

Focolare Word of Life
May 2019

Transcend your limits

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

(John 20:21)

After giving an account of Jesus’ terrible death on the cross and describing the disciples’ fear and bewilderment over it, the evangelist John proclaims something completely new. Jesus has risen from the dead and come back to his people!

In fact, on Easter morning, the risen Lord was seen and recognized by Mary Magdalene. That same evening, he showed himself to some other disciples, who had shut themselves indoors because they felt so confused and defeated.

Jesus went looking for them, wanting to see them again. The fact that they had betrayed him or run away from danger did not matter. He showed them the signs of his passion: his hands and side, which had been pierced and wounded during his torment on the cross. His first words were a greeting of peace, a true gift that reached into their souls and transformed their lives.

That was how the disciples finally recognized him and were filled with joy. Being with their Lord and master again, they felt healed, consoled and enlightened.

The risen Jesus then gave this group of flawed men a very demanding task: go out into the streets to bring the Gospel to the world, as he himself had done. It took courage on his part! Just as the Father has trusted him, Jesus trusted them completely.

Lastly, John adds that Jesus “breathed on them,” meaning that he shared his own inner strength with them, the same spirit of love that renews hearts and minds.

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Jesus had experienced human life, knowing the joy of friendship and the pain of betrayal, the demands of work and the fatigue of traveling. He knows how we are and understands the limits, sufferings and failures that accompany us every day. Just as he did with the disciples in that darkened room, he continues to seek us out in our darkness and narrowmindedness. He goes on believing in us.

The risen Jesus offers us the experience of new life and peace with him that we can share with others. He sends us out to witness to our having encountered him. This means “going out” of ourselves, beyond our fragile sense of security and our limitations, to continue throughout the world and down through time the mission he received from the Father: to proclaim that God is love.

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Chiara Lubich wrote a commentary on this Word of Life in May 2005: “Nowadays, words are not enough. ... The proclamation of the Gospel will be effective if it is based on testimonies such as those given by the first Christians who said, ‘We declare to you what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes’ (see 1 Jn 1:1).

“It will be effective if what was said of them can be said of us: ‘See how they love one another, and each one is ready to die for the others.’¹ It will be effective if our love is practical and we give food, clothing and shelter to those who need them; if we offer friendship to those who are alone and desperate, and support people in trying times. By living in this way, others will experience the wonder of knowing Jesus and, by becoming other Christs, will contribute to the continuation of his work.”

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We too can seek out Jesus in people who are blocked inside their suffering and loneliness. We can be near them as respectful companions on their life journey, traveling toward the peace that Jesus gives.

An example of this is Maria and her friends, who work in a small immigration center in southern Italy. The pain of war and violence that these immigrants have experienced shows on their faces.

“What am I looking for?” Maria asks. “For Jesus, who gives meaning to my life and who is present in these brothers and sisters who are suffering so much. At first, our association offered them Italian lessons and helped find houses and work and supplies for their basic needs.

“When we asked them if they felt the need for some spiritual support, a group of Orthodox women responded positively. Some Baptist Christians then came to the center, and we agreed with the Baptist minister to bring them to church on Sunday, quite a distance away.

“This concrete love among Christians led to friendships that grew deeper thanks to cultural exchanges, discussions and even concerts. We realized we are a ‘people’ who can seek and find new ways of being united in diversity, to witness to the kingdom of God.”

Letizia Magri

Next month:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.” (Acts 1:8)

¹ Tertullian, *Apologetics*, 39,7.