

May 2023

Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. (Rom 12:10).

This month's word of life is taken from the letter written by Paul to the Romans. The text is rich in content. Paul presents the Christian life as one where love abounds, a gratuitous and limitless love that God has poured into our hearts and that we, in turn, give to others. To make his meaning clearer and even more effective, he inserts two concepts into a single word, '*philostorgos*,' which expresses two particular characteristics of love that distinguish the Christian community: love among friends and love within the family.

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Let us focus especially on the aspect of fraternity and reciprocal love. Paul states that the people of the Christian community love one another because they are members of one another (12:5), they are brothers and sisters whose only debt to one another is love (13:8), they rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (12:15) and they do not judge and are not a cause of scandal (14:13).

Our existence is intertwined with the lives of other people and the community is a living witness to the law of love that Jesus brought to earth. This is a demanding love that reaches the point of laying down one's life for others. It is also a practical love that is characterised by the thousands of expressions of care for other people and their happiness. It leads to fulfilment and to people competing in the appreciation of one another's qualities. It is a love that looks to everyone's needs and does all that is possible to avoid leaving anyone behind. It draws us to be responsible and active in society, culture and political engagement.

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Chiara Lubich writes, 'Looking at the first century communities, we see that Christian love, which spread indiscriminately to all, had a name. It was called *philadelphia*, which means brotherly love. In the secular literature of the time, this term was used to refer to love

between blood brothers and sisters. It was never used to refer to members of the same society. Only the New Testament was an exception.’¹ There are many young people who feel the need to have ‘a deeper, more heartfelt and more genuine relationship. And the mutual love of the early Christians had all the characteristics of sibling love, for example in its strength and affection.’²

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A distinguishing characteristic of these communities living mutual love is that the members do not close in on themselves but are ready to face the real challenges that arise within the context in which they exist.

J.K., a Serbian, Hungarian national and father of three could finally afford to buy a house but due to an accident he did not have the financial and physical resources to renovate it himself. So the Focolare community went into action and drawing upon the Youth for a United World ‘Dare to Care’ project, it was able to offer practical support.

JK spoke enthusiastically about the solidarity among the helpers none of whom wanted to be outdone in generosity: ‘So many people came to help me that in three days we were able to renew the roof and replace the earth and thatch ceilings with plasterboard.’ Some people from the Czech Republic also contributed financially to the renovation work. This action was a visible witness to the extended community and was not limited by geographical and political boundaries.³

Edited by Patrizia Mazzola and the Word of Life team.

1C. Lubich “Colloqui con i gen” Rome 1999

2Ibid

3From www.unitedworldproject.org