



Charity in the 21st Century

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Jesus called the practice of Charity the greatest commandment of God. In the gospel of John chapter 15 verses 9 and 12, Jesus says, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” And again: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Love and charity are one and the same. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church it states: “Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake and love our neighbors as ourselves for love of God.” (CCC1822)

Having said that, we need to ask ourselves, “What are Theological Virtues?” They are the character qualities associated with salvation, resulting from the Grace of God, which enlightens the human mind. Those virtues are Faith, Hope, and Charity, also known as Love.

All the theological virtues are given directly by God to our souls at baptism. By Charity God dwells in our souls. 1 John 4:16 says, “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.”

Understanding now that Charity and love have the same meaning for us as Christians, how does charity work in our lives? If we turn to St Paul’s 1st letter to the Corinthians we discover the most identifiable definition of love. One that is familiar to all of us because it is read so often during the rite of marriage as an example to a young couple on how to live as husband and wife. (1 Cor. 13:1-13)

However, St Paul’s intention when he wrote this letter was much different. St. Paul founded the Church in the city of Corinth, which was a prosperous commercial center infamous for its low moral values. After being away for several years Paul received reports of the community’s lack of morality, division among the members of the church, liturgical abuse and neglect of the poor. Paul then writes to the church in Corinth, like a father to his children, encouraging them and instructing them in the ways of Christian life. He urges them to turn away from pride and selfishness and instead turn toward the needs of one another and the greater good.

Our world today in the 21st century appears very much a mirror of the ancient city of Corinth in the 1st century. There is a lack of moral values, neglect of the poor, selfishness and pride, division among people and yes, even liturgical abuse within our own church. St Paul appears to be writing to us. To paraphrase his words, “If I..... have not charity,” says the Apostle, “I am nothing. Whatever my privilege, service, or even virtue, if I have not charity, I gain nothing.”

St Paul’s call to love is a call to selfless charity.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, today calls us to the same selfless charity. In a homily last July at his residence, the Pope reflected on the essential role of charity in the life of every Christian. He said, “Christianity is not a repository of formal observances for the people who put on a hypocritical good appearance to conceal their hearts empty of any charity. Christianity is showing the flesh of Jesus who bends down without shame in front of whoever is suffering.”

The Pope also reminds us that true charity means breaking the chains of evil, freeing the oppressed, sharing our bread with the hungry, opening our houses to the homeless and clothing the naked. He stated, “This is the charity or fasting that our Lord wants! Charity that is concerned about the life of our brother, that is not ashamed. This is the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. It means sharing our bread with the hungry, taking care of the sick, the elderly, those who can’t give us anything in return: this is not being ashamed of the flesh! “

And then the Holy Father ended his homily with a question: “Am I capable of giving a caress or a hug to the sick, the elderly, the children, or have I lost sight of the meaning of a caress?” Don’t be ashamed of the flesh of our brother, it’s our flesh! We will be judged by the way we behave towards this brother, this sister.”

It is fair to say that our Holy Father truly understands what Christian charity is about and wishes only to share his understanding with all of mankind.

Charity has such a high place of honor because it is the bond between God and man. It is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of all the virtues, because charity unites us intimately to God and our neighbor. It is true love which goes deeper than feeling good about someone or something. And true love means that we want only what is really good for the other person. To love God means that we want to please Him by doing good. To love our neighbors means that we want good things for them.

For us as Cursillistas, the Group Reunion is a key to charity because friendship helps us to love, by inviting our friends to come and see how Christ is present in our lives. Friendship within our group reunion helps us to grow in friendship with God who is the source of our piety, study and action. Enabling us to be charitable to others with the love of Christ.

Charity is concerned with the person. Matthew 25:40, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Cursillo is also concerned with the person. Our founder, Eduardo Bonin spoke of the specific qualities of the leader being natural and supernatural. Within the supernatural qualities he speaks of charity saying, “for a Christian, this life is nothing more than a series of oppositions to sanctity, and charity is a definite assignment. Charity, which is love, lives on in a detailed accounting.” Eduardo continued, “to put these qualities into practice one needs not only theoretical knowledge, but, principally, acquired habit, diligent training, so that when the occasion arises they may put it into action easily and spontaneously.”

It is authentic and true charity, which is needed in order to win the heart of the other person. If we do not win the heart first, we win nothing.

Helping others to find their way back to the Father is what Cursillo is all about. It is not to make it easier for us. It is to make it easier for the others. Cursillo is about making it easier for those who are *far away*.

This is how we practice true charity as leaders, inviting others who enter into our one square meter environment with friendship, accepting the other for who they are, loving God in them and loving them in God.

To quote Eduardo, “The goal of Cursillo is to enable people, in the existing circumstances and happenings of their life, to learn through loving what can only be understood by loving. This is done in a contagious manner through a vital intercommunication within an atmosphere of friendship, “infecting” each other.”

In Cursillo, friendship is the key to Charity. Friendship with God and friendship with others. For it is in Charity that we “Make a friend, Be a friend and Bring that friend to Christ.”

I would like to close with a quote from our Holy Father, Pope Francis, “To love God and neighbor is not something abstract, but profoundly concrete; it means seeing in every person the face of the Lord to be served, to serve him concretely. And you are, dear brothers and sisters, the face of Jesus.” (5/21/13)