

## Love put into practice

“While realizing that the foundation of the Gospel is charity... we did not immediately understand how to live it, nor with whom, nor to what degree we were to put it into practice.

At the beginning, due mainly to the distressing circumstances of the war, we directed our love toward the poor. We were convinced that in those gaunt and, at times, repulsive faces, we could make out the face of the Lord. It was a real training. We were not accustomed to loving supernaturally. At most, we cared about our relatives or our friends in a spirit of warm respect or in a purely natural and healthy friendship.

Now, under the impulse of grace, trusting in God and in his Providence which cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, we addressed our attention to all the poor of the city. We invited them to our houses, to eat at our table... When we could not receive them in our home, we arranged to meet them somewhere, and we gave them whatever we had managed to put together. We visited them in their dismal shacks and we comforted them and offered them medicines.

The poor were truly the object of our love because for them and through them we could love Jesus. They became the concern also of those who had been attracted by our common ideal.

As the community grew around the initial nucleus of the focolarine, the possibilities of helping, of assisting whoever suffered grew. And it was quite a sight to see tons of food, clothing and medicine arrive; it was an unusual abundance which, considering that we were in the last years of the war, clearly made the special intervention of divine Providence obvious to anyone. It was hard to tell if it was the hand of angels or people that produced such a sight...

These are small events which happen to whoever, being a follower of Jesus, experiences ‘Ask and it will be given to you’ (Mt 7:7). Nevertheless, they never ceased to amaze us. At the same time, we were encouraged by other extraordinary events experienced by our great brothers and sisters who had preceded us and who also knew—at a time when they were not yet saints—the difficulties encountered in the ascent to God, in the process of thawing the hardened human personality by the fire of Divine Love.

Hadn't Saint Catherine, in her love for the poor, given to one her mantle and to another the cross on her rosary? And hadn't Jesus appeared to her in a vision the following nights to thank her for the gifts she had given to him in the poor? And didn't St. Francis give away his cloak to the poor some thirty times?

Surely, then, it was no great sacrifice for us to take off our gloves in the winter and offer them to somebody who needed to beg for hours out in the cold just to survive....

This work continued in earnest for months. Yet, in spite of everyone's great generosity... it became clear that perhaps this was not the immediate goal for which the Lord had urged us to love in a concrete way.

It was only later that we seemed to understand the Lord had urged us in this direction also for an intention of his own: it is in love and through the practice of love that one can better comprehend the things of heaven, and that God can more easily enlighten our souls.

It was probably because of this concrete love that later on we understood that we didn't have to turn only towards the poor but towards everyone indiscriminately. No doubt there were people who needed to be fed, to be given drink, to be clothed, but also those who needed to be educated, advised, put

up with, or who were in need of our prayers....

The corporal and spiritual works of mercy opened up before us. Furthermore, they were the precise questions that the Judge of our lives would ask in order to decide our eternity. This thought immersed us in adoration considering the infinite love of Jesus who had revealed them to us when he came on earth so as to make it easier for us to get into heaven.

Each one of us felt impelled to respond with love to his great Love by practicing these tenets of his will. God was not asking us only to love the poor, but each and every neighbour, whoever they were, as we love ourselves.

So if we came across someone who was weeping, we tried to weep with him and their cross was lightened. If someone rejoiced we rejoiced with them, and the joy was all the greater. 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep' (Rom 12:15)."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. Lubich, *May they all be one*, New City Press, NY, 1984, pp.44-48.