

That true happiness that we all yearn for will only be attained in fullness in eternal life, but it is won and begins here on earth when we live in friendship with God. As St. Augustine said so forcefully: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” I’ll also add that only those who feel a need for salvation can feel a need for Jesus. Is there anyone today who thinks he has no need to cleanse anything in his heart, in his life, in his past, in his present? We Christians should be the understanding face of Christ for others. If our friends, and all mankind, find in us a fraternal face, we can communicate to them the Church’s marvelous message: “Do not be afraid to open your doors to Christ” (John Paul II). “Have the magnanimity to risk your life on Christ” (Benedict XVI). The path of happiness is always a path of generosity. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, a person “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24).

Finally, we would like to ask you something on a more personal note: Is there any possibility that you might visit us during the course of this Year of Faith?

I would be delighted to visit the University and chat with each and every one of you, to share your joys and sorrows, your challenges and plans. I place this desire in God’s hands.

Address at the Tenth Anniversary of Harambee, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 5, 2012)

Dear friends of Harambee-Africa,

The tenth anniversary of your association leads us directly to the ever-present memory of St. Josemaría’s canonization. Permit me, ten years on from that date, to begin with an act of thanksgiving to God for this exemplary shepherd. By his heroic response to the spiritual and human gifts he received from God, he made many things happen. One of them is the way so many thousands of people from all over the world who feel the need to help the men and women in developing countries, are able to do so effectively through your organization.

I also want to thank God personally for the way devotion to St. Josemaría has spread around the world, and for all the help he has given from Heaven over these ten years, ever since the ceremony of his canonization, when our much-loved Pope John Paul II called St. Josemaría “the patron saint of ordinary life.”

St. Josemaría was a big-hearted priest, and that comes through in everything he wrote, in his preaching, and also in the projects for helping the needy that he inspired during

his lifetime. His teaching is still an active source of inspiration all over the world today, especially in Africa, which is the focus of attention for this conference.

I think that St. Josemaría's great capacity to love explains why in so many places in the world, there are churches, chapels, buildings, streets and squares named after him. Congresses and studies have been devoted to his message about seeking God in life's ordinary occupations, as well as books, films and documentaries. People have come to the Church as a result of getting to know St. Josemaría and his teachings. Every June 26, when the Church celebrates his liturgical memorial, we receive news of thousands of Masses said in every quarter of the globe. At these Masses, women and men of every nationality and every walk of life ask God, through St. Josemaría's intercession, that "we may, through our daily work, be formed in the likeness of Jesus your Son and serve the work of redemption with burning love."¹

The Primacy of love

To get down to the topic for this session, St. Josemaría preached that "A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ's heart."²

When I speak of the human heart

I am not just talking about feelings, still less about the physical organ. As St. Josemaría often said, "When we speak of a person's heart, we refer not just to his sentiments, but to the whole person in his loving dealings with others. In order to help us understand divine things, Scripture uses the expression "heart" in its full human meaning, as the summary and source, expression and ultimate basis, of one's thoughts, words, and actions. A man is worth what his heart is worth."³

As Pope Benedict reminded us at the beginning of his first Encyclical, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him' (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny."⁴

Charity, true love, is at the center not just of Christian life but of human life as such. Indeed, "From the fact that God is Love, and that man is made in God's image, we can understand the profound identity of the human person: our vocation to love. Man is made to love; his life finds its fulfillment only if it is lived in love."⁵ As a result, "Man. . . . remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does

1. Mass of St. Josemaría Escrivá, June 26, Collect.

2. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 167.

3. *Christ is Passing By*, 164.

4. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

5. Pope Benedict XVI, Message to 10th International Youth Forum, March 24, 2010).6. V.

not participate intimately in it.”⁶ And the other way round: as human beings, the more we grow in love and in the rightly-ordered gift of ourselves, the more we are revealed to ourselves and the more we develop as people. Then we are motivated by the desire to give, freely, instead of being stuck with the craving to get more and more.

As St. Josemaría taught, “Man’s great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral.”⁷ So each individual should not limit themselves to doing things. Our actions are fully in accordance with our nature only when the things we do are born of love, show love, and are aimed at love.⁸ We can go still further, and stress, in the Holy Father’s words, that “It is therefore the vocation to love that makes the human person an authentic image of God: man and woman come to resemble God to the extent that they become loving people.”⁹ Charity, service, self-giving to our neighbor—these things are expressions of our basic, innate calling as human beings, who develop by loving and being loved. That, then, is what we must take as our constant, overriding rule of behavior—the practice of all the other virtues must be vivified by charity, which is the bond of perfection. Indeed, St. Josemaría tells us that “By living charity—Love—you live all the human and supernatural

virtues demanded of a Christian. These virtues form a unity and cannot be reduced to a mere list. You cannot have charity without justice, solidarity, family and social responsibility, poverty, joy, chastity, friendship...”¹⁰

Charity, teaches the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, is a “force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today’s world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations, legal systems from within.”

This truth applies to all mankind, and especially to Jesus’ disciples. Let’s recall that when a doctor of the law asked him which was the first commandment, our Lord did not limit himself to saying that loving God was the greatest and first commandment. He added the need to love our neighbor as a commandment that was included in the first (Matthew 22:35-39). He made it clear that it is not possible to love God without loving our neighbor, since genuine love for God has to include loving what God loves, i.e. this world and the people in it. Quoting an idea of St. Maximus the Confessor, Benedict XVI teaches that “the love of God is revealed in responsibility for others.”¹¹ And he shows that “those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them.”¹²

6. See Blessed John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 10

7. See St. Josemaría, “Commitment to the Truth,” no. 8 (*Discursos sobre la Universidad*).

8. See *Christ is Passing By*, 48.

9. Benedict XVI, speech to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, June 6, 2005.

10. St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, 62.

11. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, 28.

12. *Deus Caritas Est*, 42.

Equally, it must be stressed that our love for our neighbor is not real love unless we love God. “United to Christ in his consecration to the Father, we are seized by his compassion for the multitudes who cry out for justice and solidarity, and like the Good Samaritan in the parable, [we are] committed to providing concrete and generous responses.”¹³ (Benedict XVI, Speech to social pastoral care organizations, Fatima, Portugal, May 13, 2010). Love is demanding and it involves self-giving, which becomes possible thanks to Christ’s full, loving gift of himself to all; and he asks us and encourages us to treat people as he has done (John 13:34; 15:12). “Only if we try to understand the mystery of God’s love—a love which went as far as death—will we be able to give ourselves totally to others and not let ourselves be overcome by difficulties or indifference.”¹⁴ Although in practice genuine, cheerful charity towards our neighbor is more immediate and gives proof of our love for God, we obviously cannot forget that the energy for real service to others comes from supernatural charity. Self-giving and sincere unity with others are possible “as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him — a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God’s love to become in their turn a fountain from which ‘flow rivers of living water’ (Jn 7:38).”¹⁵

This interaction between love for God and love for our neighbor, which has been taught and practiced from the beginnings of Christianity, has been underlined in the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. “If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be ‘devout’ and to perform my ‘religious duties’, then my relationship with God will also grow arid.”¹⁶

Putting our hearts into social action

The fact that people’s actions become fully human when they are the result of love is something that “also applies in the social sphere; Christians must be deeply convinced witnesses of this, and they are to show [it] by their lives.”¹⁷ Therefore charity, service, must be present and must imbue all human relations. “It is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones),” says the Pope.¹⁸ We should be convinced, and should try and convince others, that society is not built primarily on contractual and utilitarian relationships, but on the more deeply human links, starting with love. Accordingly, this principle is the first criterion for the development of society, and

13. Benedict XVI, Speech to social pastoral care organizations, Fatima, Portugal, 13 May 2010.

14. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 98.

15. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 42.

16. *Deus Caritas Est*, 18.

17. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 580.

18. *Caritas in Veritate*, 2.

should be considered as the soul of the whole social order.¹⁹ Charity, teaches the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, is a “force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today’s world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations, legal systems from within. In this perspective love takes on the characteristic style of social and political charity: ‘Social charity makes us love the common good,’ it makes us effectively seek the good of all people, considered not only as individuals or private persons but also in the social dimension that unites them.”²⁰

From this comes the requirement that affects every aspect of society, and, in the first place, Christians and the whole community of the Church itself. We are to do all we can to love our neighbor with deeds and in truth; not merely our close relations such as our family, but to love with a love that embraces even those furthest from us, in a correctly-ordered way. If we want to bring about a more human society, one that is more worthy of the dignity of the human person, it is necessary to give due importance to social charity, so that it inspires, purifies and raises all human, political and social connections. In short, the first criterion for social progress is the commandment of love. Jesus Christ “revealed to us that ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8) and at the same time taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human per-

fection and hence of the world’s transformation. . . . He cautions [us] at the same time that this charity is not something to be reserved for important matters, but must be pursued chiefly in the ordinary circumstances of life.”²¹ Charity must imbue all social structures from within. This is why the Holy Father has summed up the whole function of the social doctrine of the Church as “*caritas in verità in re sociali*: the proclamation of the truth of Christ’s love in society.”²²

Some consequences

There are all sorts of practical consequences from all of this, both for the whole Church and for each individual believer. Let’s look at a few.

The need to announce that God is love shows that in the social sphere too, the effort to practice charity cannot be seen as something good but secondary. It is a substantial part of the mission of the Church and each Christian. Therefore organized charity on the part of the Church began when the Church herself began, has accompanied her throughout her life, under changing forms, and will continue to do so until the end of time. St. Josemaría said, “It is easy to understand the impatience, anxiety and uneasiness of [faithful Christians who want to] fight the personal and social injustice which the human heart can create. So many centuries of men living side by side and

19. See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 32.

20. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 207.

21. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.

22. *Caritas in Veritate*, 5.

still so much hate, so much destruction, so much fanaticism stored up in eyes that do not want to see and in hearts that do not want to love! The good things of the earth, monopolized by a handful of people; the culture of the world, confined to cliques. And, on the outside, hunger for bread and education. Human lives—holy, because they come from God—treated as mere things, as statistics. I understand and share this impatience. It stirs me to look at Christ, who is continually inviting us to put his new commandment of love into practice.”²³

Work for everyone

Promoting social charity is work for everyone, as a task that is needed at the individual level, at the level of associations, and at the level of the whole Church. The Second Vatican Council laid clear stress on this: “Let everyone consider it his sacred obligation to esteem and observe social necessities as belonging to the primary duties of modern man. . . . The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation.”²⁴ Accordingly, St. Josemaría taught that “While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind. Otherwise their Christianity will not be the word and life of

Jesus; it will be a fraud, a deception of God and man.”²⁵

Charity, which is love, should include the whole person in his or her integrity, body and soul. “Men need earthly bread to sustain them in their lives on earth; they also need bread from heaven to enlighten their minds and inflame their hearts.”²⁶ Dire poverty demands the urgent gift of material help, but we must never forget spiritual help as well: charity ought in some way to bring God’s love before people’s eyes. This means that Christian charitable work should have a specific characteristic, which cannot be lost or diluted in merely human philanthropy—which is a good thing, but not enough to fulfill the mission Christ has entrusted to us. In addition, we need to underline the fact that the strength of all charitable activity depends on the strength of our faith and our love for God. As Benedict XVI says, “Only on the basis of a daily commitment to accept and to live fully the love of God can one promote the dignity of each and every human being. . . . Without a transcendent foundation, without a reference to God the Creator, without an appreciation of our eternal destiny, we risk falling prey to harmful ideologies.”²⁷

At the same time, so as not to end up with nothing but good intentions, it has to be recognized that social charity has to be organized and institutionalized. “In so many

23. *Christ is Passing By*, 111.

24. *Gaudium et Spes*, 30 and 43.

25. *Christ is Passing By*, 167.

26. *Christ is Passing By*, 49.

27. Speech to participants in the General Assembly of *Caritas Internationalis*, May 27, 2011

aspects the neighbor to be loved is found 'in society'. . . . To love him on the social level means, depending on the situations, to make use of social mediations to improve his life or to remove social factors that cause his indigence. It is undoubtedly an act of love, the work of mercy by which one responds here and now to a real and impelling need of one's neighbor, but it is an equally indispensable act of love to strive to organize and structure society so that one's neighbor will not find himself in poverty, above all when this becomes a situation within which an immense number of people and entire populations must struggle"²⁸

It must be stressed that although social structures are necessary, their aim is not to be a substitute for love between people, because human dignity is to be measured only by love, and not by what is just or reasonable. "Be convinced that justice alone is never enough to solve the great problems of mankind. When justice alone is done, don't be surprised if people are hurt. The dignity of man, who is a son of God, requires much more. Charity must penetrate and accompany justice because it sweetens and deifies everything: 'God is love' (1 John 4:16). Our motive in everything we do should be the Love of God, which makes it easier for us to love our neighbor and which purifies and raises all earthly loves onto a higher level"²⁹ What's more, "the claim that

just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man"³⁰ Institutions and laws on their own are not enough to build a society that is worthy of humanity; personal charity is also needed as the solid basis for the life of society.

What has been said so far applies to any social situation, but it is particularly important in relation to the poorest sectors of society. Preferential love for the poor has to be activated at the social and global level, by furthering development in ways that overcome religious, racial, ideological and territorial boundaries. St. Josemaría emphasized that "Opus Dei [must be present] wherever there is poverty, unemployment, sadness, and suffering, to teach people about bearing suffering with joy, to end poverty, to end unemployment (because we train people for jobs), and to bring Christ into every person's life, if they want us to, because we are all for freedom."³¹ And on another occasion he said, "There is only one race, the race of the children of God. There is only one color, the color of the children of God. And there is only one language, the language which speaks to the heart and to the mind, without the noise of words, making us know God and love one another."³²

There is even a pragmatic reason for helping others in their develop-

28. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 208.

29. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 172.

30. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 28 b.

31. October 1, 1967; quoted in *Una mirada hacia el futuro desde el corazón de Vallejas*, Madrid 1998, p. 135.

32. *Christ is Passing By*, 106.

ment, since any given human group can only achieve its own development by working for the development of others. Blessed John Paul II recalled that “Collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all, and must be shared by the four parts of the world. . . . If, on the contrary, people try to achieve it in only one part, or in only one world, they do so at the expense of the others; and, precisely because the others are ignored, their own development becomes exaggerated and misdirected.”³³ But as well as this pragmatic reason, cooperation in development, especially that of the poorest, is imperative from the ethical and Christian standpoints, and starts by renouncing every kind of selfishness. This union of human and divine is central to St. Josemaría’s message. He said that the lives of Opus Dei faithful involve “a service whose goals are exclusively supernatural, because Opus Dei is not and never will be—could never be—a worldly instrument. But at the same time, it is a human service, because all that you are doing is trying to achieve Christian perfection in the world, cleanly, with your absolutely free and responsible actions in all fields of civic life. An unselfish service, which does not degrade you but educates you, enlarges your hearts, making them Roman in the best and highest sense of the word, and leads you to seek the honor and good of people in every country, so

that day by day there may be fewer poor people, fewer uneducated people, fewer souls without faith, fewer people in despair, fewer wars, less insecurity, more charity and more peace.”³⁴

As with every other aspect of Christian life, all that has been said on this subject cannot be reduced to a nice-sounding theory to be preached about. It should be a spur to effective action for the integral development of all without excluding anyone.³⁵ Such development must be considered as an inescapable duty, one that demands a well-planned, responsible and properly regulated effort that we are all called to carry out, in accordance with our place in the Church and civil society.³⁶ To achieve our goal perhaps we need to work for changes in the way people live, the structures of power that govern society, the models of production and consumption, and order them according to a correct understanding of the common good of the whole of mankind.³⁷

The effort to live like that, aiming to help our fellow-men, is something that none of us should try to avoid. But as well as practicing it ourselves it is equally essential to pass it on to others, i.e. to help them, in St. Josemaría’s words, “not to be selfish and to spend some of their time generously in the service of other less fortunate people, doing

33. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 32.

34. Letter dated April 31, 1943, 1.

35. See Bl. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 57.

36. See. Bl. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42-45.

37. See. Bl. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 58.

38. *Conversations*, 111.

jobs suited to their age, in which they can show in a practical way, a human and supernatural concern for their fellow men.”³⁸

As Harambee is directed to the world of Africa, I would like to quote some words of Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* of November 19 last year: “Human consciences are challenged by the grave injustices existing in our world as a whole and within Africa in particular. . . . If justice is to prevail in all areas of life, private and public, economic and social, it needs to be sustained by subsidiarity and solidarity, and still more, to be inspired by charity.”³⁹

Harambee came into being in response to St. Josemaría’s canonization. As I wish you a happy anniversary today, I would like to thank you for your work and assure you that I am praying for many more people to join in your shared effort to support people and entities in Africa, who, in their turn, wish to be the builders and agents of their own development. Together with you I thank God for the many educational projects that have already been set up in sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade, and for the many activities you have promoted in the rest of the world. One of your aims is to spread an image of Africa that is very different from the stereotype. In your continent, it is true that there are many injustices that no one can ignore, but Africa is also a land of spiritual values that are of the greatest importance in our time.

The day after tomorrow, the Thirteenth Assembly of the Synod of

Bishops opens, with the theme “The new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian Faith.” I invite you all to pray for this intention. On the tenth anniversary of St. Josemaría’s canonization we can ask him to intercede for the Synod, so that this ecclesial Assembly may remind the world that holiness is not just a goal for the privileged few, but, as the Second Vatican Council confirmed, it is an invitation to everyone, within the reach of every man and woman of good will. Let’s pray that this Synod, and the Year of Faith that is about to begin, may help to enlarge many people’s hearts “in the measure of the Heart of Christ.” May those hearts then stir up other conversions, and be what drives transformations on the social level in accordance with human dignity and our destiny in God’s glory, in Africa and throughout the world.

Interview Granted to *Avvenire*, Italy (October 6, 2012)

By Francesco Ognibene

The scenes of the half million pilgrims who filled St. Peter’s Square on October 6, ten years ago, are still deeply engraved on our memories. We saw a vast multitude of men and women from all over the world, from many different professions, and social and educational backgrounds.

39. *Africae Munus*, 24.