

(English translation)

Rome, April 25, 1980¹

Word of Life

‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.’ (Jn 13:34)

You may want to know when Jesus said these words. It was just before the beginning of his passion. He gave his farewell discourse as his final testament, and these words are part of that.

Just think how important they are!

If we never forget what a father says just before he dies, what about the words of a God?

They must be taken seriously, and so together let’s try to deepen our understanding of them.

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Jesus was about to die and what he said was affected by this. His imminent departure demanded an answer to one problem above all. How could he stay with his people and help the Church grow?

You may know, for example, that Jesus is present in sacramental acts: he makes himself present in the Eucharist.

But Jesus is also present wherever there is mutual love. Indeed, he said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt. 18:20).

In a community whose deep life is mutual love, therefore, he can remain actively present. And through the community he can continue to show himself to the world and continue to influence the world.

Isn’t this wonderful? Doesn’t it make you want to start right away living this love together with your fellow Christians?

John, who tells us of these words, saw mutual love as the Church’s supreme commandment. The Church’s vocation is precisely this: to be communion, to be unity.

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Jesus said immediately afterwards, ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ (Jn 13:35)

So if you want to discover the true mark of authenticity for Christ’s disciples, if you want to see their badge, you have to look for it in mutual love.

Christians are to be recognized by this sign. And, if it’s missing, the world will no longer find Jesus in the Church.

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Mutual love creates unity. But what does unity do? Jesus prayed, ‘May they be one ... that the world may believe’ (Jn 17:21). Unity, by revealing Christ’s presence, draws the world to follow him.

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When the world is faced with unity, with mutual love, it believes in him.

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In the same farewell discourse, Jesus called this commandment ‘his’.
It is his and so is particularly dear to him.

You ought not take it as simply a rule, a precept or a commandment alongside others. Here Jesus wants to reveal to you a way of living, to tell you how to set up your life. Indeed, the first Christians made this commandment the basis of their lives. As Peter said, ‘Above all, maintain constant love for one another’ (1 Pt 4:8).

Before starting work, before studying, before going to church, before any activity, make sure that mutual love reigns between you and whoever lives it with you. If it is so, then on this basis everything has value. Without this foundation, nothing is pleasing to God.

‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.’

Jesus also tells you that this commandment is ‘new’. ‘I give you a new commandment’.

What does he mean? Perhaps that the commandment was unknown before?

No. ‘New’ means that it is made for the ‘new age’.

But what’s this about?

It’s like this. Jesus died for us. Therefore he loved us to the utmost extreme. But what kind of love was his? It certainly wasn’t like ours. His was and is a ‘divine’ love. He said, ‘As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you’ (Jn 15:9). He loved us, therefore, with the very same love with which he and the Father love one another.

And it is with this same love that we must love one another in order to carry out the ‘new’ commandment.

But you, as a man or a woman, don’t have a love like this. Yet you can be happy because, as a Christian, you receive it. And who gives it to you? The Holy Spirit pours it into your heart, and into the hearts of all believers.

There is, then, an affinity between the Father, the Son and us Christians because of the one divine love that we possess. It is this love that introduces us into the Trinity. It is this love that makes us children of God.

It’s through this love that heaven and earth are linked as by a great current. Through this love the Christian community is brought into the sphere of God and the divine reality dwells on earth where believers love one another.

Doesn't all this seem to you divinely beautiful, and isn't the Christian life utterly fascinating?