

## December

### **May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. (1 Thes. 3:12)**

St Paul often uses expressions like this one where he both wishes for and asks the Lord for special graces for his communities. (cf. Eph. 3: 18; Phil. 1: 9)

Here he asks that the Thessalonians have the grace of an ever-greater, overflowing mutual love. He doesn't intend this to be a veiled criticism, as if mutual love didn't already exist in their community. Rather, it's a reminder of a law present in the nature of love itself: the law of its constant growth.

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Love is at the heart of Christian life so if it doesn't grow the whole life of a Christian is affected. It grows feeble and may even die.

It's not enough to have understood the commandment to love our neighbour or to have experienced its drive and zeal at the beginning of our conversion to the Gospel. We need to make love grow by keeping it alive, active, at work. This will happen if we know how to grasp, with always greater readiness and generosity, the various opportunities life offers us each day.

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Paul believes that Christian communities should have the freshness and warmth of a real family. It's easy to understand, therefore, the reason why he warns against the dangers that most threaten them: individualism, superficiality, mediocrity.

But he also wants them to avoid another grave danger, that of settling into a way of life that is orderly and peaceful, but ultimately closed in on itself. He wants open communities, because it is the nature of charity both to love the members of the community of faith and to go out towards everyone, to be sensitive to the problems and needs of all. It's the nature of charity to find a way to welcome everyone, to build bridges, to recognize the positive and to unite its own efforts to do good with all who show good will.

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How should we live this month's Word of Life?

We, too, can try to increase mutual love in our families, in our places of work, in our communities or church societies, in our parishes, and so on.

This Word of Life asks us to have an overflowing charity, a love capable of going beyond the mediocre measures and barriers of our subtle selfishness. It's enough to consider just some of the aspects of charity (tolerance, understanding, mutual acceptance, patience, readiness to serve, mercy towards the true or presumed shortcomings of our neighbour, sharing material goods, etc.) to spot our many chances to put it into practice.

Clearly, then, if such an atmosphere of mutual love exists in our community, its warmth cannot fail to spread to everyone. Even those who do not yet know the Christian life will feel its attraction and, almost without realizing it, they will become involved to the point of feeling part of the same family.

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