

*"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." (Eph 4:32)*

There is nothing more wonderful than hearing someone say to you: 'I love you.' When someone loves us we don't feel alone, we walk secure, we are able also to face difficulties and critical situations. If then our being loved becomes mutual, hope and trust are reinforced, and we feel protected. We all know that children, to grow well, need to be surrounded by an environment that is full of love, and to have someone who loves them. But this is true at any age. For this reason, this Word of Life invites us to be 'kind' to one another, which is to say to love one another, and it gives God himself as a model.

It is precisely his example that reminds us that loving one another is not mere sentiment. It is extremely concrete and demanding, wanting the good of the other. In Jesus, God has come close to the sick and the poor, felt compassion for the crowds, had mercy on sinners, and forgiven those who crucified him.

For us, too, wanting the good of others means listening to them, showing them sincere attention, sharing their joys and trials, taking care of them, walking with them along their way. The other person is never a stranger, but a brother or sister who belongs to me, whom I wish to serve. This is the exact opposite of what happens when we see others as rivals, competitors, enemies, to the point of wanting their harm, to the point of crushing them, even eliminating them, as we sadly see in the news each day. Even though we may not go so far, don't we also accumulate grudges, distrust, hostility or simple indifference towards others who have hurt us, or whom we find unpleasant or who do not belong to our social circle?

Wanting the good of one another, the Word of Life teaches us, means following the path of mercy, ready to forgive one another every time we slip up. Talking of this, Chiara Lubich tells us about the experience at the beginning of her new Christian community. In order to put Jesus's command into practice, she and her first companions made a pact of mutual love. And yet, despite this, 'especially in the early times it was not always easy for this group of girls to live the radicality of [Gospel] love. We were ordinary people like anyone else, even if we were sustained by a special gift of God. Dust could still gather on our relationships and unity could weaken. This is what happened, for example, when we realised the others' shortcomings, their imperfections, and we judged them, so that the current of mutual love grew cold.

'To face this situation one day we thought we would make a pact among us that we called the "pact of mercy". We decided every morning to see each neighbour we met – in our focolare house, at school, at work and so on – to see them as new, as really new, without remembering at all the other's flaws and defects, but covering everything with love. It was a matter of meeting everyone with this complete amnesty, this universal pardon, in our hearts. It was a powerful commitment, taken by all of us together, that helped us always to be the first in loving, in imitation of God who is merciful, who forgives and forgets.'

A pact of mercy! Couldn't this be a way to grow in kindness?

*Fabio Ciardi*