

“The love of Christ compels us” (cf. 2 Cor 5:14–20)

Some 10-year-old children at a school in Rome put this Word of Life into practice like this: “Yesterday evening Mom and I went out for a meal with one of my mother’s friends. I ordered a side dish with the meal and then wanted to have a sweet too. My mother said no. I was about to be angry but remembered that Jesus was beside my mother so I smiled instead”. “I went home after a tiring day. While I was watching television my brother took the remote control from me. I was very angry with him but then I calmed down and let him watch TV”. “Today I answered back angrily when my father spoke to me. I saw that he was not happy about this, so I said sorry and he forgave me.”

Although there may not have been an exact link between the experiences these children told and the Word of Life they were living at the time, the push to love is itself the fruit of the Gospel put into practice. Any Word we set out to live has the same effect. It changes our lives and puts the desire to be attentive to other people’s needs into our hearts, enabling us to be at the service of our brothers and sisters. It could not be otherwise: welcoming the Word and living it gives life to Jesus in us and helps us to act like him. This is what Paul is saying in this letter to the Corinthians.

What urged St Paul to announce the Gospel and dedicate himself to the unity of his communities was the deep experience he had had with Jesus. He had felt loved and saved by Jesus who had entered into his life to the point that nothing and no one could separate him from Jesus again. It was no longer he who lived, because Jesus lived in him. The thought that the Lord had loved him to the point of giving his life blew Paul’s mind and stirred him into action. Its irresistible power urged him to do the same thing with the same love.

Does the love of Christ urge us on with the same zeal?

If we have truly experienced his love, we cannot fail to love in our turn and courageously enter into places where there is division, conflict and hatred so as to bring agreement, peace and unity. Love enables us to bring love beyond all obstacles, so as to create real connections with people, through understanding and sharing, and to find solutions together. It is not a question of choosing this or not. Unity must be pursued at all costs, without letting ourselves be hindered by false prudence, by difficulties or potential clashes.

This approach is urgently needed above all in ecumenism. This Word of Life has been chosen for this month in which we celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It can be lived together by Christians from different Churches and communities so that we will all feel urged on by the love of Christ to seek each other out, so as to re-establish unity.

When Chiara Lubich spoke at the opening of the Second Ecumenical European Assembly at Graz, Austria in June 1997, she affirmed, “An authentic Christian who wants reconciliation is someone who knows how to love others with God’s own charity, which makes us see Christ in each person, a charity that goes out towards all people (Jesus died for the whole human race). This charity always takes the initiative, and enables us to love each person as ourselves, making us one with our brothers and sisters: in sufferings, joys etc. The Churches too should love with this love.”

May we too live the radicality of love with the simplicity and seriousness of those children at the school in Rome.

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