

The Word of Life of January 1999

“God will dwell with them; they will be his people” (cf. Rev. 21:3).

During the month of January, Christians throughout the world join together in prayer and special meetings to celebrate their shared faith. The theme chosen for this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is taken from the book of Revelation. Let’s read the entire passage:

“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his people,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away” (Rev. 21:1-7).

This month’s Word of Life is an exhortation: if we want to be part of his people, we must allow him to live among us.

But how is this possible, and what can we do in order to foretaste, while still on earth, something of the endless joy we will have in seeing God?

This is exactly what Jesus revealed to us. This is the very meaning of his coming: to communicate his life of love with the Father, so that we too can live it.

We Christians can live this phrase even now and have God among us. To have him among us requires certain conditions, as affirmed by the Fathers of the Church. For Basil, the essential condition is living according to the will of God; for John Chrysostom, it is to love our neighbor as Jesus did; for Theodore the Studite, it is mutual love; and for Origen, it is agreement in thought and feeling, so as to reach that agreement which “unites, and contains the Son of God.”¹

The key for allowing God to dwell among us is found in Jesus’ teachings: “Love one another as I have loved you” (cf. Jn. 13:34). Mutual love is the key to the presence of God. “God remains in us,” (1Jn. 4:12) “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20), says Jesus.

“God will dwell with them; they will be his people.”

In this light then, the fulfilment of all the promises of the Old Covenant - “My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Ez. 37:27) - is not far off and unattainable.

Everything is already accomplished in Jesus who continues, beyond his historical existence, to be present among those who live according to the new law of mutual love, that is, the norm which makes

¹ Comm. In Matth., XIII. 15 (PG 13: 1131).

them a people, the people of God.

This Word of Life is therefore a pressing call, especially for us Christians, to witness through love to the presence of God. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn. 13:35). Living out the new commandment establishes the conditions for the presence of Jesus among all people.

We cannot do anything unless this presence is guaranteed, a presence which gives meaning to the supernatural brother and sisterhood that Jesus brought on earth for all humanity.

“God will dwell with them; they will be his people.”

First of all, it is up to us, Christians, even though we belong to different ecclesial communities, to let the world see “one people” made up of every ethnic group and culture, adults and children, the sick and the well. One people to which we can apply the words said of the first Christians: “See how they love one another and are ready to give their life for one another.”

This is the “miracle” humanity is waiting for in order to regain hope. It will also give an essential contribution to progress in ecumenism, the journey towards full and visible unity among Christians. It’s a “miracle” within our reach, or better, within reach of the one who, dwelling among his own united by love, can change the destiny of the world and lead all humanity towards unity.

Chiara Lubich