

'For the love of Christ urges us on' (2 Cor 5:14)

Urged on by Christ we too can live the radical love that is God's very nature and seek in all things and in all ways to build relationships of unity with others – especially among Christians of different Churches.

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'Yesterday evening I went out for a meal with my mum and one of her friends. I had ordered some peas, which I did not like, and wanted to move immediately on to the dessert which I liked a lot more. But my mum said no, that I had to finish my peas first. I was about to go into a sulk, when I remembered that Jesus was there with my mum and so I put a smile on my face.' 'Today, feeling mega-tired, I got back home. While I was watching television my brother snatched the remote control from my hands. I was really, really angry, but then I calmed down and let him watch what he wanted.' 'Today my father said something to me and I answered him back in a nasty way. I looked at him and I could see he wasn't happy, so I said sorry and he forgave me.'

These are experiences of living the Word of Life told by primary-school children from Rome. Perhaps there is no direct link between these experiences and the Word of Life we were living at that time, but exactly this is the fruit of trying to live the Gospel: the urge to love. Any Word at all that we seek to live has the same effects. It changes our lives, putting in our hearts the urge to be mindful of the needs of others and making us try to serve our brothers and sisters. It cannot be otherwise. Welcoming and living the Word gives birth to Jesus in us and makes us act like him.

What motivated the Apostle Paul in living and proclaiming the Gospel, and in working for the unity of his communities, was the profound experience he had had of Jesus. Paul had been loved by Jesus and saved. He was so soaked in Jesus' life that nothing and no one could ever separate the two of them. The thought that the Lord had loved him to the point of giving his life made Paul almost crazy. It was always on his mind and urged him with an irresistible force to do the same thing with the same love.

Does the love of Christ urge us on with that kind of passion?

If we have experienced his love, we cannot in our turn fail to love. We will enter, with courage, wherever there is division, conflict and hatred, so as to bring harmony, peace and unity. Love allows our heart to leap over every obstacle, to make direct contact with others, striving to understand, share and find solutions together. This is not just something optional. Unity has to be sought whatever the cost, without letting ourselves be blocked by false prudence, difficulties or possible clashes.

This seems to be pressing above all in the field of Christian unity. The Word of Life has been chosen this month, when we celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, precisely so that it can be lived by Christians of different Churches and communities. It should make us all feel urged, by the love of Christ, to go towards one another, and so rebuild unity.

‘The only genuine Christian of reconciliation,’ Chiara Lubich said on 23 June 1997 at the opening of the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, Austria, ‘will be the one who knows how to love others with God’s own charity, that charity which makes Christ seen in everyone, the charity which is destined for all people (Jesus died for the whole human race), the charity which always takes the initiative. It makes us love each person as ourselves, makes us one with our brothers and sisters, in their sorrows and in their joys. And it is necessary that the Churches too should love with this love.’

Let’s also live the same radical love with the simplicity and seriousness of the children in that school in Rome.

Fabio Ciardi