

Rocca di Papa, 3rd January 1985

To Take the Initiative

The New Year begins with a splendid Word of Life: "But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ" (Eph. 2:4-5).

The commentary on this Word of Life, which you may have already read, underlines two characteristics of God's love. One is that God in His love took the initiative to love us even though we were anything but lovable ("dead through our sins"). The second is that God's love did not only reach the point of forgiving our sins, but since His love is infinite, He brought us to share in His own life ("he brought us to life in Christ").

These words and thoughts take us back to the very beginnings of the Focolare, when God enkindled in our hearts the spark (the Pope would say¹) of our great ideal. In the light of this splendid Word of Life, I realize that the spark or the fire was nothing less than our sharing in Love itself, who is God.

In the midst of the dreariness and desolation which surrounded us due to the war, did we find others taking the initiative to love us?

Through a special gift of God, wasn't it in fact we who were the ones lighting the flame of love in many hearts around us, urged on by the desire to see this flame ablaze in everyone? Did we choose to love those who appeared the most likeable or rather were we more attracted to the poorest of all in whom we could better recognize the countenance of Christ, and to sinners who most needed His mercy?

Yes, by a divine miracle, (the kind of miracle that occurs each time a charism of the Holy Spirit pours forth in the world), our own little hearts could witness to being rich in mercy.

As we know, loving our neighbours did not simply mean to make ourselves one with them to the point of bringing them to God. It meant to draw them into our revolution of love, our very ideal. We considered everyone to be a candidate for unity and so everyone could and did participate in the dynamic divine life that God had brought about at a given point in the Church's history. That is how it was then, and so it should be today. Certainly times have changed, but it shouldn't be difficult to admit that if the world at that time seemed like a desert because of the destruction of the war, the world today, even though the reasons may be different, shouldn't seem to be any less of a desert.

Many factors have contributed toward the levelling out of our modern society; we live in very ambiguous times.

In the past society was fundamentally Christian and a clear distinction could be made between good and evil.

That is not the case today. In the name of a freedom which is not true freedom, good and evil, observance and non-observance of the commandments are all put on the same level. We are living in a new kind of desert, where what has been bombed are not homes, churches, and other buildings, but moral laws, and as a result, individual consciences too.

What can be done about this?

Are we without weapons in our battle to bring the forgiveness and love of Christ to a world which takes so little account of the reality of sin?

No, we are not without weapons.

This desecrated world has a countenance for us: Jesus Forsaken, in whom the sacred and the divine are completely hidden. In every negative situation we can see a reflection of Him, God who is abandoned by God. It is in His name and in our love for Him that we will find the strength to love what

¹ Chiara refers to the words of Pope John Paul II, who emphasized that love is the "inspiring spark" of the Focolare Movement. This was during his visit to the International Center of the Focolare Movement, 19 August 1984. (ed.)

today appears so despicable. With the fire of love aflame in our hearts, and like our God who always takes the initiative, we will reach out to those we meet along our way. God in us will reawaken and enlighten consciences, instil contrition, bring back hope, enflame with enthusiasm, giving a desire to many, dead as they are, to be brought to life in Christ.

So, the Word of Life for January (1985) places three objectives before us: to keep the fire burning in our hearts; to be the first to love; and not to limit our love, but to love boundlessly. In this way we will bring many people to live our ideal, which is to live Christ.

Only by living on this level can we be in line with what the Scriptures ask of us this month.

(...)

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