

Rocca di Papa, 20 December 1984

**Charity is what counts, charity is what remains**

Dear All,

... We have been called, above all, to give the world a show of perfect charity, charity which is love for God and which is proved by love of neighbour.

We also spoke about charity in the last conference call and many of us were struck when we understood that love for our neighbours does not mean being ready to die for them but to actually die, not being ourselves so as to be the other, to live the others.

The impression it left seemed so strong and beneficial that I was doubtful about offering a new thought for our journey. I was doubtful but then I became convinced that it is a good idea to stay with this concept a little longer so as to assimilate it better and to try and try again to put it into practice.

So, in this conference call, in order that our decision to die completely to ourselves before each neighbour may grow stronger, I would like to look again with you at the importance of charity, this time with the help of two great saints who have successfully completed their Holy Journey, St Augustine and St Jerome.

Various ideas of theirs have left a deep impression on me and I hope they will do the same for you.

St Augustine, a master of charity, makes this clarification: "If everyone were to make the sign of the cross, if they were to respond 'amen' and sing alleluia; if everyone were to be baptized and were to flock to the churches; if everyone were to build the walls of basilicas, the fact remains that only charity is what distinguishes the children of God from the children of Satan.

Those who have charity are born of God, while those who do not possess charity are not born of God. This is the principal criterion for discernment. If you had everything but lacked this one thing, nothing you have would be useful to you. If you lack those other things but you possess this one, you have fulfilled the law...<sup>1</sup>

St Jerome writes: "I ask you: do you know what it means to pass from infancy to childhood, to youth, maturity and then old age? We die a little bit each day. Each day we change and despite this we still live in the illusion of being immortal. These very things that I am dictating, that are written down and I then reread and correct, are all moments subtracted from the time remaining for me to live. Each mark that a scribe leaves on the page is a mark removed from the arc of my life. ... The only true gain that remains is our unity in the love of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Dearest everyone, have you understood?

What matters to us Christians is charity as St. Augustine affirms; charity is what remains, as St. Jerome tells us.

What can we take from this?

During the day when we feel that our heart gives value to one detail or another, to giving a

1 St. Augustine, "Commentary on the First Letter of St John," 5,7, in *Theology of the Fathers*, III, Rome, 1982, p. 250.

2 St. Jerome, *Letters II*, Rome, 1964, p. 135.

good impression, to saving face, to affection, an attachment, to judgments, thoughts, feelings, persons, or to ourselves, let's make a habit of putting everything aside and eliminating all these things by saying to ourselves, "This is of no value, nor is this", so as not to fill ourselves with vanity.

Instead, when we have an opportunity to practice charity, let's say to ourselves "This has true value, this is what counts, and this will last."

*Chiara Lubich*