

May Word of Life

‘Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.’ (Rom 12:10)

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This month's word of life is taken from the letter written by Paul to the Romans. The text is rich in content. Paul presents the Christian life as one where love abounds, a gratuitous and limitless love that God has poured into our hearts and that we, in turn, give to others. To make his meaning clearer and even more effective, he inserts two concepts into a single word, ‘*philostorgos*’, which expresses two particular characteristics of love that distinguish the Christian community: love among friends and love within the family.

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Let us focus especially on the aspect of fraternity and reciprocal love. Paul states that the people of the Christian community love one another because they are members of one another (12:5), they are brothers and sisters whose only debt to one another is love (13:8), they rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (12:15) and they do not judge and are not a cause of scandal (14:13).

Our existence is intertwined with the lives of other people and the community is a living witness to the law of love that Jesus brought to earth. This is a demanding love that reaches the point of laying down our lives for others. It is also a practical love that is characterised by thousands of expressions of care for other people and their happiness. It leads to fulfilment and to people competing to appreciate each other's qualities. It is a love that looks to everyone's needs and does all that is possible to avoid leaving anyone behind. It draws us to be responsible and active in society, culture and political engagement.

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In an address to young people, Chiara Lubich wrote ‘Looking at the communities of the first century, we see that Christian love, which spread everywhere to all, had a name. It was called *philadelphia*, which means brotherly love. In the secular literature of the time, this term was used to refer to love between blood brothers and sisters. It was never used to refer to members of the same society. The only exception was the New Testament.’ There are many young people who feel the need to have ‘deeper, more heartfelt and more genuine relationships. And the mutual love of the early Christians had all the characteristics of the love in a family, for example in its strength and affection.’

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A distinguishing characteristic of these communities that live mutual love is that the members do not close in on themselves but are ready to face the real challenges that arise within the environments where they are at work.

J.K., a Serbian, of Hungarian nationality, and father of three was finally able to afford to buy a house but due to an accident he had neither the financial nor the physical resources to renovate it himself. So the Focolare community went into action and drawing upon the Youth for a United World 'Dare to Care' project, it offered practical support.

JK spoke enthusiastically about the solidarity among the helpers none of whom wanted to be outdone in generosity: 'So many people came to help me that in three days we were able to rebuild the roof and replace the earth and thatch ceilings with plasterboard.' Some people from the Czech Republic also contributed financially to the renovation, a gesture that was a visible witness to the extended community, which stretched beyond geographical and political boundaries.

Edited by Patrizia Mazzola and the Word of Life team.