

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Rocca di Papa, December 7, 1973

Chiara Lubich to the meeting of women focaline from Italy and other European countries (videotaped in her home):

“Today the Movement is thirty years old” (11’) (video text)

I was asked today, December 7th, 1973, to recall December 7th, 1943, which is the date we have always considered as the official beginning of the Movement. It was the day of my consecration to God.

I believe that the young people and also those newer to the Movement might appreciate it if I describe that simple day. I will try to do so looking at what God did on that day, and not at me as an individual.

Imagine a young girl who is in love, with a love that is her first love, the purest kind of love, as yet undeclared, but which is already burning in her soul. There is only one difference. A young girl who is in love here on earth has before her eyes the image of her loved one. Instead, this girl does not see her beloved, she does not hear or touch him. She does not sense his fragrance with the senses of her body, but rather with the senses of her soul, through which Love¹ - with a capital “L” - has entered and taken complete possession of her. Thus, she feels a characteristic kind of joy, one that is difficult to experience again in life, a joy which is secret, serene, jubilant.

A few days before December 7th, I was told that I should spend the night before my consecration praying in front of a crucifix, so as to prepare myself as well as I could for my marriage to God, a marriage that was to take place in secret. The only ones who knew about it were God, myself and the priest.

That evening I tried to keep this vigil, kneeling beside my bed in front of a metal crucifix that my mother has now. I think I prayed for a couple of hours. But since I was young and not too convinced about certain practices, which I later understood were not consistent with my vocation, I fell asleep, after noticing that the crucifix was covered with the moisture from my breath as I prayed. This fact seemed to be a symbol. The crucifix which I was to follow would not be one so much of physical wounds, which many spiritualities have underlined, but rather of spiritual suffering, the spiritual sufferings that Jesus had experienced, even though I didn’t know Jesus forsaken yet.

The next morning, I got up at about five o’clock, put on the best dress I had, even though it was very simple, and set out on foot across the city towards a small boarding school. I had told my mother that I was going to a service which would last quite some time.

1 Referring to God who is Love.

A storm was raging and I had to make my way pushing my umbrella in front of me. This too was significant. It seemed to me to signify that the step I was taking would meet many obstacles. The fury of the wind and the rain pushing against me seemed to be the symbol of a hostile presence.

When I arrived at the school the scene changed. An enormous door opened as if automatically. I experienced a sense of relief and welcome, almost as though God, who was waiting for me there, was welcoming me with outstretched arms. The chapel was beautifully decorated. On the back wall was a painting of Mary Immaculate. In front of the altar, on the inner side of the altar rail, a kneeler had been carefully prepared. The priest had asked me to bring a sealed envelope containing a request for a grace, certain that it would be granted to me on that day. In it I asked for the gift of faith for someone dear to me. The priest took it and put it under a linen cloth on the altar and started Mass.

Before Communion I saw in an instant what I was about to do. I was crossing a bridge with my consecration to God and that bridge was collapsing behind me. I would never be able to go back again into the world. Yes, because my consecration was not simply a formula that I then read in front of the Eucharist that was raised up before me, saying: "I make a vow of perfect and perpetual chastity." It was something else.

I was getting married. I was marrying God. And this did not only mean a life of chastity, of no human marriage, but it meant leaving everything - my parents, studies, school, amusements, everything that in my little world I had loved so much up until then. Opening my eyes to what I was doing in that moment was, I remember, something immediate and brief, but so strong that I shed a tear that fell on my missal.

The Mass ended in silence. I went back to a pew and knelt down. The priest took off his vestments and knelt a few pews behind me. There was a long thanksgiving. Then he came up to me and said: "You will be the spouse of blood." Although I was grateful for everything that was said to me, I did not feel harmony between what he was saying and what I felt in my soul. The words "spouse of blood" seemed like a formula from the past and not meant for me. The reply in my heart was: "No, I am the spouse of God." And it was that God who would later reveal himself to me as the Abandoned One. Blood, certainly, but blood of the soul.

I think I ran all the way home, stopping only once, near the bishop's house, to buy three red carnations for the crucifix awaiting me in my room. They would be the sign of the feast we celebrated together.

That's all. Thirty years ago.

Recalling that day recently I couldn't help being moved at the thought of the joy of that day. The events which followed are known to you more or less. Thirty years, as one of our old songs says, of "suffering, torments, love, happiness. Lord," I repeat with you today, "these are my flowers."

Recently someone asked me if I had the desire to go back and start again. In spite of being fully aware that I could do everything better, my reply was "no." What has happened in these thirty years is too great. Perhaps not everyone is aware of it. A little branch has been grafted onto the tree of the Church, has already blossomed and is

“Church.” The graft has taken place and the instruments God used are not important. What matters is the Church. Christ placed Peter as the rock and we, even though poor and little, have the joy in this twentieth century of enriching her with a new light, a new springtime.

All this came about because those who worked within it responded to God’s grace, but above all, because of the charism, which is the gift we had to bring to fruition. And it was even because of our weaknesses, inexperience and shortcomings, not because these limitations are good in themselves, but because we always believed that everything works together for the good (of those who love God²), and so weaknesses, inexperience and shortcomings become useful material for the work of God, as well as being our greatest strength, for as Saint Paul says,³ in them we glory. They have become the proof for others that ours is a work of God.

But this graft might not have happened. We were free. So it seems reasonable not to want to go back, but rather to thank God - something we can never do enough - for these thirty years.

I have thought many times recently that if I died, I would take with me into the next life the joy, the great joy of having contributed to a Work of God which will remain after me, because it is “Church.” Of course, we always need him to keep watch over us, because we could still ruin everything.

But today is December 7th, 1973. A brief pause to look back... and now... ahead! Who knows what awaits us? What’s certain is that everything is only love. With even the brightest predictions on December 7th, 1943, I could never have imagined what I see today.

Praise be to God, glory to Mary, queen of a kingdom which, without exaggeration, has invaded the world.

Chiara Lubich

2 See Rom 8:28.

3 See 2 Cor 12:9.