"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."
(2 Cor 3:17)

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of the city of Corinth, who were especially dear to him. He had lived among them for almost two years, between the years 50 and 52, sowing the word of God and laying the foundations of the Christian community to the point of generating it like a father (see 1 Cor 3:6-10; 4:15).

A few years later, when he went back to visit them, some members of the community publicly challenged his authority as an apostle (see 2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:12), and this became a moment to reaffirm the greatness of his ministry. It was not on his own initiative that he was announcing the Gospel, but because he was moved to do so by God. The word of God for him was no longer veiled, for the Holy Spirit had enabled him to understand it in the light of what had taken place in Christ Jesus. This is why he could live it and proclaim it with complete freedom. It enabled him to enter into communion with the Lord, to be transformed into him to the point of being guided by the Lord's own Spirit of freedom.

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The risen Jesus, the Lord, continues today, as in Paul's time, to act in history through his Spirit, especially in the Christian community. He enables us to understand the Gospel in all its newness as well, and he writes it on our hearts so that it becomes our law of life.

We are not guided by laws imposed on us from the outside; we are not slaves forced to obey regulations that we find unconvincing or that we do not share. A Christian is moved by a principle of interior life that the Spirit has placed within through baptism, and by the Spirit's voice repeating the words of Jesus, making them understood in all their beauty—expressions of life and joy. The Spirit makes these words timely, teaches us how to live them, and infuses within us the strength to put them into practice.

It is the Lord himself who, thanks to the Holy Spirit, comes to live and act in us, making us a living Gospel.

To be guided by the Lord, by his Spirit, by his word—this is true freedom! It coincides with the fulfillment of what is most profound in our being.

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But we know that for the Holy Spirit to act, we must be completely ready to listen, change our way of seeing things if necessary, and then adhere fully to what the Spirit's voice suggests.

It is easy to allow ourselves to become slaves to pressures from fixed customs and social mores that can lead us to make wrong choices.

In order to live the Word of Life this month, we need to learn to say a decisive "No!" to those negative things that surface in our hearts each time we are tempted to settle for ways of acting that are not in line with the Gospel. And we need to learn to say "Yes!" to God with conviction each time we feel he is calling us to live in truth and in love.

We will discover the connection between the cross and the Spirit as cause and effect. Each cut, each pruning, each "No!" to our selfishness is a source of new light, peace, joy, love, inner freedom, self-fulfillment. It is an open door to the Spirit.

During this time of Pentecost, he will be able to bestow his gifts more abundantly; he will guide us, and we will be recognized as true sons and daughters of God.

We will become ever more free from evil, ever more free to love.

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It was precisely this freedom that a U.N. officer found during his last assignment in one of the Balkan states. The missions entrusted to him were rewarding, although extremely demanding. One great difficulty, however, was that he had to be away from his family for prolonged periods. He also found it hard to leave the burdens of his work at the door and devote himself, free of worries, to his children and wife when he

returned home.

Suddenly he was told that he would be transferred to another city in the same region. Bringing his family with him to that city was unthinkable because, in spite of recently signed peace agreements, hostilities continued.

He wondered what to do. What was more important, his career or family? He spoke at length about it with his wife who shared an intense Christian life with him for a long time. They asked for light from the Holy Spirit, and together they attempted to understand God's will for their family. Finally, they came to a decision: to leave his job, a highly sought-after position. It was a most unusual decision in that professional environment.

"The strength to make this choice," he said, "came from the mutual love between myself and my wife, who never made me feel the burden of the hardships I had brought on her. As for me, I had sought the good of the family, beyond economic security and career interests, and I found inner freedom."

Chiara Lubich