

(English translation)

20 March 1986

To Be Reborn through Love

... As we know, the Lenten season asks all Christians to make a conversion.

So this is true also for us.

And what is the typical conversion that we, who are members of the Focolare, must be ready to make, particularly during the season of Lent?

This "converging" and redirecting of our lives toward God finds its most concrete application in our turning towards our neighbor, in the consideration of our neighbor as our specific means toward approaching God.

You know how often we speak of our neighbors and of the love we owe them. However, each time we are enlightened about this, it appears as something new to us.

A few days ago it also happened to me.

I was reading the daily Missal for meditation and the stupendous page on the final judgment appeared before me: "Jesus who will come to judge us and tell us '... I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink...' (Mt 25:35)."

It was as if I was reading those words for the first time. I rediscovered that in the final judgment Jesus will not ask me if I did this or that thing which I must do anyway, but He will aim directly at love for neighbor.

Like a person who was just beginning her ascent to God, I began to love everyone, everyone who in one way or another crossed my path during the day. And believe me, I felt as if I were reborn. I reminded myself that my soul, above all, thirsts for love, thirsts to love, and that it is in love towards everyone where it truly finds its rest, its nourishment and its life. It is true that I had previously tried to perform many acts of charity, but I now realize that some of them were stemming from an excessively individualistic spirituality, fed by small or larger penances; which, notwithstanding our good will, can become an occasion for us who are called to love, to look upon our own selves instead. Now, in this new effort to love everyone, I could still perform many acts of charity but they would all be for the service of my neighbors in whom I could see and love Jesus. And it was only in this way that I could experience fullness of joy.

We are called to continually work at our own reconversion; we must all experience this kind of rebirth, this fullness of life. Therefore we must try as much as possible to translate all the aspects of our daily existence into charity towards our neighbor.

Is it our task to keep up the house? Let's not do so for merely human reasons, but because there is Jesus in the others to be loved by dressing, feeding and serving them. Do we have any other kind of responsibility to take care of? Jesus is present in the individuals and in the communities whom we serve. Must we pray? Let's always pray for the others as well as ourselves, referring to that "we" that Jesus has taught us to use in the "Our Father." Are we called to suffer? Let's offer our suffering for the others. Is it the will of God to spend time with someone? Let's always have the intention to listen to Him, to give advice to Him, to console Him... in short: to love Him. Must we rest, eat, or take out time for recreation? In all these actions let's place the intention of wanting to re-gather our strength in order to serve our neighbor better.

In other words, let's do all things with our neighbor in mind.

And even though this spiritual attitude which brings us constantly outside of ourselves will be a source of great joy (I mentioned rebirth), nevertheless we can be sure that the effort involved in going out of ourselves to "live the others," as we say, will be present.

Through this effort we will be offered the possibility of loving Jesus Forsaken in the practice of the virtues of patience, benevolence, humility, magnanimity, poverty, and purity which are all implicit in charity.

Yes, we must become saints, but through the road indicated for us: the way of love, a radical love which first of all must be lived among us where it is reciprocal, and then with everyone.

So that such a continual conversion may take place in us, during the next two weeks let's keep in mind our commitment "to be reborn through love."

(taken from *On the Holy Journey*, New City Press, New York 1988, pp. 122-124)