Written by Chiara Lubich
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"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."
(Lk 6:27-28)

"Love your enemies." These are very strong words. They completely overturn our way of thinking, and they force us to make a sharp turn in our life's direction!

Let's face it. We all have an enemy of one kind or another.

My enemy might be my next-door neighbor, that unpleasant busybody I try to avoid every time I see her approach the elevator I'm taking.

It could be that relative who mistreated your father thirty years ago and you haven't spoken to since. It could be that classmate you refuse to look in the face since he got you into trouble with the teacher.

Your enemy might be the girl who was your friend but dropped you to hang out with someone else. Or it could be the salesperson who cheated you.

Quite often we look at politicians as enemies if their opinions are different from ours. And, as always, there are people who see some priests as their enemies and then hate the Church.

All of these people and many, many others whom we consider enemies have to be loved.

They have to be loved?

Yes. They have to be loved! However, this is not merely a matter of changing our feeling of hatred into another feeling that is more benign.

We have to do much more than that.

This is what Jesus says:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

As we can see, Jesus wants us to overcome evil with good. He wants us to have a love that is carried over into concrete actions. We might wonder why Jesus is asking this of us.

The fact is he wants us to pattern our lives after the life of God, his Father, who "makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (Mt 5:45).

This is the point: we are not alone in the world. We have a Father, and we should be similar to him. Furthermore, he has the right to ask this of us because when we were still his enemies, when we were still living in darkness, he was the first to love us by sending us his Son who died in such a terrible way for each one of us (see 1 Jn 4:19).

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you…."

This lesson had a big impact on little Jerry, an African-American boy from Washington, D.C. Because of his high I.Q., he was admitted to an honors class with all white children. But his intelligence alone was not enough to win him acceptance. Everyone disliked him because he was black. When Christmas came, the other children exchanged gifts with each other, but they left Jerry out. Naturally, the young boy cried. When he got home, however, he remembered Jesus' words, "Love your enemies."

So, with his mother's permission, he bought gifts which he distributed with love to all of his "white brothers and sisters."

"Love your enemies … pray for those who mistreat you."

One day, a girl from Florence named Elizabeth was heading into a church to go to Mass when, all of a sudden, a group of girls her age started to make fun of her. She wanted to yell back at them, but instead she smiled. While she was in church Elizabeth prayed for them. As she was leaving, they came up to her and asked why she had behaved the way she did. She explained that since she was a Christian she had to love in every situation. She said this with great conviction. The following Sunday she discovered that what she had done had borne fruit. When she entered the church she saw those same girls sitting attentively in the first pew.

These experiences show how children understand the Word of God. Because of this they are "grown-ups" in God's eyes.

Perhaps we too ought to take steps to remedy certain situations in our own lives, all the more so since we will be judged by the way we judge others. We ourselves are the ones who give God the measure by which he will measure us (see Mt 7:2). Do we not really believe what we often pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (see Mt 6:12)? So, let's love our enemies! Only by doing this can we heal disunity, break down barriers and build up the community.

Is it difficult? Painful? Does the mere thought of it keep us awake at night? Be strong! It is not the end of the world: all it takes is just a little effort on our part, and the remaining ninety-nine percent will be done by God. Then in our hearts will flow a river of joy.

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