

(English translation)

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Word of Life

“He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1)

Do you know the context of this sentence in the Gospel? It is in St. John's account of the last supper when Jesus is about to wash the feet of his disciples and is preparing for his passion.

During the last moments that Jesus spent with “his own,” he revealed in the highest and most explicit way the love he had always had for them.

“He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.” The words “to the end” mean to the end of his life, to his very last breath. But there is also the idea of perfection. That is, he loved them completely, totally, with the greatest intensity, to the highest degree.

When Jesus would go on to his glory, the disciples would remain in the world. They would feel alone, they would have many trials to face. It is precisely in view of those moments that Jesus wanted to make them feel sure of his love.

“He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.”

Can't you feel in this phrase the whole lifestyle of Jesus, his way of loving? He washed the feet of his disciples. His love made him stoop to do this lowly service, which in those days was done only by slaves. After having given them his extraordinary words, his miracles, and all the other things he did, Jesus was now preparing for the tragedy of Calvary in which he would give his very life for “his own” and for all people. He knew they had a great need, the greatest need that people can have: the need to be liberated from sin, which means freed from death, and to regain the possibility of entering the kingdom of heaven. Only he could give them the peace and joy of everlasting life.

And so Jesus gave himself up to death, crying out his abandonment by the Father, until he was able at the very end to say, “It is accomplished” (Jn 19:30).

“He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.”

We see in these words both the tenacious love of a God and the tender affection of a brother. We Christians, since Christ is in us, can also love like this.

Now, however, I am not proposing that you imitate Jesus by actually dying for others as he did when his hour came. Nor do I put before you models like Father Kolbe, who died for a fellow prisoner, or Father Damien, who contracted leprosy from his lepers and died with them and for them.

It may be that in the course of your lifetime you will never be asked to give your physical life for your neighbors. But what God certainly does ask of you is that you love them “to the end,” to the point where you too can say, “It is accomplished.”

This is what an eleven-year-old Italian girl named Katy did. She saw that her classmate and friend Georgina was very sad. She tried to comfort her, but it did no good. So she decided to find out what made her friend so sad. She learned that Georgina's father had died and that her mother had left her alone with her grandmother and had gone to live with another man. As soon as she realized what had happened, Katy decided she had to do something about it.

She asked Georgina if she could talk to her mother, but Georgina asked her to go with her first to visit her father's grave. With great love Katy went with her. There she overheard Georgina sobbing and imploring her father to take her with him.

Katy felt heartbroken. There was a little church in ruins nearby and the two girls went in. The only things left inside the church were a small tabernacle and a crucifix. Katy said, “Look at this, in this world everything is going to be destroyed; only the crucifix and the Eucharist will always be with us.” Georgina

dried her tears and replied, "Yes, you're right!" Then with tender love, Katy took Georgina by the hand and accompanied her to her mother.

When they got there Katy boldly addressed the mother with these words: "I know this is none of my business, but I must tell you that you left your daughter without the mother's love that she desperately needs. I must tell you also that you will never have peace until you make up for what you did and take your child back to live with you."

The following day Katy met Georgina at school and again she tried to cheer her up. But something new happened that day: a car came to pick Georgina up after school. In it was her mother. Since then, the car has kept coming regularly because Georgina now lives with her mother, who no longer has any relationship with the man she was living with.

Looking at the small but great thing Katy did, we can now say, "It is accomplished." She did everything well, "to the end," and she achieved what she set out to do.

Think about it. How many times have you started to take an interest in someone who needed help and then abandoned him or her, using all kinds of excuses to silence your conscience? How many things have you started with enthusiasm and then not followed through because of difficulties that you felt were beyond your strength?

The lesson Jesus is giving you today is this: "He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end."

Love to the very end. And if one day God should literally ask you for your life, you will not hesitate. You will be like the martyrs who went to their deaths singing. And your reward shall be the greatest glory because Jesus said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13).

By Chiara Lubich

Chiara's complete commentary can be found in *Words to Live By* (New City Press, 1980)