

## **Love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27).**

This year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity<sup>1</sup> offers the phrase quoted above as a basis for reflection. The origins of the phrase lie in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

On his way to Jerusalem Jesus is stopped by a doctor of the law who asks him, 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'<sup>3</sup> This opens a dialogue and Jesus responds with a counter-question, 'What is written in the Law?'<sup>4</sup> thus enabling the questioner himself to draw out the answer. He states that the Law and Prophets are summed up in love of God and love of neighbour.

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The doctor of the law continues by asking, 'And who is my neighbour?' The Master responds by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. He does not list the various types of people who may be neighbours but describes the attitude of deep compassion that should underlie all our actions. It is we ourselves who should become 'neighbours' to others.

The question to ask is, 'Whose neighbour am I?' Just as the Samaritan did, we should care for our brothers and sisters whose needs we know and not be fearful of becoming fully involved in the situations that arise all around us. Our love can show concern and bring help, support and encouragement to everyone.

We need to see in other people 'another self' and do to them what we would want done to us. This is the so-called 'golden rule' that we find in all religions. Gandhi explains it effectively, 'You and I are one. I cannot hurt you without hurting myself'.<sup>5</sup>

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'If we remain indifferent or resigned to the needs of our neighbours, whether these are material or spiritual, we cannot say that we love our neighbours as ourselves. We cannot say that we love them as Jesus loved them. In a community that strives to be inspired by the love that Jesus taught us, there can be no place for inequality, marginalization or neglect. ... For as long as we regard our neighbours as strangers who are disturbing our peaceful lives and disrupting our plans, we will not be able to say that we love God with all our hearts.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is celebrated in the northern hemisphere 18 -25 Jan & in the southern hemisphere during the week of Pentecost. This year the texts of prayers have been prepared by an ecumenical group in Burkino Faso.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Dt 6:4-5 & Lev 19:18.

<sup>3</sup>Lk. 10:25

<sup>4</sup>Lk. 10:26

<sup>5</sup>C. Lubich, *L'arte di amare*, Città Nuova, Roma 2005, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>C. Lubich. Word of Life, Nov 1985

Life is what happens in the present moment. Noticing those around us and knowing how to listen to each other can open up interesting situations and set in motion unexpected initiatives.

This is what happened to Victoria:

'In church I was struck by the beautiful voice of an African woman sitting next to me. I congratulated her, encouraging her to join the parish choir. We stopped to talk. She was a nun from Equatorial Guinea who was passing through Madrid. In her institute, they take in abandoned baby boys and girls and care for them until they become adults. The young people usually either study at university or learn a trade. The tailoring workshop was well established in the institute but did not have sufficient sewing machines.

I offered to help her find more machines. I placed my trust in Jesus and was sure that he was listening to our needs and urging me to love without measure. One of my friends knew a tradesman who was happy to participate in this chain of love. He arranged to repair eight machines and even found an ironing machine for the workshop. A couple of friends offered to take them all the way to Madrid even though this meant changing the destination of their two-day holiday and travelling nearly 1,000 kilometres. Thus, the "hope machines" arrived in Malabo after a long journey over land and sea. In Equatorial Guinea they could not believe what had happened and could only express their immense gratitude!

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