

WORD OF LIFE

by Chiara Lubich

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'I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' (Eph 4:1-3)

These words of Saint Paul, written from prison to the Christians of Asia Minor, burst forth from the impassioned heart of the apostle. He calls his brothers and sisters to live their lives in conformity with the ideal of unity to which they have been called. In fact, for those who follow Jesus, unity is more important than anything else. According to Paul, the unity of all people in love and peace sums up all the fruits of the redemption. With his death on the cross, in fact, Jesus demolished every barrier and division that separate people from one another.¹ In this way, he made all those who believe in him into a new people who have God as their Father, Jesus as their Lord and Master, and the Holy Spirit as their life-giving principle.²

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If unity is so important for Christians, then it follows that nothing is more opposed to our vocation than failing to live unity. We sin against unity every time we yield to the temptation, which continually reappears, of being individualistic, or wanting to do things our own way, or letting ourselves be guided only by our own judgment, personal interests or the desire for prestige. We sin against unity when we ignore or even disregard others and their needs and rights. Individualism is the root cause of all divisions, all hatred, rivalry and disagreements, and ultimately of all wars, big or small.

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1 See Eph 2:13-15.

2 See Eph 4:4-6.

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It is therefore necessary to build unity, or better, to safeguard the unity that Jesus already brought on earth. Unfortunately, divisions among Christians at every level too often cause unity to be fractured, obscured or paralyzed.

The Church is undoubtedly called to promote beautiful, important and courageous initiatives. However, its first duty is to make unity shine out from the concord and harmony among its members.

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Of course, experience shows us that unity is extremely difficult to attain. It is continually threatened by the forces of fragmentation and death that we carry within ourselves, that is, by the disordered demands of our egos, which are expressed in many ways.

Therefore, if we want the unity of Jesus to shine forth in our families, in our groups, in our communities and in the Church, if we want the fruits of Christian unity to flourish again in our society, we have to courageously turn our lives in the opposite direction, that is, we have to take on the mentality of Jesus, as indicated here by Paul.

First of all, we have to carry out the work entrusted to us with a spirit of true service to others. This is where 'humility' is needed. Then we have to eliminate from our attitude any form of arrogance, harshness or severity. This requires 'meekness'. Finally, we should lovingly accept one another, notwithstanding our differences. This is where we need 'patience' and 'mutual forbearance'. These virtues maintain peace among us and peace safeguards unity.

I believe that we Christians have not yet sufficiently experienced the advantages of fraternal unity. Those who have experienced it in depth know that everything in life changes, because unity brings with it the presence of Christ himself in our midst. Then, with Christ and through him, the impossible become possible.

Life is transformed into a human-divine adventure. Everything acquires meaning. We can only hope that Christians do not exchange this treasure for anything else in the world - for their own good and for the good of many, many others.