

Chiara Lubich

*Jesus in Our Midst*  
*Source of Joy and Light*

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## Series Preface<sup>1</sup>

*“To those who follow you, leave only the gospel.”*

Chiara Lubich has articulated the gospel in many ways, which are outlined in twelve cornerstones: *God-love*, the *will of God*, the *Word of God*, *love of neighbor*, the *new commandment*, the *Eucharist*, the *gift of unity*, *Jesus crucified and forsaken*, *Mary*, the *Church-communion*, the *Holy Spirit*, *Jesus present among us*.

Since they emerged in the late 1940s, these points have been inscribed in the souls and in the lives of thousands of people from every corner of the earth. Nevertheless, since Chiara Lubich’s death in 2008, what has been missing is a document that combined many texts, including those yet unpublished, that would illustrate them. This series of books seeks to deepen our understanding of these twelve cornerstones by presenting three sources from which they have emerged:

- the dimension of her personal testimony, especially as Chiara Lubich understood, deepened and lived these points;
- the theological dimension of reflecting on the mystery of God and of humankind;
- the dimension of incarnating these points in human life via a communitarian experience, in line with Vatican II (see *Lumen Gentium* 9).

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1. This volume contains Chiara Lubich’s thought and experience on “Jesus in Our Midst.” While it is the twelfth in this series of titles originally published in Italian by Città Nuova, it is the sixth to be translated in its complete form and published by New City Press

The series will include as many as twelve books, through which it is hoped that readers may discover:

- A great spiritual teacher who can accompany them in their spiritual life;
- A deeper appreciation of the communal aspect of Christian life, and the implications of a communitarian spirituality for the Church and humanity;
- A deeper and more personal understanding of Chiara Lubich's life and thought that they can apply in their everyday life.

## Chapter I

### Jesus in the Midst, Fruit of Mutual Love

#### The Discovery and Life of Jesus in the Midst During the “Early Days”

*Towards the end of 1944, due to wartime circumstances in Trent, Chiara and some of her first companions began sharing a small apartment in Piazza Cappuccini. They had no idea of what was about to come to life. They simply understood that the Gospel had to be taken seriously, that its words were not only to be meditated on, but to be put into practice. Among these were all the passages about love for neighbor and love for one another, including Jesus' New Commandment. It was a strategy God used to lead them to a new discovery, that of the presence of Jesus among those who love one another, which soon became the cornerstone of their existence.*

#### 1. Where There is Love, There is God

*Jesus in the midst is the fruit of the mutual love Jesus asked of his disciples, who had to be ready to give their lives for one another (see Jn 13:34), that is, “to be consumed in unity.” Already in the very first years of this new “adventure,” in trying to live like this, Chiara and her first companions experienced what she described as “a qualitative leap” in their spiritual life. They noticed that*

*they had new peace and light, supernatural joy previously unknown, and fruits that were disproportionate to their human efforts, such as unexpected conversions. They experienced—as some writings later testify—the presence of God within the community, which they soon connected with the presence of Jesus, who promised to be present with “two or three gathered in his name.”*

*The first text in this section dates to 1950, a few years after the “discovery” of Jesus in the midst. We find here clearly expressed all the fundamental elements of his presence: it is an unmistakably real presence, it is linked to mutual love and unity, and it has tangible effects.*

## **A delectable mystery**

*From “A Little Harmless Manifesto”  
Trent, 1950*

We did not take a single step if we were not all united by mutual love: “above all” (see 1 Pt 4:8) . . . The strength that came to us from unity, brought about by mutual love, soon led us to reflect on the sentence of Jesus: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). We saw the wonderful effects brought about by this unity, especially through our prayers, since he had said: “Truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (Mt 18:19).

Therefore, Jesus was among us because we were united in his name. This delectable mystery compelled us to keep our unity strong, so as to always have him among us.

And his presence was felt above all in an abundance of light, love and strength, just as his absence was felt when for a few moments we were not living in unity, because one or another of us had not done the will of God. That was when everything seemed to fall apart. The light was extinguished, the light that came from him and that made us see his words as so beautiful, so revolutionary, so full of life and so necessary in order to be true Christians. What had previously been so clear because we had *seen* and loved, now had to be *believed* in the darkness of faith. Doing any good deeds was heavy and almost impossible. Everything seemed empty and useless, until through mutual love (with the return of the brother or sister who had erred by not loving), unity was re-established and Jesus returned among us, to shine in our souls like the sun, spreading charity and peace, which made us powerful and capable of every sacrifice. Alone we wouldn't be able to carry on.

Unity became our passion, because with unity Jesus came among us. Therefore, unity with God by carrying out his whole will for us. Unity with our brothers and sisters as the fulfilment of the New Commandment of Jesus, as an expression of our love for the Father. Unity with Jesus because Jesus in the midst meant Jesus in us made *one* by him through our mutual love, sharing in his light, his strength, and his love. He has said: "the glory that you have given me I have given them" (Jn 17:22). Therefore united among us.

Before, we had mingled together as brothers and sisters. Now Jesus in the midst was like the fire that melts two metals into a third element, which has qualities different from the other two. Likewise, we noticed that two people united in the name of Jesus, who loved

each other with the love with which Jesus had loved them, lost their natural human qualities in this “fusion” and acquired the divine qualities that made them one, while at the same time keeping them distinct, each with a very unique supernatural<sup>7</sup> personality. They became another Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

### **The prelude of a communitarian spirituality**

*Let’s go back a little bit in time. Before the birth of the first focolare household<sup>9</sup> and the first written reference to Jesus in the midst, God prepared Chiara for what was to become—together with Jesus forsaken—one of the fundamental cornerstones of the spirituality of the future Movement. In November 2003, during an ecumenical conference of bishops in Rocca di Papa, she recalled an inspiration she had had in Loreto, Italy, in 1939, which she later related to Jesus in the midst.*

*From a talk to the bishop-friends  
of the Focolare Movement*

Rocca di Papa, November 26, 2003

Jesus in the midst of his people. When did the idea of Jesus in our midst, the highest expression of the spirituality of unity, first appear in our Movement? Four

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7. The word “supernatural” is used in theology to express a quality of divine grace that lifts a believer to a share in the life of God, beyond a merely “human” way of being.
  8. See Chiara Lubich, *Manifesto* (London: New City, 1975), 24–6.
  9. The term “focolare” (Italian for “hearth” or “fireside”) refers to a small community of either men or women who have consecrated their lives to God as single or married persons and who take the commitment to live in unity with one another. They are referred to as focolarine (women) or focolarini (men).

years before the date that marks the birth of the Movement, in 1939, when I was 19 years old, I was invited to Loreto for a conference for Catholic youth.

Although I was following the course, I felt strongly attracted to go into the church, which, like a fortress, seemed to safeguard the “little house”—as we have always called it—where the holy family of Nazareth is thought to have lived.

I went back there several times during the course, and each time I knelt down next to those walls blackened by the lanterns, something new and divine enveloped me, moving me deeply and almost crushing me. I imagined and contemplated the virginal life of Mary and Joseph with Jesus in their midst.

I did not understand the reason for that strong impression. Later, over the years, everything became clear to me. It was the call to a life of communion among persons who live with “Jesus in their midst.”

That was the prelude to a spirituality that is not only individual, but also communitarian, the “spirituality of unity,” which all those who would become part of the newborn Movement would be called to live.

### **From the prelude to the implementation**

*This vague intuition, a mere foreshadowing of what would come, began to take shape in a very natural way when the first group of focolarine began to live together in Trent, in a small apartment on Piazza Cappuccini. Gradually they came to understand what would later be considered the main points of the spirituality: God-Love, the will of God, mutual love, the New Commandment, unity, Jesus forsaken, etc. As the following note shows, Chiara herself, in reading something in a book many years*

*later, understood more clearly how the Holy Spirit had gradually instructed her in a way of life that then led to having Jesus present in their midst.*

*From a written note*

October 20, 2000

Whereas in Loreto I had the vague idea of a family and of Jesus present within it, I certainly did not know *how* to have Jesus really present among us.

Last night, when I woke up, I had the clear impression that I had received a revelation back then (that's how I saw it), when, as the points of the spirituality gradually opened up for us, I came to understand *how* to have Jesus among us. I saw him as our principal characteristic, and the requirements to have him present were revealed to us one by one. These were the various points of the spirituality. Therefore, we, and perhaps only we, have this possibility. Are we going to disregard it? Shouldn't we value having Jesus in our midst as an absolute necessity?

## 2. He Revealed Himself

*In the early years of the Movement, although she didn't yet use the term "Jesus in the midst" and made no explicit reference to Matthew 18:20, Chiara spoke expressly of the presence of Christ as the result of the unity between two or more people. Thus, for example, in the notes prepared for a meeting with the young people of the Franciscan Third Order in 1946, which was entitled "Unity," she wrote:*