

Word of Life
April 2021

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (Jn 10:11)

Images from biblical culture, marked by the slow pace of nomadic and pastoral life, seem far removed from our daily demand for efficiency and competition. Yet we too sometimes feel the need to pause, to find a place to rest, and to encounter someone who welcomes us just as we are.

Jesus presents himself as the one who is ready, more than anybody, to welcome us and offer us rest. Indeed, he is ready to give his life for each one of us.

This Word of Life comes from a long passage in John’s Gospel wherein Jesus assures us that he is the presence of God in each person’s life story — just as promised by the prophets to the people of Israel. ⁱ

Jesus is the shepherd and guide who knows and loves his sheep; that is, he knows and loves his people, who at times are weary and lost. He is not a stranger who ignores the flock’s needs, nor a thief that comes to steal, nor a brigand who kills and scatters, nor a mercenary who acts only out of self-interest.

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The flock that Jesus considers to be his own certainly consists of his disciples and all those who have already received the gift of baptism, but there are others too. Jesus knows every human being. He calls them by name and tenderly cares for each one.

As the true shepherd who not only guides us toward life and searches for us whenever we go astray, he has also already given his life for us, so that we can experience the fullness of personal communion with him. This is the will of the Father. And although mortally wounded by sin, we can rediscover our brother and sisterhood.

Each of us can try to recognize God’s voice, hear his word addressed to us, and trustingly follow it. Above all, we can be sure that we are loved, understood and forgiven unconditionally by the one who tells us:

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When we experience, even for a bit, this silent but powerful presence in our lives, we begin to ardently want to share this experience and grow in our capacity to care and welcome others. Following Jesus' example, we can try to know and better understand our family members, colleagues and neighbors, allowing their needs to disturb our peaceful lives.

Love can give us great imagination, as we find ways of involving others in what we do and vice versa. In our own small way, we can contribute to building fraternal and open communities, capable of patiently and courageously accompanying many others on their journey through life.

Commenting on this same Gospel phrase in April 1997, Focolare founder Chiara Lubich wrote: "Jesus will openly say of himself: 'No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15:13). And he lives his offering to the full. His love is a sacrificial love, that is, a love made up of a real willingness to offer, to give one's life.

"God also asks of us ... acts of love that have (at least in intention and decision) the measure of his love.

"Only such a love is Christian love: not just any love, not a veneer of love, but a love so great that it puts our life at stake. ... By loving in this measure, our lives as Christians will take a great qualitative leap. And then we will see men and women from every corner of the earth gather around Jesus, attracted by his voice."

Letizia Magri

Next month:

"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (1Jn 4:15)

ⁱ Cf Ez. 34:24-31