

(English translation)

Rome, June 2005

Word of Life

“Follow me.” (*Mt 9:9*)

While he was coming from Capernaum, Jesus saw a tax collector by the name of Matthew seated at the customs post. Matthew had a job that made him despised by the people, for it placed him in the same category as loan sharks and those who took advantage of others to amass personal wealth. The Scribes and Pharisees put him on the same level as the public sinners and criticized Jesus for being “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” and for eating together with them (*Mt 11:19; 9:10*).

Jesus, going against all social conventions, called Matthew to follow him and accepted the invitation to dine at his home, as he would later do also with Zaccheus, the head of the tax collectors in Jericho. When questioned about his behaviour, Jesus responded that he had come to heal the sick, not the healthy, and to call sinners, not the righteous. His invitation, also this time, was addressed directly to one of them:

“Follow me.”

Jesus had already said these words to Andrew, Peter, James and John on the shore of the lake. He made the same invitation, using different words, to Paul on the road to Damascus.

But Jesus did not stop there; down through the centuries he has continued to call men and women of every culture and nation. He still does it today: he passes by in our lives, he meets us in quite different places and in different ways, and he makes us understand once again that invitation to follow him.

He calls us to be with him because he wants to build a personal relationship with us, and at the same time he invites us to collaborate with him in his great plan to create a new humanity.

He does not care about our weaknesses, our sins, our limitations. He loves us and chooses us just as we are. His love will transform us and give us the strength to answer his call and the courage to follow him as Matthew did.

He has a particular love for each one of us, a plan for each person’s life, an individual call. We can feel it in our hearts through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, through certain circumstances or through a piece of advice given by someone who cares about us. Even if manifested in different ways, his message spells out the same words:

“Follow me.”

I remember when I too felt a call from God.

It was a very cold winter morning in Trent. My mother asked my younger sister to go and pick up some milk at a place about a mile away from home. Since it was so cold, my sister did not feel like going. My other sister also refused to go. “I’ll go, Mom,” I said, and I picked up the bottle and left the house. Halfway there something peculiar happened: it seemed as though the skies opened up and God reached down to me with an invitation to follow him. “Give all of yourself to me,” I felt him say in my heart.

It was a clear call that I wanted to answer right away. I spoke with my spiritual advisor about it, and he gave me permission to give my life to God forever. It was December 7, 1943. It is impossible to fully convey what I felt in my heart that day: I had married God. I could expect everything from him.

“Follow me.”

This phrase does not only pertain to that specific moment when we make a choice for our lives. Jesus continues to ask us this every day. “Follow me,” he seems to suggest to us as we face our smallest daily chores — “follow me” in the trial we are called to endure, in that temptation we have to overcome, in that act of service that needs to be done.

How should we respond concretely?

By doing what God wants from us in the present moment, which always comes accompanied by a particular grace.

Our commitment this month will be, then, to do God’s will with determination, dedicating ourselves fully to the brothers and sisters that we are called to love, our work, our studies, praying, resting, and all the different things we are supposed to do.

Let us learn to listen to the voice of God deep within our hearts, which speaks to us also through the voice of our conscience: he will tell us what he wants from us in every moment. Our part is to be ready to sacrifice everything in order to do it.

“Let us love you, O God, not only more each day, for the days that remain may be few, but let us love you in every present moment with all our hearts, souls and strength in whatever is your will.”

This is the best way to follow Jesus.

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