

(English translation)

Rome, 25 december 1996

Word of Life

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20).

This is Paul's appeal to the Corinthians following his great proclamation, which is the heart of the whole Gospel: God has reconciled the world to himself through Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:19).

On the cross, in the death of his Son, God has given us the greatest proof of his love. Through the cross of Christ, he has reconciled us to himself.

This fundamental truth of our faith has much to say to our times. It's the revelation that all humanity is waiting for. Yes, God is near to everyone with his love and he loves each person passionately. Our world needs to hear this, but we can say it if first we proclaim it, again and again, to ourselves, so that we really do feel enveloped by this love, even when everything could make us think otherwise.

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This faith in God's love, however, cannot remain closed in the inner depths of each person, as Paul explains very well. God has given us the task of bringing others to be reconciled with him (see 2 Cor. 5:18), entrusting each Christian with the enormous responsibility of witnessing to God's love for those he has made. How?

The whole of our behaviour should make this truth we proclaim credible. Jesus said clearly that before offering our gift at the altar we ought to be reconciled with our brother or sister if they have anything against us (see Mt 5:23-24).

And this applies first of all within our communities: families, groups, associations, Churches. We are called, in other words, to break down all barriers to harmony among people and nations. ...

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'On behalf of Christ' means 'in his place'. Acting in his stead, living with him and like him, let's love one another as he has loved us, without being in any way closed or having prejudices, but open to welcome and appreciate the positive values of each neighbour, ready to give our lives for one another. This is Jesus' commandment *par excellence*, the mark of a Christian, valid still today as it was in the time of Christ's first followers.

Living these words means becoming reconcilers.

And like this our every gesture, our every word, our every attitude, if filled with love, will be like Jesus's. We, like him, will be bearers of joy and hope, of harmony and peace, that is, of that world reconciled with God (see 3 Cor 5:19) which all creation awaits.

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