

Word of Life June 2016

“Be at peace with one another.” (Mk 9:50)

How welcome, in the midst of the conflicts that harm humanity in many parts of the world, is this invitation by Jesus to peace! It keeps hope alive when we realize that that he himself is peace and that he has promised to give us his peace.

Mark's gospel places these words of Jesus at the end of a series of things said to his disciples, meeting at home in Capernaum, where he explains how they should live as his community. The conclusion is clear: everything must lead to peace, which contains every good.

It is a peace we are called to experience in our daily lives: in our families, at work, with those who have other ideas politically. It is a peace that is not afraid to face contrary opinions, which we need to speak about openly if we want a unity that is always more true and deep. It is a peace that, at the same time, demands that we should take care that our relationship of love never dwindles, because the other person is more valuable than any differences that may exist between us.

‘Wherever unity and mutual love come to be,’ Chiara Lubich once said, ‘there is peace, indeed, true peace. Because where there is mutual love, there is a certain presence of Jesus among us, and he truly is peace, peace par excellence.’¹

Chiara's ‘ideal of unity’ was born during World War II and it immediately looked like the antidote to hatred and ruptures in society. From then on, when faced with any conflict, Chiara persistently continued putting forward the Gospel logic of love. When, for example, war exploded in Iraq in 1990, she expressed bitter surprise at hearing ‘words that we thought had been buried, such as: “the enemy”, “our enemies”, “hostilities are beginning”, and the war bulletins, prisoners, defeats.... We realized with dismay that this was a body blow to the fundamental Christian principle of Jesus's “commandment” par excellence, his “New Commandment”.... Instead of loving one another, instead of being ready to die for one another’ here is humankind again ‘in the abyss of hatred’: contempt, torture, killing.² How can we escape? she asked herself. ‘We must knit together, wherever possible, new relationships or a deepening of those that already exist, between those of us who are Christians and the followers of other monotheistic faiths: Muslims and Jews,³ in other words, those engaged in the conflict.

The same is true when faced with any kind of conflict. We must knit together among individuals and peoples relationships of listening, of love, as Chiara would also say, to the point of ‘being ready to die for one another.’ It is necessary to set aside one's own positions in order to understand the other's, even though we know that we will not always manage to understand them completely. The other too can do the same with me and at times neither will the other, perhaps, understand me and my positions. But we want nonetheless to stay open to the other, even when there is difference and incomprehension, before all else saving our relationship.

The Gospel makes it a command: ‘Be at peace.’ Making it a command is a sign that serious and tough commitment is demanded. It is one of the most essential expressions of the love and mercy we are called to have for one another.

Fabio Ciardi

¹ On Bavarian television, 16 September 1988.

² 28 February 1991, see *Santi insieme*, (Città Nuova: Rome, 1994), pp. 63-64.

³ Ibid.