

'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you' (Jn 21:17).

The last chapter of John's Gospel takes us to Galilee where Peter, John and the other disciples have returned to their work as fishermen. They have spent the entire night on Lake Tiberias but, unfortunately, their efforts have been fruitless. The Risen Lord appears for the third time and encourages them to cast out their nets once more and this time they gather a large number of fish. The Lord invites them to join him on the shore and to share their food but though Peter and the others have recognized him, they dare not speak to him directly.

Jesus takes the initiative and asks Peter a very challenging question, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these men?' The tone seems solemn as Jesus continues by asking Peter three times¹ to care for his sheep.

Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.

However, Peter knows he has betrayed the Lord, and the memory of this tragic experience prevents him from responding positively to Jesus' question. He humbly replies, 'You know that I love you.'

During their conversation, Jesus does not hold the betrayal against Peter; nor does he point out the mistakes he made. He reaches out to him in a way which makes Peter feel at ease and Jesus' friendship heals his painful wound. The only thing he asks is to rebuild their relationship with an attitude of mutual trust. Peter responds by showing not only an awareness of his own weakness but also a sense of unlimited trust in the welcoming love of his Master and Lord:

Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.

Jesus asks each of us the same question: do you love me? Do you want to be my friend?

He knows everything: he knows the gifts we have received from him and he knows our weaknesses and wounds that may still be raw and unhealed within us. Yet he renews his trust, not in our strengths, but in our friendship with him.

This friendship gives Peter the courage to witness to his love for Jesus to the point of giving his life.

'We all experience moments of weakness, frustration, and discouragement... adversity, painful situations, illness, deaths, inner trials, misunderstandings, temptations and failures... When people feel unable to overcome certain physical or spiritual challenges by relying on their own strength, they are forced into the position of having to trust in God. And he intervenes because he is attracted by this trust. He can achieve great things which seem all the more

powerful because they spring from an awareness that we are small and incapable.’ⁱⁱ

Everyday we can stand before God just as we are and ask for his healing friendship. In this trusting surrender to his mercy we can return to intimacy with the Lord and resume our journey with him.

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This word of life can also become a personal prayer as we acknowledge the limits of our strength but place our trust in God and thank him for all the signs of his love:

‘I love you because you have entered my life more than the air in my lungs, more than the blood in my veins. You entered where no one could enter, when no one could help me, when no one could comfort me... Enable me to be grateful to you - at least a little - in the time I have left, for this love that you poured out on me, and forced me to say to you: I love you.’ⁱⁱⁱ

We can follow Jesus’ style of loving in our relationships in the family, society and the Church. Jesus loved everyone, he was the first to love and he ‘washed the feet’^{iv} of our brothers and sisters, especially the least and most fragile. By doing this, we will learn to welcome everyone with humility and patience, without judging, open to asking and accepting forgiveness and understanding together how to walk side by side through life.

Edited by Letizia Magri & the Word of Life Team

iCf. Mt. 16:18-19

iiC. Lubich, Word of Life, July 2000

iiiC. Lubich 'Gratitudine' *Dottrina Spirituali*, 2001

ivCf. Jn. 13:14