

# Word of Life

Letizia Magri

September 2017

*Following the path of liberation from egoism, we can grow in our humanity; we can win the freedom that allows our personality to be completely fulfilled.*

**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Mt 16: 24).**

Jesus was in the midst of his public life, proclaiming the kingdom of God was near, and he was preparing to go to Jerusalem. His disciples had some insight into the greatness of his mission. They realized he was the one sent by God, whom the whole people of Israel was waiting for. They looked forward to being freed from Roman rule, to the dawn of a better world where there would be peace and prosperity.

But Jesus did not want to encourage these illusions. He said clearly that his journey to Jerusalem would not lead to triumph but rather to rejection, suffering and death. He also revealed that he would rise again on the third day. Those words were so hard to understand and accept that Peter protested and opposed such an absurd idea. He tried, in fact, to dissuade Jesus.

After a firm rebuke to Peter, Jesus turned to the disciples with a disturbing invitation.

**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

With these words, what was Jesus really asking from his disciples both then and now? Does he want us to despise ourselves? Does he want us to devote ourselves to a life of austerity and discipline? Is he asking us to seek out suffering so as to be more pleasing to God?

This Word of Life exhorts us rather to walk in Jesus' footsteps, to accept the values and demands of the Gospel in order to be ever more like him. This means living all of life fully, as he did, even when the shadow of the cross appears on our path.

**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

We cannot deny it: each of us has our own cross. Suffering in its various forms is part of human life. Yet it seems beyond our understanding, the opposite of our desire for happiness.

But it is precisely in this that Jesus teaches us to discover an unexpected light. It is like those times when you go into a dark church and discover how the stained-glass windows look so wonderful and bright, rather than dull and dreary as they did from the outside.

If we want to follow him, Jesus asks us to reverse our value system, shifting ourselves away from the centre of our world and rejecting the logic that seeks our own good. He suggests that we pay more attention to other people's needs than our own, spending our energy in making them happy, as he did. He did not miss a chance to comfort and give hope to those he met.

Following this path of liberation from egoism, we can grow in our humanity; we can win the freedom that allows our personality to be completely fulfilled.

**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

Jesus invites us to be witnesses to the Gospel, even when this faithfulness is tested by little or big misunderstandings within our social environments. Jesus is with us, and he wants us to be with him in staking our lives on the boldest of ideals: universal brotherhood and sisterhood, the civilization of love.

This radicalness in love is a deep need of the human heart. We see it in key figures of non-Christian religions who followed the voice of their conscience right to the end. Gandhi said: 'If someone killed me and I died with prayer for the assassin on my lips, and God's remembrance and consciousness of His living presence in the sanctuary of my heart, then alone would I be said to have had the non-violence of the brave.'<sup>1</sup>

**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

Chiara Lubich found, in the mystery of Jesus crucified and forsaken, the remedy for every personal wound and every disunity among individuals, groups and peoples. She shared her discovery with many people.

'Each one of us experiences sufferings in life that are at least a little like his,' she wrote in 2007 for an event organized by movements and communities from various churches held in Stuttgart, Germany. 'When we feel these sufferings, we can remember that he made them his own. They are almost his presence, a sharing in his suffering...Let us do what Jesus did. He was not paralysed by suffering, but added these words to his cry, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23: 46), re-abandoning himself to the Father. Like him, we too can go beyond suffering and overcome trial by saying: "I love you in this, Jesus forsaken. I love you; it reminds me of you and is an expression of you, one of your faces." And, if in the next moment we throw ourselves into loving our brother or sister and doing what God asks of us, we will almost always experience that suffering is transformed into joy...In the small groups where we live ... we can experience greater or smaller divisions. Even in these sufferings we can recognize his face, overcome the pain within ourselves, and do everything possible to become brothers and sisters again ... The pathway and model of the culture of communion is Jesus crucified and forsaken.'

---

<sup>1</sup> Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Vol. II (Navajivan: Ahmedabad, 1958), p. 327.