

Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the Law

Can we command someone to love others? If we understand love as a feeling, it is clearly impossible! However, if we understand it as a gift from God, things change.

In his letter to the Romans, from which this word of life is taken, Paul describes the relationship between the Law and love very precisely by stating that love is the fulfilment of the Law. He had already revealed the source of this love: 'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5: 8). The First Letter of John also refers to love: 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins' (1 Jn 4: 10).

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None of us can give what we do not have. Augustine understood this very clearly and when addressing God directly, he said: 'Give what you command, and command what you will.'¹ We have received the priceless gift of God's love and are called not to keep it only for ourselves but to pass it on to others. From being recipients of God's love, we can become its agents: from being loved, we are called to become lovers, thus sharing in the very life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: the Lover, the Beloved and Love.

Paul assures us that we owe nothing to other people except this mutual love, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the Law.²

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'True love of neighbour,' says Chiara Lubich, 'does no harm. It therefore enables us to live out all of God's commandments, without exception, since their primary aim is to help us avoid all forms of evil – towards ourselves and towards our broth-

ers and sisters – into which we might fall.'³

Understood in this way, the commandments of the Law become, a gift of God's love rather than an obligation: they do not constrain our love but set it free.

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To reach this degree of love for our neighbour, the first step is to avoid harming them. However, we can take this a stage further and become creative in love: Pope Francis reminded us 'It is not enough not to harm one's neighbour; we must choose to do good, seizing opportunities to bear witness that we are disciples of Jesus.'⁴

How, then, are we to live out this word of life? Let us put love back at the centre of our lives. Let us love others in a concrete way, just as Jesus would love them: he is the fullness of love, wholly given to God and to humanity. From him we can learn the highest measure of love.

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Doris, a young woman from Scotland, tells us: 'During our regular visits to a homeless shelter, I enter a world very different from my own. I know that what I feel doesn't matter so much; what matters is loving. One day, a man whose face was marked with deep sadness confided in me that he felt ready to end it all, that he even wanted to die. I simply sat and listened to him and then we shared a sandwich and a coffee. I realised that listening and being present was already a way of showing love. When it was time to leave, he gave me a big hug and smiled, saying that what we were doing was very important, not just for him, but for everyone there. I felt the incredible power of love. Perhaps I didn't "save" him, but his gratitude filled me with joy, and that, in itself, is very powerful.'

*Edited by Claudio Cianfaglionni
and the Word of Life Team*

¹ St Augustine, *Confessions*, 10, 29,40.

² Cf. Rom. 13: 8.

³ C. Lubich, *Word of Life*, September 1993.

⁴ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 3rd January 2018.