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The apostle Paul followed the development of the Christian community in the city of Corinth with love and attention; he visited and supported the people during difficult times.

At one point, however, by means of this letter, he had to defend himself against accusations made by other preachers who questioned his style of preaching: Paul was not paid for his missionary work, he was not an eloquent speaker, he did not have letters of recommendation in support of his authority and he proclaimed that he understood and lived out his own weakness reflecting the example of Jesus.

Nonetheless, in concluding his letter, Paul delivers an appeal full of confidence and hope to the Corinthians:

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

The first very obvious feature of his exhortations is that they are addressed to the community as a whole which is regarded as a place where God's presence can be experienced. All the human frailties that make it difficult to understand one another, to communicate fairly and sincerely, to agree in a respectful manner with differences of experience and thought, can be healed by the presence of the God of peace.

Paul suggests some practical forms of behaviour that are consistent with the demands of the Gospel. They include striving for the fulfilment of God's plan for each and every one, as brothers and sisters; enabling the consoling love of God that we have received to circulate among everyone; caring for one another, sharing our deepest aspirations; welcoming one another, offering and receiving mercy and forgiveness, nurturing trust and listening.

These choices can be freely undertaken but sometimes courage is needed if we are to be a ‘sign of contradiction’ going against the current mentality.

Therefore, the apostle also recommends that we encourage one another in this commitment. He values the efforts we make to joyfully safeguard and witness to the inestimable worth of unity and peace, in charity and truth, always founded on the rock of God's unconditional love for his people.

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To live this Word of life, like Paul, let us look at the example of Jesus, who came to bring us a peace all his own. (Jn 14:27)

This peace, as Chiara Lubich wrote, ‘... is not only the absence of war, of quarrels, of divisions and traumas. ... it is fullness of life and joy, it is complete salvation, it is freedom, it is fraternity in love among all peoples. ... And how did Jesus give us his peace? He paid for it himself. ... He stood in the midst of his adversaries, he took upon himself hatred and separation and he broke down the walls that divided people. ... Peace-building demands a strong love from us, a love that is able to reach even those who do not love us in return, a love that is able to forgive, a love that does not see people as enemies and then, the capacity to love their country as our own... It even asks us to have new hearts and eyes to love and see everyone as a candidate for universal fraternity. ... “Evil arises in the human heart,” wrote Igino Giordani, and “to remove the danger of war it is necessary to eliminate the spirit of aggression, exploitation and selfishness from which war comes: it is necessary to rebuild a conscience.”’

Bonita Park is a neighbourhood in Hartswater, an agricultural town in South Africa. As in the rest of the country, the effects inherited from the Apartheid regime persist, especially in the educational sphere: where the education of young people belonging to the black and mestizo groups are far inferior to those of other ethnic groups, with the consequent risk of social marginalization.

‘The Bridge’ project aims to create a mediation between the different ethnic groups in the neighbourhood, by bridging distances and cultural differences among them. They do this through an after-school programme and a small communal meeting space where people of different cultures and generations come together. The community shows a great desire to work together. Charles offered his old truck to fetch the timber with which the desks were made and the principal of the nearest elementary school donated shelves, notepads and textbooks, while the Dutch Reformed Church provided fifty chairs. Everyone has done their part to make this bridge between cultures and ethnicities grow stronger each day.

Edited by Letizia Magri and the Word of Life team