

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Münster, Germany, November 15, 1998

Chiara Lubich to young people in St. Paul's Cathedral:

“Vocation” (with German translation after each sentence)

(Song in German)

(Applause)

Chiara: Dear friends and dear young people, in particular. We are gathered here in this very beautiful house of God for a day dedicated to deepening our understanding of a subject that concerns all of us, that is, our vocation.

I too would like to consider this very important theme and add some thoughts to those you already know about it.

“A vocation.” What does this word mean?

In the wide sense of the word, it can be defined as an inclination towards a role, a particular profession, a mission, a task that one feels called to carry out for the benefit of others.¹ “I want to become a doctor, an architect, a nurse, a lawyer, a teacher, a politician, a journalist, and so on, in order to be of use to society.”

In the religious field, instead, vocation means a call from God. God takes the initiative, out of love for us. It is a call to a person, or to a whole nation, to be part of his life. He entrusts them with a mission, perhaps a very special one, but one that is woven into a much broader plan, which is that of helping humanity become the family of God.

To express it more clearly: God is Love and he shows that he is Love by calling us - the word “vocation” comes from the verb “*vocare*” [in Latin], which means “to call.” He calls a person or a people to share their whole life with him and to carry out a specific, particular task aimed, however, at the great mission of Jesus, that is, to make the world one family.

Thus, a vocation is a calling. And as such it awaits a response.

We are all familiar with the many times that God called people, both in the Old and in the New Testaments, and the way these people answered him. For example, there was the call of Abraham, of Moses, of the twelve apostles, of Paul, and others. We also see that people are called today too, within the Church of God, like the vocation to the priesthood, or to the religious life, or to giving oneself completely to God as consecrated virgins or as married people, in the new modern ecclesial movements.

1. Chiara referenced *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità/3*, a cura di Ermanno Ancilli, Città Nuova 1990, p.2670. See also Cambridge English dictionary.

Today I have been asked to speak to you about one of the many vocations of our times, that is, my vocation. As you can imagine, it is not easy for me to speak about certain things in public. But I will do so with simplicity, hoping that you will find it interesting. I do it only to give glory to God. (Applause)

In telling you about this vocation, I will have to keep in mind the period in which I understood it. Like all the other vocations, mine too is that of a person invited, above all, to share God's life with him, striving to become perfect, as Jesus said, "Be perfect" (Mt 5:48). And then, as the others, it is a call to contribute towards making humanity one family.

In the beginning, of course, I didn't know anything about what would happen in my life, nor did I have any plans. In fact, it is God who calls you; he is the one who chooses. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn. 15:16). And this is what he did with me, too, even though I was weak and frail, like any other girl, like all the other girls at that time. And then he gradually fulfilled his plan.

However, even before he called me, there were many little episodes in my life that were signs, perhaps, that God was calling me.

I'll tell you about them because I'm sure that there have been beautiful signs in the lives of each one of you. Perhaps when you were still a little child, you might have had a small inspiration, a thought, an intuition, something beautiful that you read or heard from a friend or relative that was different from the ordinary routine of your daily life. And so I would like to invite you, after I tell you about these episodes, to think about this and to discover how Jesus loved you. I'm certain that you will find similar signs in your own life.

When I was still small, about six or seven years old, the Sisters used to take me to church for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. I felt a strong impulse to fix my gaze on the Host and ask Jesus: "Give me your light, give me your love." I remember that the desire for Jesus' love was so strong that I kept staring at the Host to the point that the white Host became black and all around it became white. I didn't know then that, during my lifetime, the Lord would give me light and love that would fill my own heart and that of many other people. This is a small episode, a small sign, and it was followed by others.

Another one happened when I was 18. I really loved philosophy, but I also had a great desire, almost a holy curiosity, to know about God. What is he like? What is his relationship with me? What is his relationship with others? What is his relationship with history? So I thought that the best thing to do would be to attend a Catholic university, hoping that the professors there would teach me about God. But the precarious financial situation of my family prevented me from going to that university.

I remember being in a little room with my mother, heartbroken and crying all my tears. I thought to myself: "I'll never get to know God, I'll never know God." My mother tried to console me, but it was useless. And then, in the depths of my soul, I had the impression that I could hear someone telling me: "I will be your teacher!" A few years

later – not many, maybe five or six years later - when God sent this charism into the world, I understood that he was starting to teach me about the things of God.

When I was 19, I was invited, together with other students, to visit a city called Loreto in the central part of Italy. People say that the house of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph was brought there during the crusades. The little house is in a church that covers it like a fortress. In the intervals during this course for Catholic students, I would run over to that little house. Its walls are blackened by so many candles. I would kneel down and something I couldn't explain happened to me. I felt almost crushed by something very powerful, like being overwhelmed by the divine atmosphere there, and I would start crying. I told myself: "Maybe the Child Jesus walked from this side to the other. Maybe Mary was singing here and so these walls heard the sound of Mary's voice. Maybe it was Joseph who put up these beams." And the more I thought about these things, the more I was overcome by a profound emotion.

And there, for the first time, I understood my way. I understood that a new way was opening in the Church for people who wanted to consecrate themselves to God, to give themselves to God, a way for young men and women, for married people, for priests. What was this way? A repetition of the family of Nazareth, where Jesus lived in the midst of two virgins. This is the vocation to the focolare: virgins, young women or young men, or priests, with Christ in their midst, as he had said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20). I kept going back to that little house, as often as I could. Then, on the last day, I was in the back of the church, I understood, and I don't know how, I understood that I would be followed by an army of virgins.

Let's go on to another episode. It was a freezing cold day in Trent. I was at home with my family, my mom and dad, two sisters and a brother. Someone had to go to buy the milk, which meant walking more than a kilometer in that cold. My mom never asked me to do errands because she wanted me to study. So she asked one of my little sisters: "Will you go?" "But, Mom, it's so cold outside!" She asked my other little sister: "Will you go?" But she said she was cold, too. Prompted by the desire to do an act of love – remember this point, "to do an act of love" – I said: "I'll go, Mom, I can go." I took the empty bottle and started out towards the farm to get the milk.

When I was halfway there, I stopped in my tracks because I had the strong impression, even though I didn't see anything with my eyes, rather like an impression of my soul, that somehow heaven opened up and a voice told me: "Give yourself totally to me." Afterwards I spoke with my confessor, and he immediately gave me permission to give myself completely to Jesus. In the meantime, I had made friends with other young women and of course, my joy was so great that I couldn't keep quiet about it. I told them what I was going to do, and they decided: "We'll come with you too, Chiara." That was the beginning of the white army. (Applause)

(Song)