

(English translation)

Rome - Basilica of Saint Mary Major, 14 March 2009

Homily by HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL PAUL POUPARD

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**First Anniversary of the departure of Chiara Lubich
Foundress of the Focolare Movement – Work of Mary**

*“That all may be one” (Jn 17, 21)
“We were born for these words, for unity,
to contribute to fulfilling it in the world.”*

Dearest Brother Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Deacons
Dear Focolarini
Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

“That all may be one. We were born for these words, for unity, to contribute to fulfilling it in the world.”

These words of Jesus with Chiara’s comment open the booklet for the celebration of the Holy Mass on this first anniversary of her departure for heaven. And I seem to hear once again her unforgettable voice, with her unmistakable accent from Trent, with her decisive energetic faith, with her heart generously and entirely open on the Church and the world, with her untiring work lavished on all continents so that all may be one.

The first reading of this Eucharistic celebration rightly evokes her prudence, her spirit of wisdom which she loved more than wealth, than health, than beauty, as stated in the Book of Wisdom: “an inexhaustible treasure, and those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God” (Wisdom 7:14).

God, “my only good,” as we just sang in the responsorial Psalm: “Taste and see that Yahweh is good. How blessed are those who take refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8). So our Chiara blessed the Lord in every moment of her life and now blesses Him in eternal life.

God is love: so confides John; the apostle that Jesus so loved: “This has taught us love, that he gave up his life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). We can well say, on the example and trail of the apostle John, Chiara gave her life for her brothers and sisters, she did not just love with words, nor with talks, but with deeds and in truth.

“Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one. I pray also for those who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one, Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me... that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as much as you loved me” (cf. Jn 17:15-23).

How many times she repeated this stupendous prayer of Jesus and how many times she shared it with ardour and fervour with many members of the Movement throughout the world, always moved by the spirituality of unity for a Church that is Communion: “The Holy Spirit, in our times,” she said while in New Delhi on 26 January 2003, “The Holy Spirit, in our times wants a Church in which all the faithful deeply love one another as true brothers and sisters, in profound unity among them. In other words, He wants a Church that is communion among all, a Church-Communion.”

And our Chiara continued, recalling with extreme simplicity, the birth of the Movement, under the bombs that fell night and day on the city of Trent in 1943, sowing destruction, desolation and death: “One particular day, we found ourselves – a group of young girls like all, poor and simple – in a dark cellar seeking protection from the bombs. We opened the Gospel and read Jesus’ words, already cited: “Father, may all be one” (Jn 17:21). They were difficult and demanding words, that we felt we understood at least a bit. In addition, in our hearts took root the conviction that we were born for this very page; that is, we were born to contribute to the unity of human beings with God and among them, to thus fulfil the plan of God on humanity.”

And Chiara confessed: “And there, in the midst of the havoc of war, fruit of hatred, we were struck, as though for the first time, by the truth of God: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), and we believed with burning faith in His love... and our joy and surprise were so great that we did not hesitate even a moment to choose Him, God-Love, as the Ideal of our lives.... Let’s love everyone, let’s be the first to love, let’s love concretely, let’s love one another.”

It is really moving to listen again to Chiara’s response to the question asked in the school of the Focolarini on 9 May 1969: “God did not give me the charism of a virtue. God gave me the charism of the presence of Jesus, of one of the presences of Jesus, and the key to this which is Jesus forsaken. Now, when I die, what will remain? Jesus will remain, Jesus in the midst. We must only bring him in our midst. Now Jesus is the One who guides you, He is the One who guides the Movement. Listen now: I will die very much in peace because I know that I will not be absent. In America there will be Jesus in the midst, in Asia there will be Jesus in the midst.... He is the One who brings ahead the Movement.... When I am no longer here, things will probably develop and you will be quite happy because you will invade the world.”

Dear Focolarini, your presence in this Eucharistic anniversary-celebration is a true witness of this. Chiara’s legacy is more than ever alive in the heart of the world, and the strength of the Love of Jesus in us tears down walls and builds bridges in our world, so lacerated by divisions and at once thirsting for unity. A year after her departure, Chiara and her ideal are truly the inheritance of all humanity. This is confirmed by the numerous and meaningful celebrations: from Ireland, Croatia, Serbia, to Indonesia and Malaysia, from the United States to Canada, from Egypt to Spain, from the little town of Loppiano to the Church of the Panaghia in Istanbul with his Holiness Bartholomew I, and the ecumenical services in Germany, the interreligious ones in Thailand and intercultural ones in Brazil and Cuba.

Maria Emmaus Voce, chosen to be the unifying point among all after Chiara’s departure, states it well: “Until the very last person on earth is not truly considered as a brother or sister by everyone, Chiara’s charism will always have a message to bring. It seems to me that today it especially says to us: be open to welcoming others, whoever they may be, love without stopping at one’s own differences of nationality, of faith and age. It is a new culture and mutual acceptance should be lived fully. We have absolute faith in this network of love.”

Dear Focolarini Friends, we are once again gathered in prayer for Chiara’s soul, on this first anniversary of her death, in this Basilica of Saint Mary Major. There could be no more meaningful church for the foundress of the Focolare Movement who expressly and decisively wanted it to be called the Work of Mary. In fact, she said: “Jesus in our midst, being also the fruit of our fraternal communion, makes us in some ways similar to Mary: instruments to give Jesus spiritually to the world. For this reason, our Movement is called the Work of Mary.”

Mary gave us Jesus and Jesus in our midst. Jesus-love, this is the legacy; the treasure that Chiara left when she went to her eternal encounter with Jesus. Chiara confided on 8 December 1975, at Rocca di Papa: “Sometimes we wonder... what testament we would like to leave to those who will follow us. And,

without a doubt, our choice would be the very same testament Jesus left – mutual love, unity, which brings the presence of Jesus in our midst. Only by leaving this presence of Jesus in every corner of the world where the Movement lives, can we be certain that everything will continue to grow, and that He will continue to be Teacher, Guide (guide is important because you've understood that He really enlightens), Father (He protects us), and Leader (to advance the battle) of each group, people, small or large, who have Him among them. He alone will be capable of carrying the Work of Mary to fulfilment according to the plan He keeps in His heart.”

May it be so in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.