

Focolare Word of Life
July 2019

Find your creative generosity

“You received without payment; give without payment” (Mt 10:8).

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus addresses these powerful words to his followers, to those he “sends out.” He had personally encountered a lost and suffering humanity and felt compassion for them.

That is why, through the Apostles, Jesus wanted to extend his work of salvation, healing and liberation. They had gathered around him, heard his words and received a mission and purpose for their lives; and so they set out to bear witness to God’s love for every person.

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But what did they receive “without payment” that they ought to give back?

Through Jesus’ life, in his words, deeds and choices made, the Apostles experienced the mercy of God. Despite their weaknesses and limitations, they received the new law of love, of mutual acceptance.

Above all, they received the gift that God wants to give to all: himself, his companionship along life’s journey, his light to help guide their choices. These priceless gifts, which are worth far beyond our ability to repay, are given freely and unconditionally.

The Apostles and all Christians have been freely given these gifts, so that they can then become channels of these same gifts for every person they meet each day.

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In the October 2006 Word of Life, Chiara Lubich wrote: “Throughout the Gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to give: to ‘give to the poor’ (Mk 10:21), ‘... to the one who asks ... to one who wants to borrow’ (Mt 5:42). ‘If anyone wants ... your tunic, hand them your cloak as well’ (Mt 5:40); to give without payment. Jesus was the first to give, restoring health to the sick, forgiving sinners and giving his life for all.

“To counteract our instinct to hoard, Jesus calls for generosity; to overcome our inclination to worry about our needs, he shifts the focus to our neighbors, and instead of the culture of having, he teaches the culture of giving.

“This month’s Word of Life can help us rediscover the value of everything we do. This might be household chores, factory work or farming. It might be office administration or school homework, or it might be our civic, political or religious duties. Everything can be transformed into attentive and thoughtful service for others. Love will help us see others’ needs and show us how to respond creatively and generously.

“And the result? Gifts will circulate, because love generates more love. Joy will be multiplied, since ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ (Acts 20:35)”

(continued)

This is exactly what happened to Vergence, a little girl from Congo. “On my way to school, I was really hungry,” she shared. “Then I met my uncle, who gave me money to buy a sandwich, but a little further on I saw a very poor man. I immediately thought of giving him the money. My friend told me not to do it. But I said to myself: I will find food tomorrow, but will he? So I gave him my sandwich money, and I was very happy.”

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Gospel logic is that we always receive in order to share, never to accumulate for ourselves. It is also an invitation for us to recognize what we have received: energy, talents, skills and material goods, and put them at the service of others.

According to the economist Luigino Bruni, “Gratuitousness, meaning ‘unconditional giving,’ is an attitude that can accompany any act. It is not that something needs to be ‘free of charge’; quite the opposite, because gratuitousness does not mean that something costs nothing. Rather it represents an infinite cost, to which we can only respond by doing the same ourselves.”¹

Therefore, giving freely overcomes the logic of the market, of consumerism and individualism and opens us up to reciprocity, to social relations, to a sense of family, a new culture of giving.

Our experience confirms that selfless love is a real challenge, but one that has positive and unexpected social consequences.

This is what happened in the Philippines, through a project that began in 1983. At the time, the country’s sociopolitical situation was very difficult, and many people were seeking positive solutions.

A group of young people decided to contribute in a different way: they opened their closets and removed everything they no longer needed. They sold it all and, with the small amount raised, they opened a social center called Bukas Palad, which means “with open hands.”

The Gospel sentence that inspired them was: “You received without payment; give without payment” (Mt 10:8).

Some doctors joined, offering their professional services without wanting anything in return, and there were many others who opened their hearts, their hands, their homes.

That was how a wide-ranging social action developed helping the poorest people. It still offers various types of services in several cities in the Philippines today. However, the most important goal achieved over the years is that of enabling those who receive help to free themselves from enslavement to poverty.

In fact, they rediscover their dignity as people and thus build relationships of esteem and solidarity. Their example and commitment help many others to escape from poverty and take on responsibilities for a new way of life for themselves and their families, their neighborhood and communities, and for the world.