

Deus Caritas Est – Pope Benedict XVI – Paragraphs 12, 14, 19, 29

Jesus Christ – the incarnate love of God

12. Though up to now we have been speaking mainly of the Old Testament, nevertheless the profound co-penetration of the two Testaments as the one Scripture of the Christian faith has already become evident. The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity. This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the “stray sheep”, a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.

14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental “mysticism” is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become “one body”, completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love. The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbour, and his grounding the whole life of faith on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality—something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization. Faith, worship and ethos are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. “Worship” itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the “commandment” of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given.

The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love

19. “If you see charity, you see the Trinity”, wrote Saint Augustine. In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. 19:37, Zech 12:10), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. 19:37), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man. By dying on the Cross—as Saint John tells us—Jesus “gave up his Spirit” (19:30), anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit that he would make after his Resurrection (cf. 20:22). This was to fulfil the promise of “rivers of living water” that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. 7:38-39). The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. 13:1, 15:13).

The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this service of charity, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

Justice and Charity

29. We can now determine more precisely, in the life of the Church, the relationship between commitment to the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other. We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation "in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good." The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility. Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as "social charity".

The Church's charitable organizations, on the other hand, constitute an *opus proprium*, a task agreeable to her, in which she does not cooperate collaterally, but acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature. The Church can never be exempted from practising charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love.

The Saint – I Celano - Chapter VIII - pp. 196-199:

How he built the church of San Damiano, and of the way of life of the ladies living in that place

The first work that blessed Francis undertook, after he had gained his freedom from the hands of his carnally-minded father, was to build a house of God. He did not try to build a new one, but he repaired an old one, restored an ancient one. He did not tear out the foundation, but he built upon it, always reserving to Christ his prerogative, although unaware of it, for no one can lay another foundation, but that which has been laid, which is *Christ Jesus*.

When he had returned to the place mentioned where the church of San Damiano had been built in ancient times, he repaired it zealously within a short time, aided by the grace of the Most High. This is the blessed and holy place where the glorious religion and most excellent Order of Poor Ladies and holy virgins had its happy beginning, about six years after the conversion of the blessed Francis and through the same blessed man.

The Lady Clare, a native of the city of Assisi, the most precious and strongest stone of the whole structure, stands as the foundation of all the other stones. For after the beginning of the Order of Brothers, when this lady was converted to God through the counsel of the holy man, she lived for the good of many and an example to countless others. Noble by lineage, but more noble by grace, chaste in body, most chaste in mind, young in age, mature in spirit, steadfast in purpose and most eager in her desire for divine love, endowed with wisdom and excelling in humility, bright in name, more brilliant in life, most brilliant in character. A noble structure of precious pearls arose above this woman, whose praise comes not from mortals but from God, since our limited understanding is not sufficient to imagine it, nor our scanty vocabulary to utter it.

First of all, the virtue of mutual and continual charity that binds their wills together flourishes among them. Forty or fifty of them can dwell together in one place, wanting and not wanting the same things forming one spirit in them out of many. Second, the gem of humility, preserving the good things bestowed by heaven so sparkles in each one that they merit other virtues as well. Third, the lily of virginity and chastity diffuses such a wondrous fragrance among them that they forget earthly thoughts and desire to meditate only on heavenly things. So great a love of their eternal Spouse arises in their hearts that the integrity of their holy feelings keeps them from every habit of their former life. Fourth, all of them have become so distinguished by their title of highest poverty that their food and clothing rarely or never manage to satisfy extreme necessity. Fifth, they have so attained the unique grace of abstinence and silence that they scarcely need to exert any effort to check the prompting of the flesh and to restrain their tongues. Sixth, they are so adorned with the virtue of patience in all these things, that adversity of tribulation or injury of vexation never breaks or changes their spirit. Seventh, and finally, they have so merited the height of contemplation that they learn in it everything they should do or avoid, and they know how to go beyond the *mind to God* with joy, persevering night and day in praising Him and praying to Him.

For the moment let this suffice concerning these virgins dedicated to God and most devout servants of Christ. Their wondrous life and their renowned practices received from the Lord Pope Gregory, at that time Bishop of Ostia, would require another book and the leisure in which to write it.

The Saint – Letter to the Entire Order – pg. 118

Listen, my brothers: If the Blessed Virgin is so honored, as is becoming, because she carried Him in her most holy womb; if the Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of God; if the tomb in which He lay for some time is held in veneration, how holy, just and fitting must be he who touches with his hands, receives in his heart and mouth, and offers to others to be received the One Who is not about to die, but Who is to conquer and be glorified, upon Whom the angels longed to gaze.

See your dignity, [my] priest brothers, and be holy because He is holy. As the Lord God has honored you above all others because of this ministry, for your part love, revere and honor Him above all others. It is a great misery and a miserable weakness that when you have Him present in this way, you are concerned with anything else in the whole world.

Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest! O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation he hides himself under an ordinary piece of bread! Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him! Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!

Matthew 5:1-16

The Beatitudes

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.