

Word of Life - July 2020

If we love, Jesus recognizes us as his family - his brothers and sisters. This is such a huge opportunity that it catches us by surprise; it frees us from the past, our fears and from our way of seeing things.

'For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.' (Mt. 12:50)

Matthew's Gospel recounts an episode in Jesus' life that can seem unimportant. His mother and her family went to Capernaum where Jesus was staying with the disciples proclaiming the Father's love to all. They had probably walked a long way to find him and they wanted to talk to him. They did not go straight to the place where he was but they sent a message: 'Your mother and your brothers are outside and are trying to speak to you.'

The family dimension was certainly very important for the people of Israel: they themselves were considered to be 'children' of God and heirs to his promises. Furthermore, the people of Israel regarded one another as 'brothers'.

But Jesus opened up an unexpected perspective: with a solemn gesture of his hand he pointed to the disciples and said:

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

Jesus revealed a new dimension: anyone at all can feel part of this family if that person is committed to knowing and fulfilling the will of the one Father.

Anyone: adult or child, man or woman, healthy or ill, of every culture and social position. Anyone: every person is made in the image of God Love. Indeed, each person is a being created by God, with whom he or she can enter into a relationship of knowledge and friendship.

Therefore, anyone can do the will of God which is love for him and love for one another. And, if we love, Jesus recognizes us as his family - his brothers and sisters. This is such a huge opportunity that it catches us by surprise; it frees us from the past, our fears and from our way of seeing things. In this perspective, even our limitations and our fragility can be 'launching pads' that propel us towards fulfilment. There is a qualitative leap in everything.

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In a certain way, we too can be the 'mother' of Jesus. Just as Mary was open and available to God from the time of the Annunciation till Calvary and then during the birth of the Church, so we too can give birth and rebirth to Jesus in ourselves by living the Gospel, and our mutual love can contribute to generating the presence of Jesus in our communities.

On one occasion, when Focolare founder Chiara Lubich was addressing a group of people eager to live the Word of God, she said: *"Be a family. Are there people among you who are suffering spiritual or moral trials? Be understanding of them as a mother would and even more. Enlighten them through your word or example. Don't let them lack the warmth of a family but rather increase it. Are there people among you who are suffering physically? May they be our preferred brothers and sisters... Never put any activity of any kind before the spirit of the family with those brothers and sisters with whom you are living. And wherever you go to bring Christ's ideal... you will do no better than try to create with discretion, prudence but with solid conviction, the spirit of a family. It is a humble spirit, it wishes the best for everyone, it is not proud, it is...true charity."*

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

In everyday life, we can discover the task that the Father has entrusted to us to build the great human family.

In the Homs area in Syria, more than one hundred and fifty children, mostly Muslims, attend after-school sessions in a building that belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church. Sandra, the director, said: 'We are a team of teachers and specialists and our aim is to create a family atmosphere of welcome and support. Our work is based on dialogue and the promotion of values. Many children are affected by the trauma and suffering they have experienced. Some are apathetic, others aggressive. We want to rebuild their trust in themselves and in others. The war often causes division among families but here they find the desire and the hope to start again.'