

Accept the invitation

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mk 1:3).

These words are spoken to me. The Lord is coming and I must be ready to welcome him. Every day I pray, “Come, Lord Jesus.” And he replies, “Yes, I am coming soon” (see Rev. 22:17, 20). He stands at the door and knocks. He asks to come in (see Rev. 3:20). I cannot leave him outside, outside of my life.

The invitation to welcome the Lord came from John the Baptist. It was directed to the Jewish people of his time. They were asked to confess their sins and change their ways. He was certain that the coming of the Messiah was about to happen. Would the people who had been waiting for him for centuries recognize him, listen to his words and follow him? Since John knew that to welcome him they had to get ready, he gave this pressing invitation:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

These words are spoken to me because Jesus continues to come every day. Every day he knocks at my door. For me too it is not easy to recognize him, just as it wasn't easy for the Jews at the time of the Baptist. Contrary to what was commonly expected, Jesus presented himself as a humble carpenter from Nazareth, an unimportant village at the time.

Today he presents himself under the guise of an immigrant, someone with no work, an employer, a schoolmate, a relative, even a person who doesn't seem to shine with the face of the Lord, where his face seems hidden. His subtle voice, which invites us to forgive, trust and offer friendship, to refuse to make choices against the Gospel — his voice is often drowned out by other voices that incite us to hate, get back what is ours, become corrupt.

The obstacles hindering God's coming into our lives are like twisted paths. It's almost pointless to list all the forms of pride, the sin that dwells in our hearts and makes us blind to his presence and deaf to his voice. Each one of us, if we are sincere, knows what personal barriers obstruct our meeting with Jesus, with his word, with people he identifies himself with. Each of us can say that this invitation in the Word of Life is spoken directly to us:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

I do this by straightening out that judgment that leads me to condemn someone else, to stop talking to him or her, and instead I come to understand, to love and put myself at their service.

I do it by correcting any behavior that betrays a friendship, makes me violent, or disobeys the law. Instead I let myself be converted and even ready to put up with injustice in order to save a relationship, to be willing to personally pay the price of encouraging brotherhood in the area where I live.

Although this month's passage is a challenging one, it is also liberating, because it can change my life, open me up to meeting Jesus, allowing him to live in me and be the one who acts and loves in me.

This word, if it is lived, can do even more. It can give birth to Jesus in our midst, in the Christian community, in our families, in the groups where we are active. John the Baptist spoke to all the people. And the result was that God came "and lived among us" (Jn 1:14), in the midst of his people.

For this reason we want to help one another to straighten out the paths of our relationships, wiping out any twist and turn between us, living the mercy that we are called to practice this year.

When we do this we will become, together, the home, the family that is capable of welcoming God. It will be Christmas. Jesus will find an open road and will be able to stay in our midst.

Fr. Fabio Ciardi, OMI

Each month the Focolare offers a Scripture passage as a guide and inspiration for daily living. Ever since the Focolare's earliest years, founder Chiara Lubich (1920–2008) wrote her own commentaries each month. Now Fr. Fabio Ciardi, OMI, theologian and close collaborator of Lubich, is writing the commentaries, reflecting her thoughts and her spirituality of unity.

This Word of Life is translated into 96 different languages and reaches several million people worldwide through the media. This monthly leaflet is also a supplement to *Living City*, the Focolare magazine (livingcitymagazine.com). For information and to subscribe to this leaflet or to the magazine, write to: *Living City*, 202 Comforter Blvd, Hyde Park, NY 12538; tel: 845-229-0496; e-mail: livingcity@livingcitymagazine.com. Visit focolare.org (international) or focolare.us (U.S.).

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Read more:

Lubich, Chiara. "See Jesus in everyone," *The Art of Loving*, New City Press: Hyde Park, New York, 2010, p. 89.

Lubich, Chiara. "Love generates communion," *Essential Writings*, New City Press: Hyde Park, New York, 2007, p.100.

Next month:

January 2015

“Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord”

(cf 1 Peter 2:9)