

Love is not always “Charity”

(March 1966 editorial)

Note: This editorial was written in the wake of the 1965 Teams pilgrimage to Lourdes at which the ‘orientation’ for the subsequent year was “Love one another” (Jn 15: 12). The word ‘charity’ in this editorial is in its Biblical sense of ‘the highest form of love’ (see Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical “Deus Caritas Est”).

Since our pilgrimage to Lourdes, in all countries where Teams are established, team members have had in mind the Lord’s commandment: “Love one another” (Jn15: 12).

In my contacts with you, I learn with joy that, within your team, within your marriage, you strive for a greater love. Sometimes, however, I have a niggling feeling: is it in fact towards a greater charity and not just towards ordinary human love that your efforts are directed?

But you might say: ‘is not all love charity as long as it is genuine?’ Certainly not! I would refer you to your own experience: is it not true that your married love is often prompted by self-love rather than love of your spouse; and that, even when charity (love of the other) is no doubt present and dominant, it is not always however the first motive?

A human love, a very beautiful human love that is pure, disinterested, self-giving, is not, for all that, charity. Charity is of ‘an other order’. According to Pascal, charity is divine: it is a spark of God burning in the heart of a human being.

Saint Paul is categorical: *“I will put before you the best way of all. If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have charity, I am no more than a gong booming or a cymbal clanging. And if I have prophetic powers to penetrate all mysteries and all knowledge and have the faith necessary to move mountains, but do not have charity, I am nothing. If give all my possessions to the poor and if I hand over my body to be burned, but do not have charity, I gain nothing”* (1 Cor. 13: 1-3).

Therefore, according to Saint Paul, to love to the point of sacrificing all one’s possessions and – even more – to sacrificing one’s life and to love to the point of being burnt alive for one’s neighbour is not always loving with a love of charity.

Well now, our orientation for the year calls on all team members to grow in charity because such is the Lord’s spiritual legacy, because “this way”, this perfection, this life *“is the best way of all”*. It is to convert all their love into charity: married love, love between parents and children, love between team members... and this is no small undertaking!

No doubt it is a case of loving more, of loving better, but it is in reality a case of loving differently. Left to our own resources, we cannot. In this as in all spiritual matters, we must remember the words of the Lord: *“without me you can do nothing”* (Jn 15: 5). The love of charity is the work of the Holy Spirit in us (see Rom 5: 5). We draw it from the sacraments, from prayer. It is nourished by the Word of God who demands that we practise it or we diminish. It is, first of all, directed to God and then to our neighbour who is a child of God called to be holy as his heavenly Father is holy.

In other words, the person whose love is charity is one who, in the manner of Saint Paul, can say: “It is no longer I who loves, but it is Christ who loves in me”. Let us not forget, however, that before Saint Paul said: *“It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”*, he had first declared: *“I have been crucified with Christ”* (Gal 2: 19-20).

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