There are no translations available.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
Mt 22:39

These words can also be found in the Hebrew Scriptures (Lv 19:18). Jesus responds to a tricky question by placing himself in the context of the great prophetic and rabbinical tradition that was in search of the unifying principle of the Torah, that is, the teaching of God contained in the Bible. Rabbi Hillel once said: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is all there is in the Torah. All the rest is mere commentary.”

For the teachers of Judaism, love of neighbor derives from love of God, who created the human person in his image and likeness. Therefore, it is not possible to love God without loving your neighbor: this is the true motive for love of neighbor, and it is “a great and general principle in the law.”

Jesus repeated this principle and added that the command to love one’s neighbor is similar to the first and greatest commandment, namely, to love God with all one’s heart, mind and soul. In affirming the likeness of the two commandments, Jesus definitively bound them together, as would all of Christian tradition. As the Apostle John said with incisive clarity: “Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Our neighbor, as the entire Gospel clearly states, is every human being, man or woman, friend or enemy. Love of neighbor is both universal and personal. It embraces all humanity, and it is expressed concretely in the person next to us.

Are we capable of having such a big heart? How can we come to possess such kindness as to consider even someone who is far away as our neighbor? What can help us overcome our exaggerated love of self and recognize the “self” in others? It takes a gift of God. We have faith in this gift “because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

Therefore, it is not ordinary love, not simple friendship, not mere philanthropy, but the love that has been poured out into our hearts at baptism: the love that is the life of God himself, of the Blessed Trinity.

And so love is everything, but in order to love in an authentic way we need to know some of love's qualities that emerge from the Gospel and from Scripture in general. We feel that they can be summed up in a few fundamental aspects.

First of all, Jesus, who died for everyone, loving everyone, teaches us that authentic love should lead us to love everyone. Unlike the simply human love that we usually have in our hearts, which is limited to relatives, friends and a few others, the authentic love that Jesus wants does not admit discrimination. It does not look too much at whether the other person is kind or unkind, beautiful or not so beautiful, an adult or a child, a fellow countryman or a foreigner, a member of my church or of another, of my religion or of another. It is love that is directed toward everyone. And we must do the same: love everyone.

The second quality of authentic love is that it leads us to being the first to love, not waiting for the other person to love us. Generally speaking, we love because we are loved. Instead, authentic love takes the initiative, as the Father was the first to love everyone. When men and women were still sinners, and therefore were not loving, the Father sent his Son to save us.

Thus we have to love everyone and be the first to love.

Another quality of authentic love is that it recognizes Jesus in every neighbor: "You did it to me" (Mt 25:40), Jesus will say to us at the final judgment. And this will apply to the good that we did and also, unfortunately, the evil.

Authentic love leads us to love a friend and also an enemy: to do good to them both and to pray for them both.

Jesus also wants the love that he brought on earth to become mutual: that one person loves the other and vice-versa, in order to achieve unity.

All these qualities of love help us to understand and live the Word of Life for this month.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Yes, authentic love leads us to love the other person as we love ourselves. And this is to be followed to the letter. We must really see the other person as another self and do for the other what we would do for ourselves. Authentic love leads us to suffer with those who are suffering, rejoice with those who are rejoicing, carry the burdens of others. As Paul says, it leads us to make ourselves one with the person we love. It is a love, therefore, that is made up not only of feelings or beautiful words, but of concrete deeds.

People of other religious creeds also seek to do this by living the so-called Golden Rule, which can be found in all religions. This rule asks us to do to others what we would like others to do to us. Gandhi explains it in a very simple and effective way: “I cannot harm the other without hurting myself.”

This month could be an opportunity, then, to refocus on love of neighbor. Our neighbor has so many faces: the person next door, a classmate, the friend of a close relative. But there are also the faces of the anguished humanity that the television brings into our homes from war-torn cities and natural disasters. Once they were unknown to us and thousands of miles away. Now they too have become our neighbors.

Love will suggest what we should do in each situation, and little by little it will expand our hearts to the greatness of the heart of Jesus.

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Chiara Lubich

Read more on this topic:

Chiara Lubich, “The Art of Loving”, ***New City Press***

newcitypress.com

“The Cube of Love”, and “The Cube of Love –

Educational Guide”, ***Living City***

cubeoflove.org

Next month’s Word of Life:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39).

The Word of Life, a sentence of Scripture, is offered each month as a guide and inspiration for daily life. Its translation into 90 different languages and dialects reaches several million people worldwide, through print, radio, TV and the internet. From the Focolare Movement's beginnings, Chiara Lubich wrote her commentaries on the Word of Life, and after her death on March 14, 2008, her early writings are now being featured once again. This commentary was originally published in October 1999. If you would like to read experiences of life related to this or to past "Words of Life," they can be found in *Living City*, the Focolare monthly magazine *(livingcitymagazine.com)* or in books published by *New City Press (newcitypress.com)*.

For information, to subscribe or to order the special issue of *Living City* dedicated to Chiara Lubich, write to: *Living City*, 202 Comforter Blvd, Hyde Park, NY 12538 - 845-229-0496; e-mail: *livingcity@livingcitymagazine.com.*
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