

(English translation)

November 1994

## Word of Life

**May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.** (1 Thes. 3:12)

These words are one of those expressions often used by Paul where he both wishes for and asks the Lord for special graces for his communities (cf. Eph. 3:18; Phil. 1:9).

Here he asks for the Thessalonians to have the grace of an ever-greater, overflowing mutual love. It is not meant as a veiled criticism, as if mutual love didn't already exist in the community. Rather, it's a reminder of a law present in the nature of love itself: the law of its constant growth.

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Since love is the core of Christian life, if it doesn't grow, the whole life of a Christian is affected, grows feeble and may even die.

It's not enough to have had the light to understand the commandment to love our neighbour or to have experienced with enthusiasm its drive and zeal at the beginning of our conversion to the Gospel. We need to make love grow by keeping it always alive, active, at work. This will happen if we know how to grasp, with ever-increasing readiness and generosity, the various chances life offers us each day.

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Paul believes that Christian communities should have the freshness and warmth of a real family.

It's easy to understand, therefore, the reason why he warns against the dangers that most threaten them: individualism, superficiality, mediocrity.

But he also wants them to avoid another grave danger, one closely connected to those just mentioned. It's the danger of settling into a way of life that is orderly and peaceful, but closed in on itself.

He wants open communities, because it is the nature of charity both to love the members of the community of faith and to go out towards everyone, to be sensitive to the problems and needs of all. It's charity's nature to find the way to welcome anyone whoever that person may be, to build bridges, recognizing the positive and uniting its own desires and efforts to do good with all who show good will.

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How should we live this month's Word of Life? We, too, can try to increase mutual love in our families, in our work places, in our communities or church societies, in our parishes, and so on.

This Word of Life asks us to have an overflowing charity, a love capable of going beyond the mediocre measure and the barriers of our subtle selfishness. It's enough to think of just some of the aspects of charity (tolerance, understanding, mutual acceptance, patience, readiness to serve, mercy towards the true or presumed shortcomings of our neighbour, sharing material goods, etc.) to spot our many chances to put it into practice.

Clearly then, if such an atmosphere of mutual love exists in our community, its warmth cannot fail to spread to everyone. Even those who do not yet know the Christian life will feel its attraction and, very

easily, almost without realizing it, they will become involved to the point of feeling part of the same family.

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