July 2019

**"Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt 10:8)[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus addresses these powerful words to his followers, to those he has “sent out”.

He himself had come to a lost and suffering humanity, having compassion on them.

That is why he wanted to extend his work of salvation, healing and freedom through the apostles. They had gathered around him, heard his words and received a mission and purpose for their lives. They had then set out to bear witness to God's love for every person.

 **"Freely you have received, freely give”**

But what did they get "freely" that they ought to give back?

Through Jesus’s words and deeds, through the choices he made and his whole life, the apostles experienced the mercy of God. Despite their weaknesses and limitations, they received the new law of love, of mutual acceptance.

Above all, they received the gift that God wants to give to all people, which is he himself. He wanted to accompany them on the path of life and give his light to help them with their choices. These are priceless gifts, which go far beyond our ability to repay; they were given freely.

The apostles received these gifts but they are also given to all Christians, so that they can become channels of these gifts to the people they meet day by day.

**"Freely you have received, freely give”**

In the Word of Life for October 2006 Chiara Lubich wrote: “Throughout the Gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to give: to “give to the poor” (Mk 10:21). “Give to the one who asks of you and…to one who wants to borrow” (Mt 5:42). “If anyone wants your tunic, hand them your cloak as well” (Mt 5:40); giving freely. Jesus was the first to do this by restoring the sick to health, forgiving sinners and giving his life for us all.

To counteract our instinct to hoard, Jesus calls for generosity; to overcome our inclination to worry about our own needs, he shifts the focus to our neighbours, and in place of the culture of having he puts the culture of giving.

This month’s Word of Life can help us rediscover the value of everything we do. This might be housework, factory work or farming. It might be office administration or school homework, as well as our civic, political, and religious duties. Everything can be transformed into attentive and thoughtful service to others. Love will help us see what other people need, and love will show us how to respond creatively and generously.

What will be the outcome? Gifts will circulate, because love generates more love. Joy will be multiplied since, “It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) "[[2]](#footnote-2).

This is exactly what happened to Vergence, a little girl from Congo. She said, "On my way to school, I was really hungry. Then I met my uncle who gave me money to buy a sandwich, but a little further on I saw a very poor man. At once I thought of giving him the money. My friend, who was with me, said not to do it and that I should think of myself. But I thought: I will find food tomorrow, but will he? So I gave him my sandwich money and I felt very happy.”

**"Freely you have received, freely give”**

The logic of Jesus and of the Gospel is that we always receive in order to share and we should never hoard things. He also asks us to recognize what we have been given: our energy, talents, skills and material goods, and put them at the service of others.

According to the economist Luigino Bruni[[3]](#footnote-3), giving or doing something freely, gratuitously,(*gratuita* in Italian) isan attitude, a dimension, that can be part of anything we do: in the family, in society, in business. It goes far beyond the idea of something being “free, gratis and for nothing”, as we sometimes say. It is in fact the opposite! This deeper dimension of giving or doing (*gratuita*) doesn’t mean that something has no cost, but represents an unlimited cost. This calls for reciprocity, our free and generous response in giving or doing things for others. And all this produces happiness and wellbeing in society”. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Therefore, giving freely overcomes the logic of the market, of consumerism and individualism and opens us up to sharing, to social interaction, to a sense of family and the new culture of giving.

Our experience confirms that selfless love is a real challenge, but one that has positive and unexpected consequences that spread through society.

This is what happened in the Philippines, through a project that began in 1983.

 At the time, the political and social situation in the country was very difficult and many people were committed to finding positive solutions. A group of young people decided to make their contribution in a different way: they opened their cupboards and took out everything they no longer needed. They sold it all in a rummage sale and with the little capital they raised they opened a social centre, called Bukas Palad, which means "with open hands" in the local language. The sentence in the Gospel that inspired them was: **"**Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt 10:8)," and it became the project’s motto from then on.

Some doctors joined in, offering their professional services without wanting anything in return, and there were many others who opened their hearts, their hands or their homes.

That was how a wide-ranging social action developed, helping the poorest people. It still offers various types of service in a number of cities in the Philippines today. However, the most important goal that has been achieved and consolidated over the years is that of enabling those who receive help to become the very ones who free themselves from enslavement to poverty.

In fact, they rediscover their dignity as persons and thus build relationships of esteem and solidarity. Their example and commitment helps many others to escape from poverty and take on responsibility for a new way of life for themselves and their families, for their neighbourhood and their communities, and for the world[[5]](#footnote-5).

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1. The NKJV translation corresponds better to the Italian text: “Gratuitamente avete ricevuto, gratuitamente date”.  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. C. Lubich, *Word of Life October 2006*, in  *Words of Life*, edited by Fabio Ciardi (Works of Chiara Lubich 5, New City, Rome, 2017) pp. 791-793. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. http://www.edc-online.org/it/pubblicazioni/articoli-di/luigino-bruni. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See an article by Luigino Bruni and an explanation of the term. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://bukaspaladfoundation.org/. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)