

CURSILLO IN CHRISTIANITY, AN ENCOUNTER WITH ONESELF

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Before beginning, it is necessary to clarify my meaning. In the course of this presentation, the word man is used in the generic sense; it always means man and woman.

Logical Point of View

A Cursillo in Christianity has to begin with an encounter with oneself.

From a logical perspective the encounter with oneself, with one's very self, is a necessity. A man is a man when he comes to the realization that he is a man. To become fully a man, he needs to go on discovering himself as a person, in other words, with a capacity for convergence of conviction, decision and perseverance.

The person is the center of creation and of history. Every man, simply because he is a man, is a person. What happens is that, at times, he doesn't act as if he were a person because he does not know himself as such.

In the past, mainly in small villages, only the teacher, the pharmacist, the priest, the doctor and the most important landowner in the town were considered to be persons. Nevertheless, a man, although he sometimes might not realize it, is somebody – an individual and a permanent source of living values, somebody remarkable, unique, irreplaceable, not easily influenced, alive, conscious, dynamic, specific, aware of his own value and the value of others, with critical perception enabling him to realize his own successes, his failures and the value of what he values.

Somebody uniquely capable of unique possibilities, with a structure and a vision, a focus, a perspective and specific possibilities that only he can carry out fully and with meaning; to the extent that as a conscious person, he goes on living his life freely, but responsibly, because he is aware of himself, of his life, of his responsibility, of his mission and his greatness.

When he familiarizes himself with these realities and meditates upon them in a personal and reflective manner, and has them present in his prayer, and most importantly, when he tries to live them accordingly, he will acquire a healthy self-esteem that enables him to value himself without pride and to understand others.

We have to respect, consider and value the person more than anything else. One can never judge anybody from appearances, because a man is what his intentions are and we will never be able to know his intentions, unless the person who embodies it and sustains it opens his mind to us, and justifies and expresses this intention to us, through the vibrant path of his dedicated and thoughtful attitude.

It has been accurately said that the person is a being who is in possession of himself, in his self-awareness and freedom. I would dare to say that he can, through his own efforts and with God's help — Who always helps him who helps himself — come to be his own person in self-

awareness and freedom; in other words, he can use his conscious freedom to become the ‘captain of his own ship’.

Then he will need to know what direction to take, to make sure where the Truth is, in order to be able to continue being free, because one of the most painful and tragic things in our world today, is that a man feels happy only when he doesn't think, forgetting that the biggest gift that God gave him, is the ability to think.

To achieve this, he needs to reach deeply within himself, he has to realize the miracle of his existence and that — I am addressing Christians — he has been redeemed by Jesus Christ who tells us in the Gospel that the Kingdom of God is within us. Therefore, looking for this Kingdom within himself, he will find the Truth, which in setting him free, will give him the precise perspective to understand many things.

Then to think, will no longer be something that saddens him, but a reason for happiness, because the self-awareness of living in grace will bring to his life an authentic Christian frame of mind, a frame of mind that will show him where he is going and with Whom. Otherwise he will get lost in the labyrinth of thinking “Who am I? Who do I think I am? Who do others think I am? Who do I pretend to be?” Forgetting that each one is what he is in the eyes of God.

A Christian is someone who knows that he is a person. He moves within the climate of faith and he allows his life to be illuminated by the light that the Gospel projects on people, events and things.

It is necessary to try and see the world from the eyes of faith, one must believe in order to see, not wait until one sees to believe. Although the impetus towards faith, always comes from God, we are almost always shown it in a subtle way, so as not to encroach upon our freedom. We sometimes find it difficult to understand the courtesy of God, we do not consider the fact that, if He were to make Himself present to us, our freedom would collapse.

Psychological Point of View

The discovery of being a person, leads to the self-knowledge of being endowed with certain qualities that, with interest and effort, can become possibilities, which we can make possible.

A man possesses some abilities which, due to the fact that he is alive, and living fully, are a constant invitation to exercise them: intelligence, freedom, and will.

Intelligence is for thinking, reflecting, reasoning, and to be able to adhere to those values that are worthy and which give value to all other values.

Freedom is a fashionable word today; somebody has said that it is a talisman word. In each time words exist that, for diverse socio-cultural reasons, are loaded with such high prestige that they escape all critical review and they are regarded as the intellectual floor upon which men and social groups confidently move. There are also other talisman words today: change, progress, etc.

But, back to our point. Freedom is used properly when it leads to wider horizons of freedom, which in turn, allow one to continue being free. A man is free to choose between a multitude of options, one of them can be the option of jumping out of the window, but if he does that, he will have no more than two options left: the cemetery or the hospital.

A man has to exercise his power to be free and not become dependent on what creates addiction. It can sometimes also be wrong to feel independent; to hoist the pirate's flag and to live as one pleases; to do just what one feels like doing, which, if it is done just to contradict someone or some custom, is usually not what is desired, but rather the not too original attitude of wishing to be original.

The best thing is to be neither dependent nor independent, but to be attentive to what one believes, values, and loves.

Emotional Point of View

If one does not love oneself, it is impossible to love anybody. If we are not faithful to ourselves with rigorous and patent fidelity, we will not be able to be faithful to what we do, nor to those we love. He who does not know himself is unable to be friends with anyone, he who does not want to get to know himself is not worthy of having friends, he who deceives himself will deceive others, he who hides or falsifies his personality will sooner or later disappoint anyone who gets close to him.

In friendship it is necessary to live together comfortably. Friends have to guarantee that comfort. It is necessary to abandon worry, distrust, and to have the certainty that nothing of what has been or will be said, will be used against us; to refrain from the hustle and bustle out there, from the gossiping out there, from the curiosity that pries where it should not. In front of he who is my friend I don't want to come across as brilliant, I want to be my true self, not having to play the role given to me; I want to be that friend who only aspires for the same in return. What is built on true friendship usually remains forever. Friends have a common root, as do the branches of a tree, which in the end, will eventually produce similar leaves and fruit. Of course there is room for differences - differences in opinion, in background, in attitude, in aspirations, but true friendship will eventually unify everything, will understand everything. Until we have reached this point, friendship is a vocation, not a reality.

Our contact with others is what defines the profile of our personality. A man is always shaken by the circumstances that surround him on the outside and by the problems that hound him from inside, but amid the outer and inner difficulties he has to try to be himself, his true self. A man is a balance, of balances in the process of balancing themselves and, therefore, he must be well balanced, not with the balance of a tightrope walker, but with the balance that the Light of Christ's Gospel casts on each case and in each situation.

This assures him of a good relationship with others and facilitates expression and communication, the means by which men are united and which enables them to experience the joy of sharing with others the adventure of living.

The man who knows how to keep his inclinations at bay and knows how to use his pride, his selfishness and his ambition, appropriately, while firmly trying to transform them until he can give them the epithet of the sacred: sacred pride, sacred selfishness and sacred ambition, will show himself and enable everyone else to see what Christ has made of him – a new man who can act as ferment, to be leaven, so that many things become Christian.

Spiritual Point of View

As the Christians that we are, we cannot forget our identity. Vatican Council II made it quite clear that every Christian is called to holiness.

From force of habit and routine and without blaming anyone, people had ended up believing that the Church was made up of only bishops, priests, monks and nuns. That the call to sanctity, had only been addressed exclusively to a certain class of Christians; that what counted more was to be enrolled in some association or movement than the fact of being baptized; that conversion meant a sudden jump from sin to grace, forgetting that more than anything else, conversion is always a permanent, vigilant, dynamic and constant attitude in the life of a conscious Christian.

By the grace of God we want to be and feel like Christians. We want to be and feel ourselves as the Church, not to control it, but because only through the Church do we receive the spiritual energy of the sacraments.

We know that the words “be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect”, were meant for everybody.

That the highest title to which we can aspire is to that of having been baptized.

That if we live in conscious grace we will be converted every day and at each moment.

What the Cursillo seeks is that Christians learn how to live out these truths, rendering them evident and embodying them in their life with faith that is alive and with human naturalness, so that they may stimulate the life of others and be able to spread happiness, so that the baptized person may discover, not only his function but also his mission which, through carrying it out and spreading it in his normal daily life, he gradually discovers the meaning of his life and the joy of living it under the light of God, together with his brothers and sisters.

With our faith, we have to pave the way for miracles to occur, whilst at the same time we must try and realize that, if we really think truly and deeply, everything is a miracle. The fact that the sun rises every day and the fact that we are able to survive each day in spite of so many dangers that stalk us. It is great to be able to perceive all this, to be able to savor it, and mainly, to know to thank God for it.

Although Christ says, “ask and you will receive”, Christians, rather than asking, should learn to thank God for all we have received. Gratefulness, a grateful attitude is the one that most suits the conscious Christian, who is aware of the fact that because Christ has been resurrected, he has been redeemed, which, if we really believe it, dispels the shadows that guilt projects on our past, the clouds of our present difficulties and, above all, the uncertainties and the ghosts that hover on

the horizon of our future. If each one took the trouble to discover what there is within him, and the possibilities that it can facilitate, he cannot help but be happy.

More than anything else, the reason why the world today is disoriented is the fact that man lives facing outwards, neither realizing nor exploiting the treasure that he has inside; however, before people who have faith, he cannot help but be attracted.

To have faith, in fact, is not to believe “because of”, but to believe “in spite of”. If we were simpler, we could say with Saint Teresa, “The less I see, the more I believe”.

The sincerity of those who are convinced and speak from the depth of their faith, cannot fail to attract the attention of, and even raise a certain envy in other people, because they ignore that such a thing is within reach of everyone and that what matters is to give it everything, one hundred percent, and not just go halfway, after which the Lord can do the rest.

The good thing, or the best thing about it, is that with faith, everything makes sense, while at the same time everything changes its sense of focus and approach, of vision and of perspective and horizon.

A merely human vision is not the same thing as a Christian vision.

Believing that we know, becomes knowing how to believe.

More importance is then laid on “being” than on “doing”.

More important than knowing how to do things, is to know the reason for doing them.

The commandment that I must love God becomes the Good News that God loves me.

The “policeman like” expression “God is watching you”, becomes the comforting fact that God looks at me.

What makes religiosity worthy is the faith with which we practice our religiosity.

All that comes from the devil is abstract; all that comes from God is concrete.

What motivates people is conviction, not commands.

More than action, what becomes the most personal is the reaction.

The immediate thing does not eclipse the thing that is true.

More difficult than forgiving others is to forgive oneself.

The person is always more important than the role that he plays.

Better than mimicry is creativity.

Better than price, is esteem/appreciation.

Better than fear, trust.

Enthusiasm displaces boredom.

To see the same old things or to see everyday things in a new light.

The fatigue of repetitive occurrences or the charm of things that occur daily.

Pleasure always has a beginning and an end, joy lasts forever.

To feel satisfied is not a Christian feeling, to feel happy is.

Our spirituality cannot be a spirituality closed within itself, but rather in being Christian and evangelical it has to be consistent with both things and therefore open to the needs of our fellow men and women. Jesus' plans consist essentially in our fight for the life, dignity and rights of people; for, without this concern for and this active, effective interest in, other people, our spirituality would not be authentic. Since true virtue consists in something other than simply an individual's struggle to reach his own perfection.

When we Christians are not as we should be, we apologize saying that we get along very well with God, even when we are unable to get along well with other people, who, apart from being an easy and Pharisaic solution, undermines the core and essence of Christ's new commandment.

God's love and our love for God can only be authenticated through our fellow men, in both directions. This is the true path to acquiring the good taste for gradually getting the best out of life.

If we know and believe that Christ is the solution, why, instead of studying, deepening, sharpening and fine-tuning the application of His message to the reality of the world, do we devote ourselves to lamenting the painful consequences that occur in the world, precisely because we do not apply it?

Every day when watching TV, listening to the radio or reading the newspaper and finding out what is happening in the world: wars, robberies, assaults, kidnappings, etc. we could put as a comment to each sad piece of news, the words that Lazarus' sisters said to the Lord upon His arrival in Bethany, after their brother's death: "If you had been here, our brother would not have died." The real drama is that the Lord is not in the minds or the hearts of men in a conscious way, and that is the reason why these things happen in the world.

We Christians, rather than lamenting what happens, have to discover how to embody and proclaim the Message. Cursillos in Christianity moves in the realm of and on the basis of the WHAT.

We have to be aware of and savor the fact that the resurrected Christ is a person that is alive, close and our friend and that thanks to our conscious life in grace we gradually realize THAT He knows us,
He looks for us,
He loves us, and
He offers us His love and His closeness, and
He wants to accompany us in our day-to-day life,
with the light of His Word and
with the soft touch of His human tenderness

When we open up to faith and we believe, and above all when we try to live these realities, we verify in a living and personal way that the essence of Cursillos in Christianity, its most vital and alive nucleus, does not have a visible dimension in space, because it operates on the intimate, deep, personal, and vital level where the impression is so evident for oneself, for one's very self, that another person's interpretation can never express it with accuracy.

It can only be glimpsed or be seen in that which says:

“ . . . the breath of God which, when He passes by, leaves us with a longing for glory” or what the disciples felt when Christ accompanied them on their way to Emmaus, or the “ . . . all the senses are suspended” of St. John of the Cross.

It is then that the sound of truth is heard.

Therefore, at the forefront of one's life is the serenity that comes from habit and the astonishment that each dawn produces.

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