

(English translation)

January 1999

Word of Life

“God himself will always be with them”(see Rev. 21:3).

In January, in many parts of the world, Christians celebrate their common faith together with special prayers and meetings. The theme chosen for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is taken from the Book of Revelations. Let's read the whole excerpt:

“Behold, the dwelling of God is with men.
He will dwell with them
And they shall be his people,
And God himself will be with them;
He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
And death shall be no more,
Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more,
For the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:3-4).

This month's Word of Life is such earnest encouragement: if we want to be part of his people, we must allow him to live among us.

But how is this possible? What can we do in order to have such a foretaste, while still on earth, 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, however, requires certain conditions that are 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 loving our neighbour as Jesus did; for Theodore the Studite, it is mutual love; and for Origen, it is having such accord in thought and in feeling that we arrive at a concord that “unites, and contains the Son of God.”

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

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In this light then, the fulfilment of all the promises of the Old Covenant — “My dwelling shall be with them; 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 because he continues, beyond his historical existence, to be present among those who live according to the new law of mutual love, the norm that makes them a people, the people of God.

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

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

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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, race and culture, adults and children. One people to whom we can apply the words said of the first Christians, “Look at 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. This miracle will also provide an essential contribution to ecumenism, the journey towards full and visible unity among Christians. It is a miracle within our reach, or better, a miracle of the one who dwells among those of us united by love, the one who can change the direction of the world and lead all humanity toward unity.

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