

Rome, 25 November 1989

Word of Life

‘Beloved, do not grumble against one another’ (James 5:9).

For a better understanding of the Word of Life offered us this month, we ought to bear in mind the circumstances that gave rise to it. They were the difficulties appearing in the Christian communities James was writing to. There were scandals, discrimination, a selfish use of wealth, the exploitation of workers, a faith made of words more than deeds, and so on. All of this led to resentment and ill feeling between one person and another, creating an unhappy atmosphere throughout the community.

‘Beloved, do not grumble against one another.’

Even at the time of the Apostles, therefore, we can see what we also find in our communities today. Often the greatest difficulties in living our faith are not those from outside, that is, from the world, so much as those from within. They come from certain situations that arise within the community and from attitudes and actions of our neighbours out of step with the Christian ideal. All this generates a feeling of uneasiness, mistrust and upset.

‘Beloved, do not grumble against one another.’

But even though all these more or less serious contradictions and inconsistencies stem from a faith that is not always enlightened and a love of God and neighbour that is still very imperfect, as Christians our first reaction should not be impatience and inflexibility but what Jesus taught. He tells us to wait patiently, be understanding and merciful, which helps develop that seed of goodness sown in us, as explained in the parable of weeds among the wheat (Mt. 13:24-30; 36-43).

‘Beloved, do not grumble against one another.’

How then can we live the Word of Life this month? It presents us with a difficult aspect of Christian life. We, too, belong to various communities – the family, the parish, the workplace, the civic community and associations of various kinds. Unfortunately, in these communities there may be many things that we feel are not right: attitudes, points of view, ways of doing things, lapses that pain us and make us feel like rejecting others.

These then are many opportunities to live the Word of Life for this month well. Instead of moaning or passing judgement, as we would be tempted to do, let’s be tolerant and understanding. Then, as far as it is possible, let’s also correct one another as brothers and sisters. Above all, let’s give a Christian witness by responding to any possible lack of love or commitment with a greater love and commitment on our part.

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