

November Word of Life

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (Rom 12:15)

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Paul was writing to the Christians in Rome, describing the great gifts that God gave to humanity in Jesus and in the gift of the Spirit. He then suggested how they could respond to the graces they had received, especially in their relationships with one another and with the wider community around them.

Paul asked them to move on from only loving people who shared their faith to loving everyone, as the Gospel says. For believers, love has no limits and cannot be confined to just a few people.

An interesting detail is that he speaks first about sharing other people's happiness. In fact, according to John Chrysostom, one of the great Fathers of the Church, envy is what makes it much more difficult to share other people's happiness rather than their troubles.

Behaving in this way this could seem like climbing a mountain too steep for us, a peak we won't be able to reach. Yet it becomes possible because believers are sustained by Christ's love, from which nothing and no one can separate them (cf. Rom 8:35).

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Considering these words, Chiara Lubich said,

"To love in a Christian way, we must 'make ourselves one' with every neighbour. ... We can enter as far as possible into their hearts and minds in order to truly understand their needs and share their sufferings and joys. It means 'bending towards' others, somehow becoming them, making ourselves them. This is Christianity. Jesus became man, he became like us, to make us like God. In this way, people feel understood and supported."

This Word of Life is an invitation to put ourselves 'in other people's shoes' as a concrete expression of genuine love. A mother's love is perhaps the best example of how to live this Word of Life. A mother knows how to share happiness with a happy child and cry with the one who is upset, without judging and without prejudice.

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There is a secret to living this kind of love and not being wrapped up in our own worries, interests or our own world. We need to strengthen our union with God, our relationship with the One who is the very source of love. It is said that the crown of a tree often corresponds to the

diameter of its roots. It can be the same for us: if we deepen our relationship with God, day by day, we will be more inclined to share the joys and bear the burdens of the people around us. Our heart will open up and become more able to contain all that the neighbour who is with us in the present moment is living. In the same way, love for our neighbour will help us enter even more into a personal relationship with God.

When we live like this, we'll see things changing around us, starting from how we relate in the family, at school, at work or in the community. We will be grateful we've had the experience that when love is sincerely and freely given, sooner or later it's returned, and becomes reciprocal.

Two couples had a very deep experience of this. One couple was Christian and the other Muslim and they often shared their problems and hopes together. When Ben became seriously ill, Tatiana and Paolo spent a lot of time in the hospital with Ben's wife, Basma and their two children, until Ben died. Then, even though she was distraught at the loss of her husband, Basma and her Christian friends prayed for another seriously ill person. She knelt on her prayer mat facing in the direction of Mecca. Basma confided to Tatiana and Paolo that, "What makes me happier than anything else is feeling part of a body in which everyone has the good of the others at heart."

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