

# Loving “With All Your Heart” (Deut 6:5)

## Christian Love in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

*José María Yanguas  
Professor of Moral Theology  
Pontifical University of the Holy Cross*

The thesis that moral theology has not always given the role of affectivity in Christian life its just due will probably not meet with too many objections. In fact, one frequently encounters the view that people endowed with great sensitivity, with strong emotions, are exposed to special dangers. The vehemence of certain feelings is too quickly interpreted as a lack of control over oneself. Some people view the affective sphere with certain misgivings, if not with outright suspicion and distrust, as though special snares were lying in wait for us there, or a deeper disorder reigned in our emotions than that produced by sin in our intellect and will. To what are such misgivings due?

There are probably many factors involved. On the one hand, some seem to consider the moral ideal to be a type of stoic indifference, accompanied by the careful observance of “forms,” of “good manners,” shunning any excess. Their model of moral life is governed by the maxim *ne quid nimis* “never to excess,” while striving to avoid at all costs any kind of “exaggeration.” It is an ideal of moral life that would be very hard to reconcile with a scene such as Jesus expelling the buyers and sellers from the temple (cf. *Mt* 21:12ff.).

Another concern could be the very real possibility that in a person with strong emotions the heart could invade the field proper to the intellect or will, dictating judgments about truth or error and moving the will to act.<sup>1</sup> In the face of this danger, some prefer to silence the heart, to prevent it from speaking. Feelings and affections belong to the blind world of passion, which requires not only control but constant repression, and if possible, suppression.

1. An interesting discussion of these points is found in Dietrich von Hildebrand's *The Heart: An analysis of human and divine affectivity*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1977, especially pp. 85-108. We would like to point out that when we speak of the “heart” in this article, we mean the rich inner world of each person's affectivity.

But such misgivings overlook the fact that man's perfection implies the harmonious development of all that is authentically human, and therefore depends also on the quality of his affective life. The human person is not composed only of intellect and will. One may be endowed with a privileged intellect and an iron will, but if he lacks a heart, if his heart is hard and unable to love, his personality is stunted, far removed from the image of Jesus revealed in the Gospel.

Thus we can endorse the following position: "A truly good life requires not only that a person make correct moral choices, but also that his emotions be engaged in his good actions. One should feel strongly about what is morally good or bad. One should be passionate about seeking what is right and rejecting what is wrong, feeling love or hatred, pleasure or sadness, hope or fear, etc."<sup>2</sup> The moral perfection of human actions, their full realization of the good, requires the involvement of the appropriate emotions or feelings, which are those in accord with the moral quality of the action being performed. To the rightness of judgment of the intellect, and the goodness of the act of the will, one must add, so to speak, the rightness of the person's emotional world, the typically human tonality that colors our acts and differentiates them from those of anyone else. The "concordance" of the emotion with the intentional act that motivates it and in some manner inheres in it, is in itself a true human value. It would be quite surprising if a morally upright person were to "feel" an emotion of sadness in the face of a great moral good; or if a trivial act were to evoke a more intense and deeper joy than the heroic act of someone who generously gives his life for another.

This study aims to show that love for God and neighbor reaches its fullness when it embraces human affectivity, the rich world of our feelings. Divine grace seeks to permeate every dimension of man's being, not only his intellect and will. The wide and varied world of human affectivity, which to a great extent defines and characterizes each person, is not to be suffocated or suppressed. Rather it is called to be ordered, reordered and integrated in the process of "Christification," that is, in the effort of each Christian, guided and supported by grace, to totally identify oneself with Christ.

In attempting to clarify this point, I will make use of the theological-ascetical doctrine of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. One of the keystones of his teaching is that supernatural love—charity—has a human dimension that should never be suppressed, since it is the love of a creature who is not only spirit, but body and soul in a substantial unity.

In the first section, I will try to show how Blessed Josemaría's teachings confront two grave deformations of human affectivity that can undermine authentic Christian life: sentimentalism and the ideal of stoic indifference (Part I). Next I

2. G. Abbá, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù*, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, Rome 1989, ch. IV, 19.

will discuss the doctrinal framework for his teachings on the place of the emotions in Christian life (Part II). In the final section, I will focus on Blessed Josemaría's presentation of the virtue of charity (Part III).

### I. *Sentimentalism and stoic indifference*

The Christian faith teaches that sin disrupted the harmony of creation, and particularly the inner harmony of man. When the Second Vatican Council defined sin, it spoke of it as a rupture, as the source of disorder, both within and outside of man.<sup>3</sup> As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us: "The interior harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation comprised the state called 'original justice.'"<sup>4</sup> The sin of our first parents altered this situation profoundly, so that "the harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered."<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas teaches that, through original sin, all the powers of the soul were in some way deprived of the order proper to them, by which they were naturally ordered to virtue. Human nature was left wounded.<sup>6</sup> But thanks to the waters of regeneration at Baptism, mankind is renewed in the Holy Spirit<sup>7</sup> and made into a new creature.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, some temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, among them the inclination toward evil usually called "concupiscence," a weakness in the re-established harmony. Therefore we have to constantly strive to consolidate this harmony, by God's grace and our own personal struggle.

Sentimentalism and stoic indifference are two mistaken ways of adapting to this situation. Both are equally dangerous for a Christian and can make a fully integrated emotional life very difficult to attain.

#### a) Pietistic sentimentalism

The first danger is that affectivity, and the moral life itself, can be identified with or summarily reduced to the shifting world of the feelings, overvaluing them and permitting them to invade areas proper to the intellect and will. Feelings can thus become the criterion of truth and the principal mover of the will. This can be seen in some currently fashionable ethical theories, where objective truth is reduced to a feeling and the will is weakened, losing the strength that should characterize it.

3. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 13.

4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 376.

5. *Ibid.*, no. 400.

6. Cf. *S. Th.* I-II, q. 85, a. 3, c.

7. Cf. *Tit* 3:5.

8. Cf. *II Cor* 5:17.

Very different is the ideal of Christian life found in the works of Blessed Josemaría. He reacted with great energy against what he forcefully describes as “manifestations of ineffective sentimentalism, starved of doctrine, with a surfeit of pietism,”<sup>9</sup> that is, against a Christian life not solidly based on a knowledge of the faith, reduced to a number of purely external manifestations of piety. “There is an urgent need to know the Church’s teachings, and to practice them in one’s life, in order to be able to pass them on to others and prevent souls from falling into the errors occasioned by ignorance and “pietism,” which disfigures the face of true piety with a devotion that is filled with empty feelings or superstition.”<sup>10</sup>

Giving affectivity its legitimate role in Christian life has nothing to do with stirring up momentary feelings that “move one to tears.” Nor is it a question of a superficial mawkishness or a lack of depth, a skin-deep spirituality that is not “profoundly human.”<sup>11</sup> Such superficial respect for affectivity, for feelings, is perfectly compatible with the “routine fulfillment” of one’s personal duties, “with boredom or apathy,”<sup>12</sup> with an “insipid dedication” indifferent to the ideal of animating one’s whole existence with the light of faith and the force of love.

According to Opus Dei’s founder, sentimentalism and pietism frequently go hand in hand. Both are a caricature of true Christian piety, a fraudulent “deception of God and man,”<sup>13</sup> a show of Christian life that in reality reduces true piety to the “external paraphernalia of piety,”<sup>14</sup> to an “easy enthusiasm,”<sup>15</sup> a “devotion that you can feel,”<sup>16</sup> that lacks solid doctrinal roots, and that not infrequently is accompanied by a notable lack of human qualities. It is a form of piety that fails to pay sufficient heed to human virtues, and that is often found in immature personalities lacking in humanity. Blessed Josemaría called this false piety “*beatería*” [sanctimoniousness] and described it as follows:

“False piety is a sad pseudo-spiritual caricature that generally results from a lack of doctrine and from a certain psychological defect. The logical result is that it is repellent to anyone who loves authenticity and sincerity.”<sup>17</sup>

#### b) Stoic indifference

At the other extreme, affectivity can be intentionally suffocated by a stoic morality that aims at neutralizing or suppressing the emotions. This inhuman

9. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, Four Courts, Dublin, 1974, no. 163.

10. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter*, May 31, 1943, no. 8.

11. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 165.

12. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, Scepter, London, 1981, no. 31.

13. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 167.

14. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, Scepter, London, 1988, no. 652.

15. *Furrow*, no. 298.

16. *Furrow*, no. 769.

17. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, Scepter, Princeton, 1993, no. 102.

ideal is found in those who are ashamed at having to admit the presence of emotions in their life, and who think feelings have to be uprooted if their moral life is to be pure and unblemished. In their viewpoint, feelings make Christian life overly human. Such a position has close ties to Kant's moral vision, in which any intervention by the emotions undermines the authenticity of moral actions. Duties are to be fulfilled simply because they are duties, without allowing other motives to falsify or contaminate one's behavior.

Blessed Josemaría was equally opposed to this other mistaken approach to affectivity. Christian life here loses its warmth and humanity, becoming "strait-jacketed" and rigid. Feelings constitute a danger. Love is degraded until it becomes an "official charity, something dry and soulless."<sup>18</sup> One can even come to think that "to keep a clean heart, a heart worthy of God, means not mixing it up, not contaminating it with human affection."<sup>19</sup> One runs the great risk "of becoming stiff and lifeless, like a rag doll," with a moral life as "rigid as cardboard."<sup>20</sup>

The indifference sought here is not a Christian detachment from earthly goods, which does not imply disdain for them but rather a just appreciation, affirming the absolute supremacy of God, the only Lord. Stoic indifference, in contrast, is characterized by a "cold intellect" and a "will of pure spirit."<sup>21</sup> It is found in those who only know how to live an "official" charity strangely compatible with an icy indifference expressed by artificial gestures and words seemingly written for a script. This cold-hearted indifference is really a form of "disaffection," and along with hatred, constitutes the mortal enemy of charity.<sup>22</sup>

We could characterize this type of mentality as a relic of deism. Like the 18th-century rationalists, people suffering from this disorder are incapable of conceiving of a God who is close to us, who has a name, a God who is "a Father, and very much *our* Father," as we read in a well-known point of *The Way*.<sup>23</sup> A "cold heart"<sup>24</sup> such as this is right at home in the gray, anonymous vision of God that deism offers. However, it is very different from the moments of coldness or tiredness a person might pass through,<sup>25</sup> or the "physical exhaustion" or "interior fatigue" that can rob the interior life for a time of its freshness and vigor, without any trace of true indifference. This distinction is brought out forcefully in *The Way*:

18. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 167.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, Scepter, Princeton, 1996, no. 156; *ibid.*, no. 492: "We are in love with Love. That is why our Lord doesn't want us to be dry, stiff, lifeless."

21. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 166.

22. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 166.

23. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, Scepter, New York, 1985, no. 267.

24. *Ibid.*, no. 769.

25. *The Forge*, no. 485.

“So you couldn’t care less? Don’t try to fool yourself. This very moment, if I were to ask you about persons and activities in which for God’s love you put your soul, I know that you would answer me eagerly, with the interest of one speaking of what is his own.

“It’s not true that you don’t care. It’s just that you’re not tireless, and that you need more time for yourself: time that will also be for your work, since, after all, you are the instrument.”<sup>26</sup>

Such a mentality also tends to convert Christian life into an “oppressive set of rules which leaves the soul in a state of exasperation and tension,”<sup>27</sup> with the added weight of having to control, suffocate or uproot emotions and deep feelings over which we do not really have dominion. This gives rise to a certain internal violence, a compulsive preoccupation to present an immaculate slate of services rendered, of faultless obedience.

## II. *The doctrinal framework for Blessed Josemaría’s teachings on the emotions*

### 1. The Holy Humanity of Jesus Christ

If we want to escape the mistaken extremes sketched above and restore our affectivity, the complex world of our higher emotions, to its proper place in Christian life, we have no other choice but to fix our gaze on Jesus Christ. For at the base of these errors is an ignorance of the true meaning of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word of God, the mystery of Jesus Christ our Lord as true God and true man. “There is a certain type of secularist outlook that one comes across, and also another approach which one might call ‘pietistic,’ both of which share the view that Christians somehow are not fully and entirely human. According to the former, the demands of the Gospel are such as to stifle our human qualities; whereas for the latter, human nature is so fallen that it threatens and endangers the purity of the faith. The result, either way, is the same. They both fail to grasp the full significance of Christ’s incarnation; they do not see that ‘the Word was made flesh,’ became man, ‘and dwelt amongst us’ (*Jn* 1:14).”<sup>28</sup>

Truly grasping the truth that the Son of God became flesh and dwelt among us, meant for Blessed Josemaría that the children of God, called to imitate Christ, have to be *very human and very divine*. Hence his insistence that “the price of living as Christians is not that of ceasing to be human,” and his forceful invitation not to abandon “the effort to acquire those virtues which some have even without knowing Christ.”<sup>29</sup>

26. *The Way*, no. 723.

27. *Friends of God*, no. 137.

28. *Friends of God*, no. 74.

29. *Friends of God*, no. 75.

The importance of the human virtues in Blessed Josemaría's teaching on how to live the Gospel has its roots in a deep intuition of the centrality of the mystery of the Incarnation in Christian life. As he pointed out incisively:

"Our faith brings out the full meaning of these human virtues, which no one should ever neglect. Christians should be second to none as human beings."<sup>30</sup>

The mystery of the Incarnation renders invalid any attempt at a Christian life that fails to make the baptized person "integrally human."<sup>31</sup> When we affirm Jesus' perfect humanity, we are referring to a person with intellect and will, but also with a rich world of feelings and affections. "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus,"<sup>32</sup> wrote St. Paul.

We discover this truth as soon as we open the Gospel. We immediately notice that "indifference is not coldness of heart, as the heart of Jesus was not cold."<sup>33</sup> He had "a heart of flesh like yours,"<sup>34</sup> as Blessed Josemaría highlights in numerous scenes from our Lord's life: the deep compassion he shows when he raises up the son of the widow at Naim; the cure of the paralytic; his weeping at the death of Lazarus; his concern for the multitudes who followed him and had nothing to eat; his treatment of sinners.<sup>35</sup> With quick brushstrokes Opus Dei's founder traces for us a picture of Christ's intimate world:

"The Gospels tell us that Jesus had no place to rest his head, but they also tell us that he had many good, close friends, eager to have him stay in their homes when he was in the vicinity. They tell us of his compassion for the sick, of his sorrow for those who were ignorant or in error, of his annoyance when faced with hypocrisy. Jesus weeps at the death of Lazarus, shows his anger at the money-changers who profaned the temple; his heart is touched by the sorrow of the widow at Naim."<sup>36</sup>

What is more, in these human gestures we discover the gestures of God, for Christ is God made man, perfect man: "through his human nature, he shows us what his divine nature is."<sup>37</sup> In the manifestation of love in Christ's heart we have the definitive manifestation of God's love for all men and women:

30. *Friends of God*, no. 93.

31. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 164.

32. *Phil 2:5*.

33. *The Way*, no. 769.

34. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 179.

35. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 146 and 166.

36. *Ibid.*, no. 108

37. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 109. In the homily *Finding Peace in the Heart of Christ*, we read that each incident in the Gospels "reveals not only the sincere gesture of a man who suffers when his friends suffer, but above all the immense charity of our Lord. Jesus' heart is the heart of God made flesh, the heart of Emmanuel, God with us." (*ibid.*, no. 169).

“The love of Jesus for men is an unfathomable aspect of the divine mystery, of the love of the Son for the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and the Son, encounters in the Word a human heart. Love in the depths of the Trinity is poured out on men by the love in the heart of Christ.”<sup>38</sup>

This is the real school where Blessed Josemaría, according to his own words, learned to love. And it is there that we men have to learn to free our hearts from hatred and indifference. Christ’s way of loving has to always be the model for a Christian’s love.<sup>39</sup> Only thus will our conduct remind others of Jesus and evoke his “most lovable personality.”<sup>40</sup>

## 2) The unity of the person, body and spirit, grace and nature

Blessed Josemaría makes no attempt to formulate an anthropological theory or a specific philosophy of man. The conception of man underlying his teachings is that provided by the faith and sound theology. Body and spirit, like nature and grace, are not separate realities that enter into only sporadic contact. Though distinct and unmistakable realities, they are so closely interrelated that they form a real and indivisible unity in every person. The soul informs the whole body; their substantial union affects both the spiritual and bodily worlds. For its part, grace heals, perfects and elevates human nature: the entire person, body and spirit, begins a new existence. But the act of faith is an act of the human intellect and the act of charity is an act of the will and the human heart. The seed of grace is called to permeate our entire human existence. As a drop of oil spreads over a piece of paper, so grace extends the radius of its influence, first to our intellect and will, the root and seat of freedom; then, if we do not put up resistance, it embraces our feelings, our affectivity.

Blessed Josemaría’s teaching draws the logical consequences of the vision of man presented by revelation: “In order that you might grasp this truth very clearly, I have preached on countless occasions that we do not have one heart to love God with and another with which to love men. This poor heart of ours, made of flesh, loves with an affection which is human and which, if it is united to Christ’s love, is also supernatural.”<sup>41</sup>

His awareness of the profound interpenetration of nature and grace led him to frequently tell his children in Opus Dei that only by being very human could they be very divine.<sup>42</sup> Hence we should approach God our Lord with our whole

38. *Ibid.*

39. Cf. *ibid.*, no. 166; *Friends of God*, no. 125.

40. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 122.

41. *Friends of God*, no. 229. “We have to love God with the same heart with which we love our parents, our brothers and sisters, the other members of our family, our friends” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 142).

42. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 166.



being: "our soul, our feelings and thoughts, our words and actions, our joys."<sup>43</sup>

In 1967, in a homily during Mass on the campus of the University of Navarre, he stressed this truth very forcefully:

"No! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot be like schizophrenics, if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things."<sup>44</sup>

### III. *Love of God in the teachings of Blessed Josemaría*

In the Gospels we see a scribe questioning Jesus, the young Teacher who was preaching with such singular authority, about the first and greatest commandment of the Law (cf. *Mk* 12:28ff). This question was of greater transcendence than it might at first seem, since it was asking what holds first place in God's will.<sup>45</sup> Jesus answers by first citing words from *Deut* 6:4-5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." Profession of faith in the one God, acknowledging him as the only Lord reigning over us, has as its immediate consequence the duty to love him. The subject of this duty is the entire person: all that one is and has, one's entire being and possessions.<sup>46</sup>

#### a) Charity as the principal demand of holiness

In perfect accord with Christian tradition, Blessed Josemaría found the key to sanctity, the essence of Christian life, in identification with Christ: "To be holy is to be a good Christian, to resemble Christ. The more closely a person resembles Christ, the more Christian he is, the more he belongs to Christ, the holier he is."<sup>47</sup> Our identification with Christ is attained above all by the grace received in the sacraments. But it requires, in addition, correspondence to grace, the effort to know and love our Lord, to reproduce his very sentiments, following the example of St. Paul (*Gal* 2:20).

43. *Ibid.*, no. 164.

44. *Conversations*, no. 114.

45. Cf. R. Pesch, *Il Vangelo di Marco*, II, Paideia, Brescia 1982, pp. 358-359.

46. According to B. Gerhardsson, the abundant rabbinical literature on *Deut* 6:5 is practically unanimous in stressing that the three parts of the commandment signify "the total involvement of the whole man." The expression "with all your heart" signifies the undivided heart with which we ought to love God, while resisting and "disciplining" any corner of our heart that might separate us from him. The words "with all your soul" signifies our duty to love God even to the point of suffering and death. Finally, since for some people the goods that they possess are even more precious than life itself, the clause "with all your might" is added, which means, with all the goods that you possess (cf. *The Shema in the New Testament*, Novapress, Lund 1996, pp. 19-20, 28).

47. *The Forge*, no. 10.

Charity, love of God and neighbor, thus plays a decisive role in Christian life. Blessed Josemaría forcefully stressed the truth that Christian life is built on charity: “We mature as children of God by practicing the new commandment.”<sup>48</sup> The way traced out by Jesus, the path of death and resurrection that must be traversed by anyone who wants to follow him closely, “can be summed up in one word: love.”<sup>49</sup> The realization that holiness is not the privilege of just a few, that the vocation to the fullness of Christian life is truly universal, could lead us to become discouraged when we confront our own weakness. But this pitfall can be side-stepped by recalling that the first and principal demand of holiness consists in loving, which is “so much in keeping with our nature.”<sup>50</sup>

The originality of Blessed Josemaría’s teaching on the virtue of charity in seen in his presentation of this virtue. “My God, I love you, but... oh, teach me to love!”<sup>51</sup> he prayed, which later became a point in *The Way*. How did our Lord respond to such a prayer? What special tones does charity take on in the teachings and life of Blessed Josemaría?

#### b) Supernatural charity and human love

The virtue of charity in its two-fold aspect, love of God and love of neighbor, is the love of a human heart that has been elevated and transformed by grace, but still a human heart. Just as we describe Jesus’ actions as “theandric,” as both human and divine, because the one who carries them out is at the same time true God and true man, so in the case of the Christian elevated to the order of grace and divinized, “Christified,” his or her actions are also in a certain sense both human and divine. It is not a question of our human actions receiving a kind of external varnish that ennobles them, a patina of grace external to the action itself. Rather the subject of these actions becomes a new man, who has been transformed in the depths of his being and who therefore gives origin to acts that are radically new, although they may not seem so exteriorly. This is one of the “constants” in the founder of Opus Dei’s preaching.

“This poor heart of ours, made of flesh, loves with an affection which is human and which, if it is united to Christ’s love, is also supernatural. This, and no other, is the charity we have to cultivate in our souls, a charity which will lead us to discover in others the image of our Lord.”<sup>52</sup>

48. *Friends of God*, no. 230.

49. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 158. “If you want to achieve holiness—in spite of your personal shortcomings and miseries, which will last as long as you live—you must make an effort, with God’s grace, to practice charity, which is the fullness of the law and the bond of perfection” (*Conversations*, no. 62). “The main thing we are asked to do, which is so much in keeping with our nature, is to Love” (*Friends of God*, no. 6). Blessed Josemaría habitually wrote this word with a capital letter, surely wanting to indicate that the love of a Christian, when it is authentic, is a participation in God’s Love.

50. *Ibid.*, no. 6.

51. *The Way*, no. 423.

52. *Friends of God*, no. 229.

## c) Charity and “affection”

Thus we can understand why Blessed Josemaría gives such great importance to the human dimension of the theological, and in a certain sense divine, virtue of charity. Perhaps the most frequent, and most beautiful, example is his description of charity as “affection”: charity is human affection elevated to the supernatural order. As we just read in the text cited above, human affection, when united to Christ’s love, is also supernatural. And as he clearly states elsewhere:

“This *dilectio*, this charity, becomes even more affectionate when its object is our brothers in the faith and particularly those who, by God’s will, work close beside us. Without this affection, which is a noble and pure human love directed toward God and based on him, there would be no charity.”<sup>53</sup>

Christian love for one’s neighbor is not a vague sentiment, nor mere camaraderie or philanthropy. Nor can it be reduced to one of its more dangerous falsifications either, that of an “official charity, something dry and soulless,” far removed from “the true charity of Jesus Christ, which involves affection and human warmth.”<sup>54</sup> The bad repute that the term “charity” has for some people may in good part be due to this fraudulent conception that robs charity of its vital element, affection. Blessed Josemaría reacted strongly against this view, calling it a “caricature” or even an “aberration.” Employing a graphic example to bring this point home, he wrote:

“This distortion of charity was well expressed once by a sick woman when she commented with sad resignation, ‘Yes, they treat me with “charity” here, but my mother used to look after me with affection.’ A love that springs from the Heart of Christ could never countenance such distinctions.”<sup>55</sup>

It is precisely from God, from God’s very Love, that charity is born, with a love that is filled with tenderness, affection, warmth.<sup>56</sup> If this affection does not exist, if one fails to “put one’s heart”<sup>57</sup> into human relationships, into serving the others, as Blessed Josemaría liked to say, one can’t speak of true charity. Thus Opus Dei’s founder considered it a misfortune “not to have a heart,” to be unable to “love with tenderness.”<sup>58</sup>

53. *Friends of God*, no. 231. Cf. *ibid.*, nos 266, 290, 291, 108, 162; *The Forge*, nos. 863, 877; *Furrow*, nos. 803, 821, 859.

54. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 167.

55. *Friends of God*, no. 229. “We are now convinced that charity has nothing whatever in common with the caricature that sometimes has been made of this central virtue of the Christian life” (*ibid.*, no. 236).

56. Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 227, 233.

57. *Friends of God*, no. 228. cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 165.

58. *Friends of God*, no. 183.

d) “Doesn’t it move you?”

Blessed Josemaría frequently invited those listening to him to let themselves be “moved” by the truths of faith and Gospel scenes, to put their mind, heart and emotions, their whole being, into grasping and contemplating them. To the extent that God’s grace transforms the entire person and reestablishes the order and unity broken by sin, it necessarily encompasses the intellect, will and feelings. For it would not be a measure of moral perfection, but quite the opposite, if the knowledge of the good were not accompanied by the desire to realize it, and by the collaboration of the heart that delights in the good.

That is why Blessed Josemaría often said that he felt “moved” or “stirred” by an action of our Lord, or by an episode in his life, and he challenged those listening to him with questions such as: “Aren’t you moved by this burning love?”<sup>59</sup> To “move” here means “to touch the soul,” “to enkindle,”<sup>60</sup> to penetrate to the deepest recesses of the heart, which is the result of opening oneself to the light of a truth and the beauty of a value in all its richness.

Together with those expressions, Blessed Josemaría used others that conveyed a similar meaning: “How my heart is won over,” he would say for example, “by the image of Christ.” “Doesn’t this way Jesus has of doing things make us fall in love with him?”<sup>61</sup>

For if charity is at the center of Christian life, the first step in this new life is to “fall in love,” and its entire meaning is an “affirmation of love.”<sup>62</sup> Everything in our life should be impregnated with a love that is also, and at the same time, human affection: prayer,<sup>63</sup> apostolate,<sup>64</sup> perseverance.<sup>65</sup> A love that “inebriates,”<sup>66</sup> that is “passionate,”<sup>67</sup> that gives rise to “madness” or “craziness,”<sup>68</sup> to “enthusiasm.”<sup>69</sup>

59. Cf. *Friends of God*, nos. 1, 23, 72, 125, 131, 224, 253; *The Forge*, nos. 243, 268, 1028; *Furrow*, nos. 234, 481.

60. *Friends of God*, no. 112.

61. Cf. *Friends of God*, nos. 1, 56, 102.

62. *Furrow*, no. 94; *The Forge*, nos. 492, 495, 547, 737.

63. Cf. *The Forge*, nos. 432, 495. “I have always understood Christian prayer as being a loving conversation with Jesus, which shouldn’t be interrupted even in the moments when we are physically far from the Tabernacle, because our whole life is a serenade of human love for our God... and we can love always” (*The Forge*, no. 435).

64. Cf. *The Forge*, nos. 31, 375, 985.

65. “And what is the secret of perseverance? Love. Fall in Love, and you will not leave Him” (*The Way*, no. 999).

66. “O Jesus, strengthen our souls, open out the way for us, and, above all, intoxicate us with your Love. Make us into blazing fires to enkindle the earth with the heavenly fire you brought us” (*The Forge*, no. 31).

67. Cf. *Friends of God*, nos. 35, 137.

68. *Furrow*, no. 799; *The Way*, nos. 402, 438, 808, 834, 910, 916; *The Forge*, nos. 12, 57, 210, 825, 879; “Self-giving is the first step along the road of sacrifice, joy, love, union with God. And thus, a whole life is filled with a holy madness which makes us encounter happiness where human logic would only see denial, suffering, pain” (*Furrow*, no. 2).

69. “To be warmed up, the tepid need to be surrounded by the fire of enthusiasm. Many could say to us: ‘There is no point in your lamenting my situation. Teach me how to get out of this condition which saddens you so much’” (*Furrow*, no. 736).

## e) Christian charity: neither insensitivity nor sentimentalism

In the teaching of Blessed Josemaría, charity, the love of God, is thus something far removed from insensitivity, from heartlessness or hardness of heart. It is closely allied to an authentic piety “that springs from divine filiation,” the virtue that governs human relations within the great family of the children of God and that constitutes, as it were, the core and essence of love. Divine filiation is “a profound attitude of the soul which eventually permeates one’s entire existence. It is there in every thought, every desire, every affection.”<sup>70</sup>

This is the virtue that allows the true face—warm, human, “cordial”—of Christianity to show forth. Each one feels gently moved to live this virtue, which provides a marvelous path of human and supernatural progress, thus uniting the human and divine dimensions of Christian perfection.

Charity, Christian piety, is “a living reality” that results in deeds of dedication and the fulfillment of God’s will.<sup>71</sup> It has nothing to do with empty gestures not backed up by commitment, with a sentimentality centered on oneself, the fruit of concupiscence, which frequently ends up in pathological emotional deformations. Authentic Christian love is always and necessarily understanding, affection, compassion; it is moved by injustice and tries to alleviate it;<sup>72</sup> it urges one to work for God.<sup>73</sup> “To love means to renew our dedication every day, with loving deeds of service.”<sup>74</sup>

## f) Purification of the heart

Our feelings stand in need of a true purification. Giving affectivity its proper role in moral life does not mean ignoring the disorder that sin has introduced in this area as well. Therefore, with the realism provided by faith and by his own personal experience with souls, Blessed Josemaría stated:

“True love of God, and consequently purity of life, is as far removed from sensuality as it is from insensitivity, and as far from sentimentality as it is from heartlessness or hardheartedness.”<sup>75</sup> Here one finds references to the “weight of the passions” in their negative sense.<sup>76</sup> Hence the need to “purify” the affections, to burn out their dross,<sup>77</sup> to ensure that the “squandering of tenderness”<sup>78</sup> does not

70. *Friends of God*, no. 146.

71. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 163.

72. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 167.

73. Cf. *Friends of God*, no. 143.

74. *Friends of God*, no. 31. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 172, 182.

75. *Friends of God*, no. 183.

76. *Ibid.*, no. 194; *Furrow*, no. 851; *The Forge*, nos. 204, 315, 414.

77. *Furrow*, no. 828.

78. *The Way*, no. 161.

introduce less legitimate feelings that could be “attachments” of the heart,<sup>79</sup> affections that “bind you to earth,”<sup>80</sup> and that one doesn’t want to cut. Hence also the need to struggle because affection has become a “temptation,” and one’s heart does not correspond to “one’s head.”<sup>81</sup> And therefore he prayed:

“I don’t ask you to take away my feelings, Lord, because I can use them to serve you with: but I ask you to put them through the crucible,”<sup>82</sup> the crucible of the open heart of Christ.<sup>83</sup>

79. *The Forge*, no. 356.

80. *The Way*, no. 786.

81. Cf. *Furrow*, nos. 166, 174; *The Way*, nos. 726, 727.

82. *The Forge*, no. 750.

83. Cf. *The Forge*, nos. 98, 204, 872. “If the love of God is put into friendships, they are cleansed, reinforced and spiritualized, because all the dross, all the selfish points of view and excessively worldly considerations are burned away. Never forget that the love of God puts our affections in order, and purifies them without diminishing them” (*Furrow*, no. 828).