

Word of Life

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It is in suffering, and only in suffering, that the works of God flourish. So our weakness and the awareness of our fragility present unique opportunities to experience the strength of Christ who died and is risen.

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12: 9)

In his second letter to the community in Corinth, St Paul writes to people who were questioning the legitimacy of his apostolic activity. However, he does not defend himself by listing his own merits and achievements. On the contrary, he highlights the work that God has accomplished in him and through him.

St Paul wrote about a mystical experience of a deep relationship with God¹, but immediately also referred to his suffering due to a ‘thorn in the flesh’ that tormented him. He did not explain exactly what it was, but we realize it caused great difficulty and could have limited his activity as an evangelizer. For this reason, he shared the fact that he had asked God to free him from that impediment. But the answer he received from God himself was extraordinary:

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness All of us continually experience our own and other people’s physical, psychological and spiritual weaknesses. We often see around us people who are suffering and can’t find the way ahead. We feel weak and unable to solve all these problems. Sometimes it is even hard to face up to them and so we limit ourselves to just not hurting anyone.

St Paul's experience, on the other hand, opens up new horizons. By recognizing and accepting our weakness, we can abandon ourselves fully into the hands of the Father, who loves us as we are and wants to help us on our journey. In fact, the letter goes on, saying: *‘For whenever I am weak, then I am strong.’*²

In this regard, Chiara Lubich wrote: *‘We naturally react against such a statement, seeing in it either a glaring contradiction or simply a paradox. Instead, it expresses one of the highest truths of the Christian faith. Jesus explained it to us with his life and above all with his death. When did he accomplish the task that the Father had entrusted to him? When did he redeem humanity? When did he conquer sin? It was when he died on the cross, after having cried out, “My God, my God, why you have forsaken me?” Jesus was strongest just at his weakest moment. He could have given life to the new people of God just by preaching or doing a few more miracles or some extraordinary deed. Instead it was not so because the Church is the work of God and it is in suffering, and only in suffering,*

¹ Cfr. 2 Cor 11:1-7a

² Cf. 2 Cor 12:10

that the works of God flourish. So our weakness and the awareness of our fragility present unique opportunities to experience the strength of Christ who died and is risen.'

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness It is the paradox of the gospel: the meek are promised they will inherit the earth³. In the Magnificat⁴, Mary exalts the power of the Lord, who intervenes totally and definitively in our own lives and in the history of humankind, precisely in our weakness and total trust in God's action.

Commenting on St Paul's experience, Chiara suggested that: *'...the choice we Christians can make is the exact opposite of what people usually do. Here we are truly going against the flow. In the world, people's ideals lie in success, power and prestige... By contrast, St Paul tells us we must boast of our weaknesses... Let's trust in God. He will make good use of our weaknesses and nothingness. And when he is at work, we can be sure that he does things that are valuable, that bring about lasting good and meet the real needs of individuals and the community.'*

³ Cf. Mt 5:5

⁴ Cf. Lk 1:46-55.