

Castelgandolfo, April 29, 1999

**What must come first**

This year we are giving special attention to deepening our relationship with God, and our prayer.

(...)

It is our duty to live this every day and I too, of course, am doing the same.

(...)

One day I had proposed, like others I hope, to “pray always”, as Jesus says and wants, by offering every action to him, preceding it with the words “for you”. Through the grace of God, I had been especially faithful to this commitment. So at the end of the day, in speaking with God, I asked him if he was pleased with me, or if he wasn’t, to correct me.

I seemed to understand his answer in the depths of my heart, which could be expressed with these words: “Your way of living today, offering God your every action by saying ‘for you’, was certainly pleasing to me, but it could also very well have been lived by anyone who follows a more individual spirituality. You are called to something different. I want something else from you. Your vocation requires that before all else, you put at the basis of your every action, also actions offered by saying ‘for you’, mutual love with your sisters and brothers. So your first commitment must be that of always being ready to give your life for them, so that unity may triumph.

I understood the lesson.

Certainly, after many years of spiritual life, I had tried on that day too, to live the new commandment, but not as my first duty.

So I began at once to look for whoever was close by, being ready to die for him or her, and to do practically whatever that implied, and only on this basis to offer my actions to Jesus with the words “For You”.

It is more than fifty years now that I have been telling myself and telling you that the “norm of all norms” –and so the basic rule for being able to pray – is unity.

And yet, we must always revive in our heart this obligation of ours, we must always start again.

May what I have confided to you console especially those who at this time find it hard to live out this essential point of our spiritual life; remembering that Jesus among us can always be reborn as in a never-ending Christmas.

My dear friends, let’s make every effort not to forget this, or better still, not to forget the One who must precede all else. He is the great innovation, the newness that we are called to offer to the world.

What an honor it is to be able to live this vocation, what fullness of joy!

Ours is the Work of Mary, of Mary in the sense that it is hers.

But, if the Work is hers, we as individuals are also hers. In fact, we must be other little Marys.

And the role of our spirituality is precisely this: it gives us the possibility of repeating Mary on earth, in some way, of imitating her.

We know we can attribute many privileges to Mary. She is immaculate, she was assumed into heaven, she is the Queen of the world.

But what makes her great, more than anything else, is her divine motherhood, so that she

can call the Word of God, incarnate in her womb, her “son”, just as the Father calls the Word in the bosom of the Trinity His Son: it is a privilege we will never fully understand.

And yet it is precisely in her motherhood that we can imitate her, in our own way, by living in such a way that Jesus will always be “generated” in our midst through our mutual love.

Imitating Mary in her divine motherhood is certainly more possible for those who follow a communitarian spirituality like ours.

So let’s do all we can to be a living expression of our characteristic vocation always, so that if we are asked: “Who are the focolarini? What does it mean to be a member of the Focolare Movement?”, we will be able to reply: those who always offer Jesus to the world, in a real way, so that today too, as in the past, he may enlighten, educate, and guide along the right paths, and form and multiply a people that is his and which can direct humanity towards universal fraternity.

We focolarini cannot do without this presence of his. We would be meaningless. It would be betraying God’s call.

So then – let’s say it again – our commitment is this: to seek to establish and maintain Jesus in our midst, offering him all our actions by saying “For You”.

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