

The Word in the first place

(prepared text)

What never should have happened has in fact happened. Eight days have gone by since this terrifying war broke out¹ and all over the world people are holding their breath in the fear that it will escalate, involving other countries.

Many members of the Movement are already suffering in nations affected to a greater or lesser degree by this present calamity - for example, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, the United States, Turkey, and so on. In spite of so many prayers, including ours, God has permitted a war to break out. Why? Because the will of someone in a position of authority did not coincide with God's will, even though a chorus of voices expressed a more reasonable option, summed up by Pope John Paul II, the greatest spiritual and moral leader in the world, in his constant appeals for peace. He underlined the futility of resorting to war to resolve any problem because of its inevitable catastrophic consequences.

We can only hope that God, in his mysterious plans and infinite love, can and will draw something good out of this immense evil, as he did during the Second World War,² at least with regard to our Movement. We don't deserve it, but we know how immense his mercy is. For this reason, and in particular so that peace may return, we won't give up praying. On the contrary, we have to intensify our "time out"³ now even more.

In this situation, we should also feel that we are all being called to resolutely follow a way of life that will correct, at least within ourselves (but through the communion of saints, in many other people, too) the serious mistake that has been made.

People haven't done the will of God, of God who is peace. They have done their own will. We have to be even more determined, as never before, to carry out his will perfectly and his will is expressed in his Words. His Words need to take on very special importance for us today.

If we have chosen God as our Ideal⁴ - and this is what identifies us - if we have put him in the first place in our lives, then concretely we have to place his Word, his

1 Referring to the First Gulf War, in which the United States and its coalition forces invaded Iraq.

2 World War II, during which the Focolare came to life.

3 "Time-Out" is a project to either pray for peace or observe a moment of silence for peace. It is held at 12:00 noon in every time zone, so that someone is always praying at every hour of the day and night.

4 "Ideal" is the term used by Chiara to indicate having God as the center and goal of one's life.

will in the first place in our hearts. His Word has to be above everything else in life. Compared with it, everything else has to become, in a certain sense, indifferent for us, with that “holy indifference” that the saints speak of. It shouldn’t make any difference to us to be healthy or sick, to study or serve, to sleep or pray, to live or die. The only important thing is to live the Word, to be the “living Word.”

This is how we lived at the beginning of our Movement, when, against the background of another war, the Holy Spirit enlightened us about what has real value. To be as clear as possible about this, I would like to recall something that happened to us at that time, something symbolic that many of you know about, but that can give us an idea of how we should act today, too.

The Movement was beginning to develop in Rome, and we needed a place to live. It was really difficult to find anything, but providentially we had been offered an apartment and we even had enough money for the deposit. So we went to see our archbishop in Trent to tell him about this possibility. At that time, however, he had been trying to find a way to have further proof that ours was a work of God. He remembered that the ultimate proof of a work of God, as indicated by his founder, Gaspare Bertoni,⁵ was obedience, and so he decided to put us to the test.

So when we arrived and told him about our intention, he opposed the idea with a firm “no,” giving as his reason the current situation of the world. We reacted immediately with joy and celebration - which for the bishop was the sign he needed. In fact, we had come to know about the will of God and we wanted nothing other than that, since we had understood so clearly its value. And now the will of God was what the bishop was telling us. It absolutely did not matter to us whether we had a house or not – we were only interested in doing the will of God. That was the Ideal.

This is how we should act today, too. Some among us might have experienced a painful and sudden change in their life. Perhaps some had to run often to air raid shelters, exactly like we did at a time so many years ago, a time still so much in our hearts. Some might be going through moments of fear and anguish, wondering if they will lose their lives. Still others might be going ahead with their normal lives, with all its daily duties, as yet far from any danger.

For all of us what has greatest value is the will of God, not one thing or another. Next month’s Word of Life says, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”⁶ We definitely need to listen to him. We have to give his Word the first place in our hearts, in our minds, in our memory. Before everything else, we should put all our energy at his service.

To be concrete, let’s listen to his Word this month telling us: “Not my will but yours be done.”⁷ If we all put this into practice, we will be able to rectify, at least in ourselves, the mistake that has been made. By doing so, Christ will live in our hearts

5 The Archbishop of Trent, Carlo de Ferrari, was a member of the Stigmatine order, founded by Gaspare Bertoni (1777-1853). He encouraged and supported the Movement until his death.

6 Mk 9:7.

7 Lk 22:42.

and we will all be much more united, more of a solid block, more one, sharing everything, praying effectively for one another, so that peace will return.

Dear friends, we will be in touch again soon, very soon and let's hope that by then the news will be better.

Chiara Lubich