

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 Jn4:8)

The first letter of John is addressed to Christians who live in a community in Asia Minor and it encourages them to restore fellowship because they are divided by different doctrines. The author exhorts them to keep in mind what has been proclaimed 'from the beginning' of Christian preaching and repeats what the first disciples saw, heard and touched when they lived together with the Lord.

By doing this, the community will be in communion with the first disciples and, therefore, with Jesus and the Father.¹

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The author gives a reminder of the very essence of the revelation received by believers: he emphasizes that, in Jesus, God first loved us and totally took upon himself human existence with all its limitations and weaknesses.

On the cross, Jesus shared in our separation from the Father, experiencing it in his own flesh. He brought healing through the total gift of himself, in loving without limits or conditions. His words and his life show us what love truly is.

From Jesus' example we understand that to truly love involves courage, hard work and the risk of facing adversity and suffering. But those who love in this way, participate in God's life and experience his freedom and the joy of self-giving.

By loving as Jesus loved us, we become aware that we become free from ourselves and from the selfishness that closes the door to communion with our brothers and sisters and with God.

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The human heart has always longed, perhaps unconsciously, to know God who created us and who knows us in the deepest way possible.

If God is love, by loving like him we can glimpse something of this truth. We can grow in the knowledge of God because we essentially live his life and walk in his light.

And this is fully accomplished when love is mutual. For if we love one another, 'God abides in us.'² When this happens, it is similar to two electric poles coming into contact and producing light.

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Chiara Lubich said, *'To witness that God is love is the great revolution we are called to offer to the modern world which is experiencing extreme tension just as the early Christians bore testimony to this in the pagan world of their time'*.

¹ Cf. 1Jn 1:1-3

² Cf 1Jn 4:12

How can we do this? How can we live this love that comes from God?

'By learning from his Son to put it into practice... in particular, let us focus on serving our neighbours, especially those closest to us, beginning with little things, with the most humble kinds of service.

Let us make the effort, following Jesus' example, to take the initiative in loving, being detached from ourselves and embracing all the small or big crosses that this might entail. In this way, we too will soon reach that experience of God, that communion with him, that fullness of light, peace and inner joy which Jesus wants us to have.³

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Santa often visited a care home for the elderly that was run by a Catholic association. One day she and a colleague called Roberta met Aldo, a tall, very cultured and very wealthy man. Aldo looked sternly at the two young women and said, 'Why do you always come here? What do you want from us? Why don't you just let us die in peace?' Santa didn't lose heart and told him, 'We are here for you, to spend some time together, to get to know each other and become friends.'

They continued to visit the home regularly. Roberta recounts, 'That man was particularly closed in on himself and dejected. He did not believe in God. Santa was the only one who was able to get close to him, gently listening to him for hours. She prayed for him and, on one occasion, gave him a rosary which he accepted.'

Later, Santa learnt that he had spoken her name as he was dying. The pain of his death was lessened by the fact that he died peacefully, holding the rosary she had given him.'

Edited by Silvano Malini and the Word of Life Team

³C. Lubich Word of Life May 1991