Beatitudes

Now we hear its echo reverberating in the souls of men of our century. It seems to tell us: Blessed are we, if in poverty of spirit we learn to free ourselves from false confidence in material things and to place our chief desires in spiritual and religious goods, treating the poor with respect and love as brothers and living images of Christ.

News

Blessed are we, if, having acquired the meekness of the strong, we learn to renounce the deadly power of hate and vengeance, and have the wisdom to exalt above the fear of armed force the generosity of forgiveness, alliance in freedom and work, and conquest through goodness and peace.

Blessed are we, if we do not make egoism the guiding criterion of our life, nor pleasure its purpose, but learn rather to discover in sobriety our strength, in pain a source of redemption, in sacrifice the very summit of greatness.

Blessed are we, if we prefer to be the oppressed rather than the oppressors, and constantly hunger for the progress of justice.

Blessed are we, if for the Kingdom of God in time and beyond time we learn to pardon and to persevere, to work and to serve, to suffer and to love.

We shall never be deceived.

In such accents do we seem to hear His voice today. Then, it was stronger, sweeter, and more awe-inspiring: it was divine. But as we try to recapture some echo of the Master's words, we seem to be won over as His disciples and to be genuinely filled with new wisdom and fresh courage.

Published here: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/paul06/p6reflect.htm>

Experiences

A path of peace education



I was in Jerusalem working in a school and on the first day a child timidly raised his hand to ask a question: “Teacher, can you tell us what peace is? What can we do one day, when there will be no more war?”. For me this was a shock. I understood that these children had been born and raised in that situation and had not experienced a day of peace, really.

Months later, walking through the streets, a bomb exploded right where I was passing by. All of a sudden, I found myself on the ground bleeding, among dead people and many wounded people screaming for help. These things I had seen on television or in the movies now were part of my life. When I left the hospital a question burned in my heart. Deep down, Carlos, what am I doing for peace? What is my role in changing this culture of war into one of peace?

It was later that an experience helped me a lot. Another time, walking down the street, all of a sudden, a group of young men started attacking me. Some soldiers, from far away, saw the scene and came running towards me. To prevent them from ending up in jail, I told the young men: “Run quickly, before the soldiers arrive! One of them fell and began to bleed. I spontaneously took out my handkerchief, put it on his knee to stop the bleeding, and repeated: “Run, run! Three days later, there was a knock at my door at night. With great surprise I met the young man who came to return my clean handkerchief and a loaf of bread that his mother had prepared for me.

At that moment, I had the intuition that, if I want to contribute to the culture of peace, I have to start with the culture of love, a love that loves everyone, beyond religion or culture. Years later, I was in Cairo (Egypt), working in a school, during the “Arab revolution”, I wanted to create a project to give these children the possibility to live in a climate of peace. The only instrument was a cube that we called “the cube of peace”, because it did not have numbers,

Experiences

but phrases to live these values. We rolled the cube and lived the phrase that came up, and a few minutes before going home, we told each other about our experiences.

This simple way of living peace transformed the lives of these children, won over parents and teachers, and transformed the whole school. This is how “Living Peace” was born, a life project that puts us all as protagonists of peace, starting with our hearts, conquering peace within us to communicate it to others, in relation to nature and the world.

It has been 12 years since this adventure began, and what were then 14 children are now 2 million, in 134 countries, building this culture of peace.

Carlos Palma (Uruguay)

Luis' Angel

I usually attend Mass at 7 a.m. in my parish of Santa Ana, in San José (Costa Rica). On the way out, I stop to visit with people who live with drug addiction and other vices. This has allowed me, over time, to create friendships and live with their situations that have become, for me, familiar.

It so happens that Luis (name changed to safeguard his privacy), 40 years old, was looking to rejoin society. I decided to support him humanly and financially so that he could be admitted to a Recovery Center, guided by the pastors of a non-Catholic church.

With great joy, after two months of treatment, his physical and mental health and optimism had improved, which allowed him to work and thus generate his own resources in a healthy way.

I received a call from his mother who told me: “I have asked God, with insistence, to send an angel to Luis and, although I do not know him, I see that the Lord heard me”. It seemed that everything was going well. However, a week ago Luis reappeared and to my great surprise, I saw him thin, sad, and in a precarious condition. He told me that, on an impulse, he had an encounter with a young woman who led him to liquor and from there he jumped to drugs and even to being a drug dealer.

My reaction was to hug him and, although I made him see that he brought this situation upon himself, a feeling of hope arose in me, because Luis wanted to go back to the hospital, and I was willing to support him again. I fed him, treated his bloody feet and tried to surround him with love; perhaps that was the reason why he had sought me out. I understood that God was presenting Himself to me in this tattered man, and that I had to change my gaze to one of

Experiences

greater charity and humility. Here I understood that Luis, although he left his past life for about a year, his mind, environment, thoughts, impulses, were more in a world built in human misery than as a child of God.

This experience made me understand that love of a neighbor, to the point of being willing to give one's life, activates the deepest virtues of charity and love, together with the certainty that the Lord will take care of him. Luis knows that the door is open with me, and he has felt the human warmth that always awaits him with joy.

J. P. (Costa Rica)