

WORD OF LIFE

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“Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” (Mk 9:41)

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus invites us to give: give to the poor;¹ give to anyone who asks of you or who wants to borrow something;² give food to the hungry;³ if someone wants your coat, give also your cloak;⁴ give without expecting anything in return.⁵ Jesus was the first to give. He gave health to the sick, forgiveness to sinners and life to all of us.⁶

In place of our selfish instinct to hoard, Jesus tells us to be generous; instead of focusing on our own needs, to care for others; to replace a culture of having with a culture of giving.

It doesn't matter whether we can give a little or a lot. What counts is “how” we give, how much love we put into even a small gesture of kindness for another person. At times, it is enough to offer a cup of water, even a cup of “cold” water, as Matthew specifies in his Gospel, which is something greatly appreciated and needed in a country as hot and dry as the Holy Land.

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Giving a cup of water is a simple gesture, yet great in the eyes of God when done in his name, that is, out of love.

Love can be expressed in many small ways. Someone who loves finds the most fitting way to express their love in each moment.

One who loves is attentive to others, because they forget themselves.

Those who love are thoughtful because, when they discover what another person needs, they do all they can to help them.

Their love looks at what is essential. They know how to be approach someone ready to listen, serve and make themselves available.

1 See Mk 10:21.

2 See Mt 5:42.

3 See Mk 6:36.

4 See Mt 5:40.

5 See Mt 10:8.

6 See Mk 10:45.

Often when we are with another person, especially someone who is suffering, we imagine we are rendering a great service by giving our advice, which may not be appropriate at that moment, or by talking too much, which might become irritating or burdensome for the other person. Instead, how important it is just to “be” a presence of love for each person! When we do that, we often find the most direct way for entering into their heart and even relieving them of their pain.

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The Word of Life for this month can help us to rediscover the value of all we do, from doing housework to working in the fields or in a mechanics’ garage, to doing paperwork at an office or homework for school, as well as carrying out our civic, political, and religious duties. Everything can be transformed into attentive and thoughtful service for others. Love will give us new eyes to understand what others need and to respond creatively and generously.

What will happen if we love like this? Giving will be reciprocated and gifts will circulate, because love calls forth love. Joy will be multiplied, since *“it is more blessed to give than to receive.”*⁷

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I remember that during the Second World War in Trent, there were extremely poor families in some parts of our city. We went to share whatever we had with them. We wanted to improve their living conditions so that everyone would live with a certain degree of equality.

This simple idea brought about unforeseen results: food, clothing and medicines began to circulate in surprising abundance. We became convinced that putting the Gospel into practice was the answer for resolving the problems of each individual and of society as a whole.

And that was not just a dream. Today, hundreds of businesses are involved in a project called the Economy of Communion. The owners run their businesses on the principles of the culture of giving, voluntarily sharing part of their profits for social projects, such as helping people in dire need by creating new jobs for them or providing them with the basic necessities of life.

But the poor are many and the profits from these businesses cannot meet all their needs. Since 1994, therefore, many of us have pledged to give at least a small amount

⁷ Acts 20:35.

each month for those in need. We are currently helping to support 7,000 people in 55 countries.

There are innumerable testimonies of “cups of water” that have been given and received, in a contest of generosity.

Here is one among many. It comes from the Philippines: “Our small butcher’s shop was going bankrupt because of an outbreak of disease among the livestock. We went into debt, and weren’t sure how to keep going. Through your regular support, we have had enough to eat every day.

“However, I very soon realized that I too had to help those around me who were in even greater need. One of my neighbors was ill and besides being in great pain, she didn’t have enough to live on. I assisted her until her departure for the next life. Since her husband was much poorer than us and was struggling to manage, I took on the financial support of their fifth child.”