

November

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

This blueprint for life is concrete and the core of what matters. It would be enough on its own to create a different kind of society, one where people are more like brothers and sisters, more supportive. It was part of a broader project put before Christians in Asia Minor.

In these communities 'peace' had been reached between Jews and Gentiles, two ethnic groups 'til then divided.

The unity given by Christ has to be constantly renewed and translated into practical social action wholly inspired by mutual love. This is the basis for suggesting how our relationships should be:

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Kindness: desiring the good of others. It means 'making ourselves one' with them, being completely empty of ourselves, of our own interests, of our own ideas, of the many pre-conceptions that cloud our vision. It means taking on their burdens, their needs, their sufferings, and sharing in their joys. It means entering into the hearts of the people we meet and making their mind set, their culture, their traditions our own. It means really understanding what they need and being able to discern those values that God has planted in the heart of every person. In a word: kindness means to live for whoever is near us.

Tender-heartedness: welcoming others as they are, not as we would like them to be, with a different character, with our political views or our religious convictions, and without those faults and habits that annoy us so much. No, we need to expand our heart to welcome everyone, with their differences, their shortcomings, their troubles.

Forgiveness: always seeing the other person as new. Even where we find our most beautiful and peaceful relationships, in the family, at school, at work, there are inevitably moments of friction, differences of opinion, clashes. People reach the point of not speaking to each other, of avoiding one another, to say nothing of when real and true hatred towards someone who thinks differently roots itself in the heart. We have to make a strong, rigorous and thorough commitment to try to see each brother or sister as new, completely new, not remembering how they may have hurt us, covering everything with love, with a complete amnesty in our hearts, imitating God who forgives and forgets.

True peace and unity are attained when kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness are lived not only by people individually, but together, with one another mutually. And just as the embers

of a fire have to be stoked every now and then, so they're not smothered by ashes, so too, from time to time, it is necessary to re-confirm our commitment to love one another, to revive our relationships with everyone, so that they are not covered up by the ashes of indifference, apathy, selfishness.

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These attitudes need to be translated into deeds, into practical action. Jesus himself showed us what love is when he healed the sick, when he fed the crowds, when he brought the dead back to life, when he washed the feet of his disciples. Actions, deeds: this is what it means to love.

I remember the mother of an African family whose daughter, Rosangela, lost an eye after a young boy poked her with a stick. He even continued making fun of her afterwards. Neither parent of the boy asked forgiveness. The silence, the lack of relationship with that family, made Rosangela's mother feel bitter. 'Don't be upset,' said Rosangela who had forgiven the boy, 'I am lucky because I can see with my other eye!' 'One morning,' Rosangela's mother said, 'the boy's mother sent someone to get me to go round to her house because she felt ill. My first reaction was: "Look, now she comes to me for help. With so many other neighbours she could have asked, she asks me, after all her boy has done to us!"' But suddenly I remembered that love has no limits. I hurried over to her house. She opened the door and fainted into my arms. I took her to the hospital and stayed with her until the doctors saw her. A week later she was discharged from the hospital and came to my house to thank me. I welcomed her with all my heart. I had managed to forgive her. Now we are in touch again. In fact, our relationship is totally new.'

Every one of our days, too, can be filled with real acts of service, humble and intelligent expressions of our love. We will then see fraternity and peace grow around us.

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