

(English translation)

Coimbatore, 21 January 2003

The Art of Loving and a United World

Meeting at the Avinashilingan University with youth and civil and religious authorities

Dear Young People,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to be here again in Coimbatore, in this beloved city which wished to honour me, two years ago, by conferring me with the title of “Defender of Peace”.

On that happy occasion I promised, so as to honour this recognition, to revive among the persons and groups I would have encountered, in all the cities and nations I would have visited, fraternal communion, solidarity, unity, the specific charism of my Movement, which is the guarantee of peace.

And it is what I would like to do today as well, here with you, addressing myself especially to the many young people who are present.

Young people have something special. I know this from experience because I belong to a Movement which includes hundreds of thousands and, perhaps, millions of young people around the world. They usually have in their hearts and minds antennas capable of detecting new and sublime wavelengths which others might not perceive.

The very fact that they are young leaves them free to entertain noble thoughts and aspirations such as peace, justice, freedom and unity. Indeed, their age prompts them to dream of achievements which could appear to others as being utopian, like one day seeing our planet as one great brotherhood in spite of the different races, languages, nations, and religions. They might foresee – and they are willing to work towards its achievement – a new and better world, a world in which there is greater happiness and unity, a world more worthy of the third millennium we have just begun.

And I am certain that also the hearts of the young people present here nurture similar aspirations, at least sometimes, if not always.

But can we still speak of peace today? Can we speak of universal brotherhood and of a united world?

Yes, certainly, and perhaps we must do so even more than before. And not only because of the dozens of wars underway in various parts of our planet, but also because today brotherhood and peace are being threatened in a different, more insidious way.

You see, even though more than a year has passed, that terrible September 11th and the crumbling of the twin towers in New York is still alive in your young hearts. Ever since that day, and then with the spreading of terrorism everywhere, we have really entered a particular moment in history which could be defined as: “After September 11th”. Very well, In view of this situation, and all the other forms of violence, the idea of elected and illuminated persons is becoming increasingly clear, and it is that all this is not only the fruit of hatred among individuals or peoples, but that it is the effect also of the dark forces of Evil with a capital E, as the Pope, John Paul II also said.

The situation is serious then. Because if this is the way things are, it is not enough to oppose such danger solely with human forces. We need to engage the forces of good with a capital G.

And you all know what this Good is: it is God and all that is rooted in Him: the world of the spirit, of great values, of authentic love, of prayer. That God, about whom Mahatma Gandhi so admirably wrote:

“With my hand on my heart I can declare that not even for one moment of my life have I ever forgotten God. For more than twenty years, I did all that I did as if I were in the presence of God.”¹

We must rely on faith in God and above all on the power of prayer. This was the reason for the meeting in Assisi, when the Pope invited representatives of the major religions of the world to the city of St. Francis in order to invoke peace from heaven.

But, even though prayer is very important, it does not seem to be enough. We can understand why if we are aware of the deeper causes of today’s dramatic situation.

You know as well as we do that justice does not prevail in the world, that there are rich countries and poor countries, people suffering from hunger, whereas God’s plan for humanity would be for everyone to be brothers and sisters in one big family with one Father.

This imbalance is one of the factors, perhaps the most decisive, that generates resentment, hostility, revenge, terrorism.

Well then, how can we create greater equality? How can we bring about a kind of communion of goods?

It’s obvious that we can’t move goods unless we move hearts. Therefore, we need to spread love, that reciprocal love which generates brotherhood. We need to invade the world with love! And we need to begin with ourselves.

But, someone here might ask me: “Is love, loving one another, compatible with the lifestyle that our culture and religion have handed down to us?”

Yes, it is: look in your sacred Books and you will find – in almost all of them – the so-called “Golden Rule”. Christianity knows it in this form: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk 6:31). And this is what the Mahabharáta says: “Do not do to others what would make you suffer if it were done to you.”² Or as Mahatma Gandhi so admirably said: “You and I are one and the same thing. I cannot hurt you without harming myself.”³ All these phrases mean: respect your neighbours. And in order to respect them, we must love them.

Loving then is one of the great secrets of this moment.

However, the love that we must put into practice is a special love, it has certain qualities.

It asks, for example, that we love everyone making no distinctions between those who are pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly, young or old, fellow-citizen or foreigner, white, black or yellow, American, African or Japanese, Christian, Muslim or Buddhist. Everyone must be loved in the same way.

Something else Mahatma Gandhi said is this: “The rule is to be friends of the world and to consider as ‘one’ the whole human family. Whoever distinguishes between the faithful of his own religion and those of another, misinforms the members of his own and opens the way to rejection and irreligion.”⁴

Furthermore, this love wants us to be the first to love, without waiting for the other person to do something kind or to smile. We must not wait to be loved; rather, we should take the first step.

And we should love the other person as we love ourselves, sharing his or her sufferings, successes, joys.... Just think how the world would be if even nations were to put this simple rule into practice; people would love the country of others as they love their own and there would no longer be wars.

1. *Young India*, January 27, 1927: C.W., vol. 32, 1969, p. 571.

2. *Mahabharata* 5: 1517).

3. W. Mühs, *Parole del cuore*, Milan 1996, p. 82.

4. *In buona compagnia*, a cura di Claudio Mantovano, Roma, 2001, p. 11.

This is a love that is expressed concretely, not only with words but with facts. If a classmate at school is having a problem with his studies, it would mean that you should help him, maybe even study with him. If someone is hungry, you should give him something to eat; if he is sick, you should go to visit him....

This love is so strong that it is even ready to love enemies, to pray for them, to respond to offenses with forgiveness.

As one of your proverbs says: «While the axe chops the sandalwood, it in turn offers its virtue by scenting the axe with its fragrance.»⁵ In fact, one of the expressions of this love is knowing how to forgive. Mercy must become a daily habit, and reconciliation among all a constant practice in our lives.

Then when this love is lived by two or more persons together, by two or more young people, there is mutual love. And this is the secret, the surest way to build peace and unity, to achieve brotherhood on earth.

This love gives much joy to those who put it into practice; it also asks for commitment, fatigue, courage, training. It is not possible to build peace without sacrifice.

Take courage then, my dear young people! Very much depends on you. Learn this art of loving, because it is a true art, a divine art, and you will see things you have never seen before. Let's take the example of the early Christians. Above all else, they knew how to love. Very well, in a short time, they had won over all the Western world known at that time. This is why one of them, Tertullian, an important person at that time, said: "We were born only yesterday and we have already spread all over the world."

Let no one surpass you then in generosity and determination.

The most beautiful thing I can wish for you is that you find happiness by beginning at once to love in this way, in your families, at school, in the neighbourhoods of your cities, and that you bring it to everyone. May many other young people and adults, touched by your love, say: "I want to live the way you do."

If you do this, if we all do this, universal brotherhood will spread, solidarity will blossom, goods will be distributed more justly, and the rainbow of peace will shine over the world, on that world which, in a few years, will be in your hands.

Thank you for your attention.

Chiara Lubich

⁵. *Dalla hindi del ramacaritamanasa, Uttara-kanda, 36:4.*