



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO PORTUGAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BEATIFICATION OF JACINTA AND FRANCISCO,
YOUNG SHEPHERDS OF FÁTIMA

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD WITH SOCIAL PASTORAL CARE ORGANIZATIONS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI

Church of the Most Holy Trinity - Fátima
Thursday, 13 May 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Friends,

You have heard Jesus say: “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37). He exhorts us to imitate the example of the Good Samaritan, which was just now proclaimed, when approaching situations which call for fraternal assistance. And what is this example? It is that of “a heart which sees”. “This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 31). This is how the Good Samaritan acted. Jesus does not only exhort us; as the Fathers of the Church taught, he is himself the Good Shepherd who draws near to each man and “pours upon his wounds the oil of consolation and the wine of hope” (Portuguese Common Preface VIII). Christ then leads him to the inn, which is the Church, entrusts him to the care of his ministers and pays in person, beforehand, for his healing. “Go and do likewise”. The unconditional love of Jesus which has healed us must now become a love bestowed freely and generously, through justice and charity, if we want to live with a good Samaritan’s heart.

I am very happy to meet you in this holy place where God chose to remind mankind, through Mary, of his plan of merciful love. I offer a friendly greeting to all of you, and to the institutions which you represent. Yours is a variety of faces, all one in concern for social issues and, above all, in showing compassion to the poor, the infirm, prisoners, the lonely and abandoned, the disabled, children and the elderly, migrants, the unemployed and all those who experience needs which

compromise personal dignity and freedom. I thank Bishop Carlos Azevedo, for the pledge of communion and fidelity to the Church and to the Pope which he has expressed both on the part of this assembly of charity and of the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Social Work of which he is President, which constantly encourages this great sowing of charitable works throughout Portugal. Conscious, as the Church, of not being able to provide practical solutions to each concrete problem, and lacking any kind of power, yet determined to serve the common good, you are ready to assist and to offer the means of salvation to all.

Dear brothers and sisters working in the vast world of charity, “Christ reveals to us that ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8) and at the same time teaches that the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. He assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 38). History presently offers us a scenario of socio-economic, cultural and spiritual crisis, which highlights the need for a discernment guided by a creative proposal of the Church’s social message. The study of her social doctrine, which takes charity as its principal strength and guide, will make possible a process of integral human development capable of engaging the depths of the human heart and achieving a greater humanization of society (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, 20). This is not simply a matter of intellectual knowledge, but of a wisdom which can provide creativity, a sort of flavour and seasoning, to the intellectual and practical approaches aimed at meeting this broad and complex crisis. May the Church’s institutions, together with all non-ecclesial organizations, perfect their theoretical analyses and their concrete directives in view of a new and grandiose process capable of leading to “that civilization of love, whose seed God has planted in every people, in every culture” (*ibid.*, 33).

In its social and political dimension, this service of charity is the proper realm of the lay faithful, who are called to promote organically justice and the common good, and to configure social life correctly (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 29). One pastoral conclusion which emerged in your recent reflections is that a new generation of servant leaders needs to be trained. Attracting new lay workers for this pastoral field surely calls for particular concern on the part of the Church’s pastors as they look to the future. Anyone who learns from the God who is Love will inevitably be a person for others. In effect, “the love of God is revealed in responsibility for others” (*Spe Salvi*, 28). United to Christ in his consecration to the Father, we are seized by his compassion for the multitudes who cry out for justice and solidarity, and like the Good Samaritan in the parable, committed to providing concrete and generous responses.

Often, however, it is not easy to arrive at a satisfactory synthesis between spiritual life and apostolic activity. The pressure exerted by the prevailing culture, which constantly holds up a lifestyle based on the law of the stronger, on easy and attractive gain, ends up influencing our ways of thinking, our projects and the goals of our service, and risks emptying them of the motivation of faith and Christian hope which had originally inspired them. The many pressing requests which we receive for support and assistance from the poor and marginalized of society

impel us to look for solutions which correspond to the logic of efficiency, quantifiable effects and publicity. Nonetheless, the synthesis which I mentioned above is absolutely necessary, dear brothers and sisters, if you are to serve Christ in the men and women who look to you. In this world of division, all of us are called to have a profound and authentic unity of heart, spirit and action.

The many social institutions which serve the common good, and are close to those in need, include those of the Catholic Church. The guiding principles of the latter need to be clear, so that they can be clearly identifiable by the inspiration of their aims, in the choice of their human resources, in their methods of operation, in the quality of their services, and in the serious and effective management of their means. The solid identity of these institutions provides a real service, and is of great help to those who benefit from them. Beyond this issue of identity, and connected with it, it is a fundamental step to ensure that Christian charitable activity is granted autonomy and independence from politics and ideologies (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 31b), even while cooperating with state agencies in the pursuit of common goals.

The services you provide, and your educational and charitable activities, must all be crowned by projects of freedom whose goal is human promotion and universal fraternity. Here we can locate the urgent commitment of Christians in defence of human rights, with concern for the totality of the human person in its various dimensions. I express my deep appreciation for all those social and pastoral initiatives aimed at combating the socio-economic and cultural mechanisms which lead to abortion, and are openly concerned to defend life and to promote the reconciliation and healing of those harmed by the tragedy of abortion. Initiatives aimed at protecting the essential and primary values of life, beginning at conception, and of the family based on the indissoluble marriage between a man and a woman, help to respond to some of today's most insidious and dangerous threats to the common good. Such initiatives represent, alongside numerous other forms of commitment, essential elements in the building of the civilization of love.

All this fits very closely with the message of Our Lady which resounds in this place: penance, prayer and forgiveness aimed at the conversion of hearts. In this way you are building the civilization of love, whose seeds God has sown in the heart of every man and woman, to which faith in Christ the Saviour gives abundant growth.