

The Word of Life of August 1988

Kind and Merciful

Be kind to one another, compassionate, and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven you in Christ (Eph 4:32)

The Word of Life of this month is taken from the letter of St Paul to the community in Ephesus. The apostle speaks of Christian life as a life of unity and charity. After enumerating the things which Christian love makes us avoid (lying, stealing, dishonesty, etc.) he tells us what this love urges us to do. And here is one of the primary attitudes suggested by charity: kindness, understanding, compassion, forgiveness towards all.

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The apostle explains that we should be compassionate because we are children of God and as such we are called to put on the sentiments of God, pouring out on our neighbours the mercy which the Heavenly Father has lavished on us through his Son Jesus Christ.

In Jesus we see an infinitely welcoming love. Jesus does not condemn. He never excludes anyone. He supports and encourages all; he does not quench the smouldering wick. His is a love that seeks out the lost sheep, a love that rebuilds and restores peace, and a love that pardons without limit, which forgets everything and rejoices over the sinner who returns to the Father's house, renewing him or her totally.

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If we are compassionate, we can really be builders of peace and unity. Since we are all fragile, limited and exposed to error, it is evident that peace and unity among us will depend first of all on our knowing how to understand one another and forgive each other.

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The Word of life of this month certainly helps us to discover one of the most beautiful, most human expressions of Christian love, the one which most makes us resemble God; however this does not mean it is easy to put it into practice.

We must in fact recognise that mercy is not our strong point; it is in this area where we frequently fall short. Our nature, wounded by sin, is more inclined to judge than to understand our neighbour, to reject more than to welcome them, to emphasise rather than to cover and hide faults and weaknesses, to remember more than to forgive and forget the wrongs and offences received.

But if Jesus asks us to be merciful, it means that He assures us the grace to be able to attain it.

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In what way can we live this word of life then? As the word itself suggests, we must look to Jesus, think of Him and also try to have for our neighbours the kindness and compassion which Jesus, before all else, has had and always has for us, and about which we never doubt, even if we make mistakes a hundred times a day.

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