

creates the environment where life is engendered, the home that welcomes lovingly the new being, that fosters one's maturing as a person.

The world of work is enriched by charity. Carrying out one's profession in accord with the Gospel precept means carrying it out with love, with the desire to serve, putting one's heart into it, thinking about the others. Sanctifying one's work means converting it into an expression of love for God and for all men and women, imbuing it with justice and charity.

The landscape of the Church is adorned by many light-filled sites where Christians are striving to work and serve silently out of love. One needs only to consider Africa, the continent most in need of everyone's assistance. There the Church makes manifest its love, also "as an ecclesial act," in the words of Benedict XVI, as an essential part of its mission. Charity spurs one to be magnanimous, to not remain indifferent when faced with the needs of others.

The Holy Father sums up the expansive process of charity: "Love is 'divine' because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a 'we' which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28)" (no. 18). Here we can find the explanation for the perennial youthfulness of the Church.

Charity is also the key to the "new evangelization." The mission of spreading the Gospel involves helping many people to experience Christian charity, opening their intellects to the light of faith through

the language of love, the universal idiom that we all understand. For faith, as St. Paul writes, works through charity.

As St. Josemaría Escrivá said so clearly: "the principle apostolate that we Christians need to carry out in the world, the best testimony of our faith, is helping to foster within the Church an atmosphere of authentic charity."

Christ at the Last Supper called his precept of charity "new." "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you." It was new then and it continues being so now, for everyone, two thousand years later. If we read and meditate on the new encyclical with the healthy curiosity of one who knows he is going to discover something new, with our intellect and heart wide open, we will discover the permanent newness of this marvelous revelation: God is love, which He longs to give to all men and women.

Thus Benedict XVI's desire will be fulfilled: that this encyclical "may illumine and assist our Christian life."

Madrid March 8, 2006

*"The world needs a woman's gifts,"
in the newspaper ABC, Madrid*

International Women's Day (March 8) points to the past, with its unfinished efforts to overcome discrimination against women, and looks to the future, encouraging us

to contemplate the benefits of having women fully integrated into every sector of society.

The first step must be to recognize the equal dignity of men and women. From the very beginning of Sacred Scripture, in the words of Genesis, we see that God created man and woman as two ways of being a person, two expressions of a shared humanity. A woman is the image of God, neither more nor less than a man, and both are called to identification with Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man.

These essential truths of our Christian faith enable us to grasp the harm that is caused by ill-treatment of any human being, whether man or woman. Mistreatment can involve violence, or other more subtle methods. Women's bodies are brutally commercialized, presenting women as things rather than persons. They are informed, in a friendly but insidious way, that pregnancy is incompatible with continued employment. It would not be hard to find many other examples showing the need to continue opposing discrimination.

In Genesis, we also discover a second fundamental point: diversity. In the family, for example, the father and mother carry out different roles, equally necessary but not interchangeable. Their responsibility is the same, but their way of contributing differs.

We often hear that one of the family's most acute problems today is a crisis of fatherhood. A man must neither see himself as a "second

mother," nor neglect his responsibilities at home. Rather he has to learn how to be a father. Something similar can be said about society as a whole, where each must find one's proper place. The man has the right to develop as a man; the woman, as a woman—without ever giving rise to mimicries that produce a crisis of identity, psychological complexes and social problems of great consequence.

The principle of equality can be exaggerated and lose its equilibrium, when one confuses equality (of dignity, of rights, and of opportunity) with a dissolving of diversity. If women become too similar to men, or men to women, they become disoriented and forget how to relate to one another. But the difference between them can also be exaggerated—and, in fact, has often been exaggerated—when one uses this diversity as grounds for justifying discrimination.

We can consider here the Christian virtue of charity, which Benedict XVI has chosen to place at the beginning and center of his pontificate. Charity helps to harmonize equality and diversity and invites one to a shared effort, for it orders one's relationship with God and with other men and women. Charity in the Church fosters communion, respect, understanding, openness to diversity, mutual assistance, and service.

In the first words of Genesis we also read that God, in his goodness, entrusted the world to men and women. We have received the joint mission of caring for the world and

enabling it to make progress. This challenging project helps to put the question of the relationship between the sexes in its proper place. We are not confronting a narrow and problematic scenario, but rather an open and positive one. With equal responsibility, with contributions suited to each one's talents, we have to work together for a better society. Masculine and feminine qualities are mutually needed to carry out this joint task. For the common good—common to all, both men and women—can be achieved only through a joint effort. Thus discrimination against women is not only an offense against her person; it also harms men, and is a serious problem for the world.

A true desire to care for the world and help it progress requires abandoning any Manichean outlook and eagerness for conflict. What is needed is an attitude of dialogue, cooperation, consideration, and sensitivity. Men have to make greater demands on themselves: striving to listen, to understand, to be patient, to pay attention to persons. And women also need to strive to understand, to practice patience, to undertake constructive dialogue, and employ their rich intuition.

In his *Letter to Women*, Pope John Paul II pointed out that the contribution of women is indispensable for “the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling,” as well as for “the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity.” A woman's gifts, with her innate aptitude for understanding and caring for others, must bear fruit in the

family and in all of society.

St. Josemaría Escrivá used to say that “in God's eyes, no occupation is in itself great or small. Everything acquires the value of the Love with which it is carried out.” When we discover that what is important is the person, discriminations of every sort will find their days numbered. Christian faith can be a true leaven for cultural change in this area if women and men of faith learn how to incarnate their faith in their daily lives.

Rome March 25, 2006

On the first anniversary of the death of John Paul II

Pope John Paul II frequently insisted that man attains his full development in giving, in giving oneself to God and to others. A year after his death, I find myself dwelling on this thought: John Paul II gave himself to God, to the Church, not only with generosity, but with real sacrifice. He sought Christ in order to love him and bring him to souls.

The difference between that Pope filled with physical strength who took the helm of the Church in 1978, and John Paul II in his final years, bent beneath the weight of fatigue and sickness, is not simply a measure of the passage of time. It also shows the totality of his self-giving. He spent all his energies in serving God and mankind.