

Conference Call CH
Rocca di Papa, August 18, 1983

Love of neighbor and the twelve stars

During these last two weeks, I saw how everyone in the Movement has taken seriously the commitment to love their neighbor, which has produced amazing results. Reading the many telegrams that I received for the feast of Saint Clare,¹ I was overjoyed and consoled by the resolutions people had made, which reflected great spiritual enthusiasm and burning love. It was a further confirmation that we are on the right track. So if this is the effect, let's continue today with the same topic.

I have already told you how our whole spiritual life benefits from heroically putting love of neighbor into practice. Today we will see that this is true, not only for people who live our spirituality, but also for those called to follow other spiritual ways. They too can find in loving their neighbor the driving force to reach perfection.

Do you remember the twelve stars of perfection of Saint John of the Cross? He says there are twelve stars that shine in the souls of those who have reached perfection and holiness, who have made of their life a holy journey. These stars are: love of God, love of neighbor, chastity, poverty, obedience, private prayer, prayer in choir (meaning prayer together with others), humility, self-denial, penance, silence, and peace. In these past few days, I have noticed how loving our neighbor makes these twelve stars shine brighter in our souls. And to convince us even more, let's review them quickly one by one.

Love of God. Is love for God more alive in our hearts when we love our neighbor? Absolutely! The example of a plant is well known, because the deeper it sinks its roots into the ground, the higher it grows towards the sun. The more we love our neighbor, the more the star of the love for God shines out in us.

The second star is love of neighbor, which is exactly what we are determined to live.

The third star: chastity. The Regulations of the focolarini² state that the best safeguard of chastity is love of neighbor. And that's understandable: if you love, you think about others, and not about satisfying your own passions.

The fourth star: poverty. As we all know, we do not love poverty for poverty's sake. The characteristic of the Focolare members' poverty is that it is the result of sharing with our neighbor. We are poor since we keep only what is really necessary and give the rest away. In various ways, we share all that we possess with others.

1 Her "name's day" is the feast of Saint Clare of Assisi, celebrated on August 11.

2 Art. 94-95, "Regulations of the Section of men/women focolarini," 2009 edition.

The fifth star: obedience. Our primary obedience is to God, to the charism the Holy Spirit has given us, which teaches us that our way to God is love of neighbor. So by loving we become perfect in obedience.

The sixth star: private prayer. We know that our prayer life grows and becomes more sublime as our union with God grows. But this, in turn, increases, as we just said, when we love our neighbor. Thus, this star, too, shines brighter when we love others.

The seventh star: prayer in choir. Love of neighbor urges us to pray together. When we truly love our neighbor as ourselves, and are one with him or her, don't we feel a desire - almost a need - to be united with them in prayer?

The eighth star: humility. True humility involves complete forgetfulness of self - annihilation of our ego - and this is accomplished perfectly when we love our neighbor, when we "live the other."

The ninth star: self-denial. Loving our neighbor as Jesus wants us to do, we not only practice self-denial, but are actually dead to ourselves.

The tenth star: penance. The primary form of penance that God wants us to practice and is most pleasing to him is the penance implicit in love of neighbor.

The eleventh star: silence. Loving our neighbor, we practice silence and avoid useless words, because, first of all, in order to "make ourselves one," we have to silence everything within us. This is the most sublime form of silence. Secondly, because when we love, the Holy Spirit is present in our hearts, filling us with love. In fact, the more we love, the stronger is his voice within us, telling us, among other things, "Keep quiet now; be silent in that situation."

The twelfth star: peace. Loving our neighbor, we acquire true peace, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is present wherever there is love.

So, dear friends, let's love others. Let's always love. Let's keep on loving. At the end of these two weeks, may we see these twelve stars shining more brightly in the firmament of our soul. If then we will examine our souls, we'll see that this is true and will be a proof that we have completed a good stretch of the holy journey. This is my heartfelt wish for each one of you.

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