Written by Chiara Lubich
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"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"
(Jn 6:68)

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God to the crowds that followed him (see Lk 9:11). He used simple words, parables taken from everyday life, and yet his words held a special fascination. The crowds were spellbound by his teaching, "for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Mt 7:29). Likewise, when the temple guards sent to arrest him were asked by the chief priest and Pharisees why they did not bring him in, they replied: "Never before has anyone spoken like this one" (Jn 7:46).

The Gospel of John also speaks about the conversations filled with light that Jesus had with individuals like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. He explained matters in depth to his apostles. He spoke openly of the Father and of the things of Heaven, and with them he no longer used figures of speech (see Jn 16:25–29). His words were convincing, and the apostles did not retreat even when they did not fully understand his words or when those words seemed too demanding.

Some of his disciples remarked, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" (Jn 6:60) when they heard him say that he would give them his body to eat and his blood to drink. Seeing that "many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him," Jesus said to the Twelve: "Do you also want to leave?" (Jn 6:66-67)

Peter, now bound to him forever — having been fascinated by the words he had heard spoken from the day he first met Jesus — answered on behalf of everyone: **"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."**

Peter had understood that the words of his teacher were different from those of other teachers. Their words were coming from an earthly source, belonging to and having their destiny on earth. The words of Jesus are spirit and life because they come from Heaven: they are a light that descends from above, and their power comes from above. His words have a wealth and depth that other words do not have, no matter how philosophical, political or poetic they are. His are "words of eternal life" because they contain, express and communicate the fullness of that life that never ends, since it is the very life of God.

Jesus is risen and lives, and his words, although spoken in the past, are not mere memories. They are words addressed to all of us today and to every person of every time and culture. They are universal, eternal words.

The words of Jesus! They must have been his greatest "art." The Word who spoke in human words — what content, what intensity, what expression, what a voice!

Basil, one of the great Fathers of the Church, recounted how "one day, almost as if waking up from a long sleep, I beheld the marvelous light of the truth contained in the Gospel and discovered the vanity of the wisdom of this world."'

In a letter of May 9, 1897, Therese of Lisieux wrote: "At times, when I read certain spiritual treatises ... my poor little spirit tires easily. I close the scholarly book that breaks my head to pieces and dries up my heart and take in my hands the sacred Scriptures. Then everything lights up: just one word opens my soul to infinite horizons, and reaching perfection seems easy."'

Yes, divine words fully satisfy a spirit that is made for the infinite; they illuminate the mind and one's whole being as well because they are light, love and life. They impart peace — that peace that Jesus calls his own: "my peace" — even in moments of bewilderment and anguish. They give full joy even in the midst of suffering that at times can torment the soul. They give strength, especially in the face of dismay and discouragement. They give a sense of freedom because they open the path to the truth.

"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

The Word of Life this month reminds us that the only teacher we want to follow is Jesus, even when his words might seem to be hard or too demanding. This means, among other things, to be honest at work, forgive, put ourselves at the service of the others rather than to think only of ourselves, remain faithful to our families, assist terminally ill persons without giving in to thoughts of euthanasia.

There are many "teachers" around, inviting us to adopt easy solutions, to make compromises. We want to listen to our only Teacher and to follow him, the only one who speaks the truth and who has "words of eternal life." In this way we too can repeat Peter's words.

During this Lenten season, as we prepare for the great celebration of the Resurrection, we should really enroll in the school of the one Teacher and become his disciples. What should come to life in us is a passionate love for the word of God. Let us be ready to welcome the word when we hear it proclaimed; let us read it, study it, meditate on it.

But above all we are called to put it into practice as Scripture itself teaches: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves" (Jas 1:22). That is why each month we focus on one word in particular, letting it enter us, form us, act in us. By living out one word of Jesus we live out the whole Gospel, because in each of his words he gives all of himself, he himself comes to live in us.

It is like a drop of divine wisdom from the Risen one that slowly sinks in and replaces our ways of thinking, choosing and acting in all the circumstances of our lives.

Chiara Lubich

Each month a Scripture passage is offered as a guide and inspiration for daily living. This commentary, translated into 96 different languages and dialects, reaches several million people worldwide through print, radio, television and the Internet. Ever since the Focolare's beginnings, founder Chiara Lubich (1920–2008) wrote her commentaries each month. This one was originally published in March 2003.

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Read more on this topic:

- Chiara Lubich, God's Word to Us : Short Reflections on Living the Word. New City Press, 2012.
- Doriana Zamboni, ed., Glimpses of Gospel Life , New City Press, 2004, pp. 120–128.
- Chiara Lubich, "Living the Word: Way to Unity," Living Dialogue: Steps on the Way to Communion Among Christians. New City Press, 2007, pp. 67–85.

Next month:

April 2012 - "You are already cleaned because of the word I have spoken to you" (Jn 15:3).