

## WORD OF LIFE

by Chiara Lubich

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*'Rejoice in the Lord always.'* (Phil 4:4)

The purpose of this brief exhortation is very important to Paul. More than an exhortation, however, it sounds like a command. For this reason, it is even more surprising. In fact, we might ask ourselves: 'Can a feeling, or a spiritual condition as spontaneous as joy, be summoned on demand? Can a person be commanded to be joyful always?'

The answer depends on the kind of joy one is referring to. There is a kind of joy that is linked to external factors, to favorable circumstances, that do not depend on us or on our will. But there is also another kind of joy, linked to a particular inner disposition, which can depend on us, and this is the joy Saint Paul is referring to.

*'Rejoice in the Lord always.'*

The joy Paul is speaking about is the joy that the Holy Spirit creates in us. It is the gift Jesus obtained for us through his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus never fails to give us this joy if we are truly united to him, imitate his example and live his Word with commitment, and above all, if we generously follow him along the way of the cross.

It is particularly significant that Saint Paul wrote these words when he himself was living through a very difficult moment. He was in prison, deprived of everything, with the fear that he might lose his life. With these words, therefore, he proves to us that no hardship or persecution, not even death itself – if embraced with Jesus - can take from us the joy and peace that come from him. On the contrary, they increase it even more.

*'Rejoice in the Lord always.'*

It is very clear what this month's Word of Life means and the way we should live it. It urges us to always be launched spiritually into living our Christian life. It tells us not to be half-heartedly, but fully committed to living, in particular, the command to love our neighbor. It impels us to embrace with all our heart the inevitable difficulties, crosses and trials of life, seeing in them the countenance of Jesus crucified, so that we may always be worthy of that special fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is joy. In fact, joy is the sign of the fullness of Christian life in us and is a proof to non-believers of our integrity.

Let's resolve then, as Christians, to be witnesses of joy in the world.