Written by Chiara Lubich
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"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another"
(1 Jn 3:14)

This sentence is from a letter that Saint John wrote to the members of the Christian communities he had founded. They were experiencing moments of great difficulty; heresies and false doctrines on matters of faith and morals were beginning to infiltrate the community. The pagan society that the Christians were living in was hostile toward the spirit of the Gospel.

The Apostle, who wanted to help the community of believers, points out to them a very radical solution to their problems — love of neighbor, to live the commandment of love as they had received it right from the beginning. He sees all the other commandments summed up in it.

By doing this, they would come to know what life means and would be led deeper and deeper into union with God. They would experience God-Love and, enriched by this experience, their faith would be firmer; they would be capable of facing attacks when they came and be ready for moments of crisis.

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"We know ..." The Apostle is referring to a certainty that comes from experience. It is as if he were saying, "We have seen it — we have touched it with our own hands." It is the experience that the Christians who had come to know the Gospel through him made at the beginning of their conversion, that is, when they put God's commandments into practice, especially the commandment of love of neighbor, through which one enters into the very life of God.

Are Christians today aware of this experience? Certainly they know that God's commandments are meant to be put into practice. Jesus constantly insists that it is not enough just to listen to the word of God but that we must put it into practice (Mt 5:19, Mt 7:21, Mt 7:26).

There is something, however, that is not always fully grasped by the majority of Christians, either because they do not know or because they have a purely theoretical knowledge — that is, they have not yet actually experienced it. It is that marvellous aspect of Christian life that the Apostle wants to stress here, that is, that when we live the commandment of love, God dwells within us.

An unmistakable sign of this presence is the life, the peace, the joy that he gives us a taste of already here on earth. Everything is filled with light, everything becomes harmonious. There no longer exists a separation between faith and life. Our faith becomes the force that penetrates and links all our actions to one another.

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This word of life tells us that love of neighbor is the golden path that leads us to God. Since we are all his children, nothing is more important to him than to see that we love one another. We give him the greatest joy when we love our neighbor.

Love of neighbor brings us to union with God, and is, therefore, an inexhaustible wellspring of inner light; it is a source of life, of spiritual fruitfulness, of continual renewal. It prevents gangrene, sclerosis, or stagnation from forming in Christians. In a word, it takes us from death to life.

When, instead, love is lacking, everything withers and dies. Knowing this, we can understand why certain attitudes are so widespread in today's world: the lack of enthusiasm and of ideals, the sense of mediocrity and boredom, the longing to escape reality, the loss of values, and so on.

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When the Apostle says "one another" in this sentence, he is above all referring to the members of the community in which we live. If it is true that we must love everyone, it is equally true that our love must begin with those we are normally in contact with and then reach out to all of

humanity. We should think first of all of the members of our family, our co-workers, the members of our parish community, of the religious community or association to which we belong. Our love of neighbor would not be authentic and well ordered if it did not start here. Wherever we may be we are called upon to build the family of the children of God.

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This word of life opens us up to immense new perspectives. It draws us into the divine adventure of Christian love that opens up in beautiful and unforeseen ways. First of all, it reminds us that in a world such as ours — in which violence is widespread, where the strongest rules, or the more clever, or where sometimes everything seems to be paralyzed by an atmosphere of materialism and selfishness — the answer is love of neighbor. This is the medicine that can cure the world of its malaise.

When we live the commandment of love not only does our own life experience a rejuvenation but everything around us enjoys the consequences. It is like a wave of divine warmth that spreads and grows, penetrating all our relationships between persons and between groups, transforming society bit by bit.

Let's make up our minds. We all have people around us to be loved in the name of Jesus. Let us be faithful to this love and help many others to love as well. We will experience in our souls what union with God means. Faith will be revived, doubts will disappear and we will no longer know what boredom means. Life will become fuller and fuller.

Chiara Lubich

Each month a Scripture passage is offered as a guide and inspiration for daily living. This commentary, translated into 96 different languages and dialects, reaches several million people worldwide through print, radio, television and the Internet. Ever since the Focolare's beginnings, founder Chiara Lubich (1920–2008) wrote her commentaries each month. This one was originally published in May 1985.

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Read more:

1) Mueller, Joan. "Planting Acts of Kindness," Living Evangelization , New City Press, 2012, p. 32.

2) Lubich, Chiara. "Our Brothers and Sisters," Essential Writings , New City Press, 2007, p.78.

3) Lubich, Chiara. "The Pearl," The Art of Loving , New City Press, 2005, p.97.

Next month:

March 2013

"Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7).