

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 21 June 1984

To Refine the Figure of Christ in Us

Dearest all,

We continue on our life's Holy Journey. There are some who have already completed their journey, and some who have just recently joined us. The predominant feature of this journey is our thrust toward sanctity which is the task of every Christian. Along with you, I am also trying each day to keep the pace, and anchored in prayer in order to obtain the grace of God, I forge ahead.

For this reason, I took a little book along with me on my trip to Istanbul, a book which offers wonderful suggestions in this regard: it is called *Imitation of Christ*, recently edited and published by *Città Nuova* publications. Although these writings are directed toward those dedicated to Jesus through an individual path in which a person journeys to God alone, a path different from our own, yet, they provide useful suggestions, full of wisdom and experience, for us who travel toward God in a more collective fashion.

Its keynote is to emphasize the importance of the virtues.

You all know how in- acquiring these virtues and in struggling against their opposing vices, we, who are called by God to find our "fortune" through our neighbor, discover self-denial of our selves through our very love for Him. You know that to improve ourselves, it is not within our practice to aim directly at our defects, but instead, to go around these obstacles by "changing room," as we say, or by "living the others." In doing so, we place ourselves in the way of charity which is the source of every virtue.

All the same, our Statutes do underline the task of exercising the virtues. It is our task, the more we progress along our spiritual journey, to take them into consideration.

Besides, it is Jesus Forsaken who is the model of all virtues, to whom we have given our lives. We always say that we want to love Him not only in suffering, but also in the practice of the virtues.

Charity, in fact, carves out the figure of Christ in us; when we love, we are another Christ. However, loving Jesus Forsaken in the practice of the virtues gives us the impression of refining that sculpture, of giving it the finishing touches.

Notwithstanding our love for our neighbors, we still carry along our little defects, even the smallest ones, which take something away from the beauty of Christ within us. Because of this, we are often dissatisfied with ourselves; though conscious of our great efforts, we are still humiliated. by our own personal imperfections.

Which defects are these? Everyone has their own. At times our actions suffer due to our haste, or to our imperfection in carrying out the will of God; we may get distracted in our prayer, or pay too much attention to the foolish things that the world likes; perhaps we lose control over our appetite. We may be often overcome by curiosity, or fall into pride. We may tend to speak needlessly, or without thinking of what we are saying. We can be attached to little things, somewhat dependent on the use of television. We allow ourselves to seek to be served by the others; we become inconsistent, and so on.

What should we do in 'this case?

When it is a question of things that are not good, Jesus invites us to act with decision when he affirms: If your eye is a cause for scandal, than take it out. (cf. Mt 5:29)

Therefore, out of love for Jesus Forsaken, not wavering, but remaining who we are, we must still uproot our vices, one after another, even while continuing along our own path, which is the path of love.

The *Imitation of Christ* tells us that it is not easy. In fact, it states that if we free ourselves from one vice each year, we will become perfect in a short time.

I am convinced that this is made even more possible through our own spiritual path. Love in fact is very helpful for this. Love is the denial of self, and burns our defects away.

Just the same, it would not be a bad idea to aim at one of our defects by creating a habit of practicing its opposing virtue.

Let's take courage then and go to work!

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Our Lady will assist us. She knows that we want to offer her the gift of our sanctification. Athletes, at times, undergo strenuous training in order to excel in an endeavour which is solely human. Let's find ourselves exerting at least as much effort.

May our love for Jesus Forsaken, whom we also encounter in the struggle to possess the virtues, obtain its greatest possible victory.

Chiara Lubich

(taken from Chiara Lubich, *On The Holy Journey*, New City Press, NY 1988)