

In the months and years ahead, we should often call to mind Pope Francis' words and remember how "we have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together."

May this First of May bring with it the hope that the freedom we recover when the lockdown ends may truly be freedom in the service of others. Then our work will become what it was in God's plan right from the beginning: care for the world, starting with the people who inhabit it.

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The Imagination of Charity, La Vanguardia Newspaper (Spain), October 4, 2020

During these months when the world is being subjected to a severe test due to the pandemic, we have witnessed heroic responses from people in all sectors of society. Health personnel on all the continents have shown a spirit of sacrifice that has drawn applause from the windows of many cities. The media have published news about acts showing a deep humanity, recounting the solidarity initiatives of many people who have mobilized – and continue to do so – to offer solutions to the urgent needs that have arisen. The Church has also reacted with generosity, and several hundred priests have given their lives to bring spiritual help to the sick. Pain and suffering draw people closer together. Often many neighbors who didn't know one another well before are now united by strong bonds of friendship, because they have helped each other in moments of dire need.

At his General Audience on September 23, Pope Francis reminded us that "either we work together to overcome this crisis at all levels of society, or we will never get out of it." If we have begun by highlighting so many examples of dedication to others during the health crisis, we cannot close our eyes to the contrary. Contemporary culture, which possesses so many positive values, is at the same time marked by a serious illness, to which the Holy Father refers: individualism. If we fail to unite, if we are unable to see others as our neighbors, as persons who possess a unique value in themselves, who deserve our respect, understanding and closeness, no matter how much we

overcome the health crisis, the wounds of an individualistic, anonymous society, which ends up becoming a battlefield of selfish interests, will remain.

Work is an essential dimension of social life. The health crisis has caused a labor crisis of major proportions. The challenges ahead are many and urgent. In the current circumstances, some characteristics of work that can mitigate the negative consequences of the crisis are particularly important. I am thinking first of all of a spirit of service. Work is at the service of the common good and the good of the human person viewed in his or her integral being. The creation of new jobs, the preservation of existing ones and, above all, a change of mentality that always places the human person at the center and not merely economic logic, are an antidote to the prevailing individualism. In the words of Saint John Paul II, we need to employ “the imagination of charity.”

We all dream of a just society. The situation in many societies has changed after this long stretch of suffering for humanity. If justice means “giving to each one his or her due,” those who have the responsibility of making decisions in society need to put into practice this “imagination of charity. For, as Saint Josemaría Escrivá said, “be convinced that you will never solve the great problems of humanity with justice alone.” And he added that the dignity of the human person requires more: it requires charity, which “is like a generous overflow of justice.” Charity implies doing well the work entrusted to us, placed at the service of the needs of others, which at this time have become more pressing. To work well is to make the most of our abilities (in the family, the business, the school, in all areas of human endeavor) to show closeness to others and overcome with love the physical “social distancing” imposed by circumstances.

We are all called to exercise the “imagination of charity” in order to resolve together the challenges of this world of ours, which we want to make more human by following in the footsteps of the One who gave us the example of self-forgetfulness to the point of giving his Life for others.