Written by Chiara Lubich
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“He loved his own in the world, and he loved them to the end.”
(Jn 13:1)

Do you know the context of this sentence in the Gospel? It is in St. John’s account of the Last Supper, when Jesus was about to wash the feet of his disciples and was preparing for the Passion. During the last moments that Jesus spent with “his own,” he revealed the love he had always had for them in the highest and most explicit way.

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The words “to the end” mean to the end of his life, to his very last breath. But there is also the idea of perfection. That is, he loved them completely, totally, with the greatest intensity, to the highest degree.

When Jesus would go on to his glory, the disciples would remain in the world. They would feel alone; they would have many trials to overcome. It is precisely in view of those moments that Jesus wanted to make them feel sure of his love.

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In this phrase, can't you sense Jesus' entire lifestyle, his way of loving? He washed his disciples' feet. His love made him stoop to this lowly service, which in those days was done only by slaves. In addition to his amazing words, his miracles and all his deeds, Jesus was now preparing for the tragedy of Calvary in which he would give his very life for "his own" and for all people. He knew of their great need, the greatest need that people can have: the need to be freed from sin, which means from death, and to be able to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Only he could give them the peace and joy of everlasting life.

And so Jesus gave himself up to death, crying out his forsakenness by the Father, until he was able at the very end to say, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30), that is, everything is completed.

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In these words we see both the tenacious love of a God and the tender affection of a brother. We Christians, since Christ is in us, can also love like this.

Now I am not proposing, however, that you imitate Jesus by actually dying for others as he did when his hour came. Nor do I put before you models like Father Kolbe who died for a fellow prisoner, or Father Damien who contracted leprosy from his lepers and died with them and for them.

It may be that in the course of your lifetime you will never be asked to give your physical

life for your neighbors. But what God certainly does ask of you is that you love them “to the end,” to the point where you too can say, “It is finished.”

This is what an eleven-year-old Italian girl named Lisa did. She saw that her classmate and friend Georgina was extremely sad. She tried to comfort her, but it did no good. So she decided to find out what made her friend so sad. She learned that Georgina’s father had died, and that her mother had left her alone with her grandmother and had gone to live with another man. Lisa could sense the tragedy and decided to do something about it.

Even though Lisa was only a child, she asked Georgina to let her talk to her mother, but Georgina begged her to go with her first to visit her father’s grave. With great love Lisa went with her. There she overheard Georgina sobbing and imploring her father to take her with him.

Lisa felt heartbroken. The ruins of a little church were nearby and the two girls went in. The only things left inside the church were a small tabernacle and a crucifix. Lisa said, “Look, in this world everything is going to be destroyed; only the crucifix and the Eucharist will always be with us.” Georgina dried her tears and replied, “Yes, you’re right!” Then with tender love, Lisa took Georgina by the hand and accompanied her to her mother.

When they got there Lisa boldly told the mother: “I know this is none of my business, but it seems that you’ve left your daughter without the mother’s love that she desperately needs. And I’ll say one more thing — you’ll never find peace until you take her back to live with you, and are sorry and decide to change.”

The following day in school Lisa continued to support Georgina with her love. But something new happened. After school a car came to pick Georgina up; it was her mother. From that day on the car has kept coming regularly. Georgina now lives with her mother who broke off the relationship with the man she had been living with.

Looking at the small yet great thing Lisa did, we could say, “It is finished.” She did everything well, “to the end” and she achieved what she set out to do.

Think about it. How often have you started to take care of someone and then have given up using all kinds of excuses to silence your conscience? How many things have you started with enthusiasm and then not followed through in the face of difficulties you felt were beyond your strength?

The lesson Jesus is giving you today is this:

“He loved his own in the world, and he loved them to the end.”

Love to the very end. And if one day God should actually ask for your life, you will not hesitate. You will be like the martyrs who went to their deaths singing. Your reward shall be the greatest glory because Jesus said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13).

- Chiara Lubich

If you would like to read experiences of life related to this or to past “Words of Life,” they can be found in *Living City*, the monthly magazine of the Focolare Movement (in print or online) or in books published by *New City Press*.

For information, to subscribe or to order the special issue of *Living City* dedicated to Chiara Lubich, write to: *Living City*, 202 Cardinal Road, Hyde Park, NY 12538; phone: 1-845-229-0230 ext: 181; e-mail: *livingcity@livingcitymagazine.com*. www.*livingcitymagazine.com*; www.*newcitypress.com*.

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