

January 2021

Remain in my love: you will bear much fruit. (Jn 15:5-9)

Every year, Christians belonging to different churches all over the world observe a week of prayer¹, during which they ask the Father for the gift of unity, according to the wishes of Jesus.

He wants this “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). Unity changes the world — it creates communion, fraternity and solidarity. It is fundamentally a gift of God, and for this reason it is essential to ask the Father for it with persistence and trust.

A group that lives the Word of Life in Spain experienced that this is true. For some years now, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, they felt impelled to pray for the grace of unity and to build bridges with other people.

“We contacted the ecumenical officers in the diocese and local church leaders, and we shared our ideas,” Margarita wrote. “Then we simply gathered together as Christians to pray, and we used our different church buildings. For example, one day we used the Catholic church and another day the Orthodox one. Each time our churches were filled with the joy that comes from God’s presence. It is he who opens the way to unity.”

For 2021, the religious community in Grandchamp, Switzerland, which is dedicated to the work of reconciliation among Christians, has proposed a very suitable phrase, taken from the Gospel of John, as the light for this journey:

Remain in my love: you will bear much fruit.

This is a demanding invitation that asks us to live and work for the unity of Christians, not only during this special time but also throughout the year; indeed, throughout our lives. Our divisions are like a serious wound that needs to be healed: first of all by God’s mercy; then by our commitment to know and respect one another; lastly by being together as witnesses to the Gospel.

Jesus’ words show us what we should do: first and foremost, “remain” in his love.

Therefore, we should strengthen our personal relationship with him by entrusting our lives to Jesus and believing in his mercy. He, in fact, faithfully “remains” with us always.

At the same time, he invites us to be decisive in standing with him as we offer our lives as a gift to the Father. Jesus suggests that we imitate him in wholeheartedly meeting the needs of each person with whom we share a small or large part of our day. He asks us to do so with generosity and selflessness in order to bear “much fruit.”

¹ In the Northern Hemisphere this is held between 18–25 January; in the Southern Hemisphere another date is chosen near the feast of Pentecost.

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The address given by Focolare founder, Chiara Lubich, in Geneva in October 2002 during the events marking the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation resonates strongly: “How much love is needed in the world!

“Jesus said that the world would recognize us as his own, and that through us — by our mutual love and unity — the world would recognize him. ‘By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (Jn 13:35).

“We have understood this: the present time demands love from each of us. It demands unity, communion and solidarity. It also calls upon the churches to recompose the unity that has been torn apart for centuries. This is the reform that heaven is asking of us; it is the first and essential step that will lead towards universal fraternity with everyone.

“In fact, the world will believe if we are united. Jesus said so: ‘May they all be one so that the world may believe’ (Jn 17:21). God wants this! May he give us the grace at least to prepare for it, even if we do not see its fulfillment.”

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