

WORD OF LIFE

by Chiara Lubich

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“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (Jn 12:24)

More eloquently than any treatise, these words of Jesus reveal the secret of life. We cannot experience the joy of Jesus without embracing suffering. Nor can we experience resurrection without death. In this sentence, Jesus is referring to himself, explaining the meaning of his existence.

His death was just days away. It would be extremely painful and humiliating. Why should he die, he who had said he was *“the Life”*?¹ Why should he suffer, he who was innocent? Why should he be slandered, beaten, ridiculed, nailed to a cross and put to death in the most shameful way? And above all, why should he, who had lived in constant union with God, come to feel forsaken by his Father? Even he was afraid of death and yet he knew it would have a meaning. It would lead to the resurrection.

He had come on earth to gather together the scattered children of God,² to break down every barrier between individuals and nations, to make brothers and sisters of people previously divided, to bring peace and to build unity. But there was a price to pay. In order to draw all to himself he had to be raised up from the earth, on the cross.³ In this context, we find this parable, which is perhaps the most beautiful in the whole Gospel:

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Jesus is that grain of wheat. In this time of Holy Week, he looks down on us from the height of the cross, which was the instrument of his martyrdom, but was also his glory and the sign of his utmost love. On the cross, he gave everything: forgiveness to those who executed him, heaven to the thief, and to us he gave his mother, his body and blood and his very life, to the point of crying out: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*⁴

1 See Jn 14:6.

2 See Jn 11:52.

3 See Jn 12:32.

4 Mt 27:46.

In 1944 I wrote, “Do you realize he gave us everything? What more could he give – a God who, out of love, seems to forget that he is God?”⁵

Furthermore, he made it possible for us to become children of God. He generated a new people, a new creation. On Pentecost, the grain of wheat that had fallen to the ground and died was already yielding an abundant harvest: three thousand people, of every race and nation, became “one heart and one soul.”⁶ Then five thousand, then more and more...

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This Word of Life gives meaning to our lives, to our suffering, and one day will give meaning to our death, too. The universal family we want to live for, the peace and unity we want to build around us are a vague dream, an idle fancy, if we are not ready to tread the same path as our Master. What did he do to “bear much fruit”? He shared everything that is ours. He took on our sufferings. He made himself darkness, sadness, tiredness, discord... He experienced betrayal, loneliness, being orphaned... In a word, he made himself “one with us,” taking upon himself all that burdens us.

We can do the same. We who are in love with Jesus, who is God and yet made himself our “neighbor,” have a way to tell him that we are immensely grateful for his infinite love. It is to live as he lived. We too have to become “neighbors” to all those we encounter in life, ready to “make ourselves one” with them, to take on the burden of disunity, to share a suffering, to resolve a problem, with a strong love that serves people concretely.

In his abandonment, Jesus gave the whole of himself. In a spirituality centered on him, the risen Jesus should shine out fully in us and our joy should bear witness to him.

5 C. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, ed. Hubertus Blaumeister (New City, Hyde Park NY, 2016), 27.

6 Acts 4:32.