



The Holy See

12TH WORLD YOUTH DAY

Beatification of Frédéric Ozanam

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Notre-Dame de Paris

Friday, 22 August 1997

1. "Love is of God" (1 Jn 4:7). Today's Gospel presents us with the figure of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, Christ wants to show his listeners who is the neighbour mentioned in the great commandment of the divine Law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:27). A doctor of the Law was asking what he should do to have eternal life: he found in these words the decisive answer. He knew that love of God and neighbour is the first and greatest of the commandments. Despite this, he asks "And who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10:29).

The fact that Jesus proposes a Samaritan as an example to answer this question is significant. In effect, the Samaritans were not particularly esteemed by the Jews. Moreover, Christ compares the conduct of this man to that of a priest and a Levite who see the man wounded by brigands, lying half dead on the road, and pass by without giving him any help. On the contrary, the Samaritan, who sees the suffering man, "had compassion" (Lk 10:33). His compassion brings him to perform a whole series of actions. First he bandaged his wounds, then he took the wounded man to an inn to care for him and, before leaving, he gave the inn keeper the necessary money to take care of him (cf. Lk 10:34-35). This example is eloquent. The doctor of the Law received a clear answer to his question: Who is my neighbour? The neighbour is every human being without exception. It is not necessary to ask his nationality, or to which social or religious group he belongs. If he is in need, he must be helped. This is what is required by the first and greatest divine Law, the law of love of God and neighbour.

Faithful to this commandment of the Lord, Frédéric Ozanam believed in love, the love of God for every individual. He felt himself called to love, giving the example of a great love for God and others. He went to all those who needed to be loved more than others, those to whom the love of God could not be revealed effectively except through the love of another person. There Ozanam discovered his vocation, the path to which Christ called him. He found his road to sanctity. And he followed it with determination.

2. "Love is of God". Love of man has its origin in the Law of God: our first reading from the Old Testament shows this. We find there a detailed description of the actions involved in loving our neighbour. It is like a biblical preparation for the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The second reading, taken from the First Letter of Saint John, explains the meaning of the words "Love is of God". The Apostle writes to his disciples: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love." (1 Jn 4:7-8). This saying of the Apostle is really at the centre of the New Covenant, the apex towards which all that is written in the Gospels and the Apostolic Letters leads us. Saint John continues: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (*ibid.*, 10). The remission of sins is a sign of the love which the Son of God made man has brought us. Then, love of neighbour, love of every human being, is not only a commandment. It is a demand which is consequent on the living experience of God's love. That is why John can write: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn 4:11).

The teaching of the Letter of John continues as the Apostle writes: "No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit" (1 Jn 4:12-13). Love, then, is the source of knowledge. If, on the one hand, knowledge is a condition of love, on the other, love makes our knowledge grow. If we remain in love, we intimately experience the action of the Holy Spirit who enables us to participate in the redeeming love of the Son whom the Father has sent to save the world. By knowing Christ as the Son of God, we remain in him and, through him, we remain in God. Through the merits of Christ we believe in love, we know the love that God has for us, we know that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16). This knowledge through love is in some way the keystone of the whole spiritual life of the Christian. "He who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (*ibid.*).

3. In the context of the World Youth Day this year in Paris, I am about to beatify Frédéric Ozanam. I cordially greet Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, the city which houses the tomb of the new Blessed. I rejoice also in the presence at this event of Bishops from many countries. I affectionately greet the members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society who have come from across the world for the beatification of their principal founder, as well as those representing the great spiritual family of Saint Vincent. The connection with the Vincentians was close from the beginning

of the Society, since it was a Daughter of Charity, Sr. Rosalie Rendu, who guided the young Frédéric Ozanam and his companions to the poor of the Mouffetard neighborhood of Paris. Dear disciples of Saint Vincent de Paul, I encourage you to join forces so that the poor, as he who inspired you always wished, may be loved and better served, and that Jesus Christ be honoured in their person.

4. Frédéric Ozanam loved everyone who was deprived. From his youth, he became aware that it was not enough to speak about charity and the mission of the Church in the world: rather what was needed was an effective commitment of Christians in the service of the poor. He had the same intuition as Saint Vincent: "Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be through the work of our hands, let it be by the sweat of our brow" (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, XI, 40). In order to show this concretely, at age twenty, with a group of friends, he created the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul which aimed at helping the very poor, in a spirit of service and sharing. These Conferences rapidly spread beyond France to all the European countries and to the world. I myself as a student before the Second World War was a member of one of them.

From then on, the love of those in extreme need, of those with no one to care for them, became the centre of Frédéric Ozanam's life and concerns. Speaking of these men and women, he writes "We must fall at their feet and say to them, like the Apostle: '*Tu es Dominus meus*'. You are our masters and we are your servants; you are for us the sacred images of the God whom we do not see and, not knowing how to love him in another way, we love him through you" (*To Louis Janmot*).

5. He observed the real situation of the poor and sought to be more and more effective in helping them in their human development. He understood that charity must lead to efforts to remedy injustice. Charity and justice go together. He had the clear-sighted courage to seek a front-line social and political commitment in a troubled time in the life of his country, for no society can accept indigence as if it were a simple fatality without damaging its honour. So it is that we can see in him a precursor of the social doctrine of the Church which Pope Leo XIII would develop some years later in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Faced with all the forms of poverty which overwhelm so many men and women, charity is a prophetic sign of the commitment of the Christian in the following of Christ. I invite the laity, and in particular young people, to show courage and imagination in working to build a more fraternal society, where the less fortunate will be esteemed in all their dignity and will have the means to live in respect. With the humility and limitless confidence in Providence which characterized Frédéric Ozanam, have the boldness to share your material and spiritual possessions with those who are in difficulty!

6. Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, apostle of charity, exemplary spouse and father, grand figure of the Catholic laity of the nineteenth century, was a university student who played an important role in

the intellectual movement of his time. A student, and then an eminent professor at Lyon and later at Paris, at the Sorbonne, he aimed above all at seeking and communicating the truth in serenity and respect for the convictions of those who did not share his own. "Learn to defend your convictions without hating your adversaries, " — he wrote — "to love those who think differently than yourselves, . . . let us complain less about our times and more about ourselves" (*Letters*, 9 April 1851). With the courage of a believer, denouncing all selfishness, he participated actively in the renewal of the presence and action of the Church in the society of his time. His role in starting the Lenten Conferences in this Cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris is well-known, with the goal of permitting young people to receive an updated religious instruction regarding the great questions confronting their faith. A man of thought and action, Frédéric Ozanam remains for today's university community, professors as well as students, a model of courageous commitment, capable of making heard a free and demanding voice in the search for the truth and the defense of the dignity of every human person. May he also be for them an invitation to holiness!

7. Today the Church confirms the kind of Christian life which Ozanam chose, as well as the path which he undertook. She tells him: Frédéric, your path has truly been the path of holiness. More than one hundred years have passed and this is the opportune moment to rediscover that path. It is necessary that all these young people, nearly your own age, who have gathered together in such numbers here in Paris from all the countries of Europe and the world, should recognize that this path is also theirs. They must understand that, if they want to be authentic Christians, they must take the same road. May they open wider the eyes of the spirit to the needs of so many people today. May they see these needs as challenges. May Christ call them, each one by name, so that each one may say: this is my path! In the choices that they will make, your holiness, Frédéric, will be particularly confirmed. And your joy will be great. You who already see with your eyes the One who is love, be a guide for all these young people on the paths that they will choose, in following your example today!

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