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# From Pope Benedict XVI, An Ever New Commandment

The Prelate writes a commentary on Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, "Deus Caritas est" (God is Love).

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"Deus caritas est". says the Latin text of St. John which the Pope has wanted to choose as the title of his first encyclical. "God is love", we read in almost all the translations of this sentence. Are charity and love

identical? In part yes and in part no. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that charity is the virtue with which we love God above all things, and our neighbour as ourselves, for love of God. Later on, it affirms that "charity secures and purifies our human capacity to love".

Because man needs to love and to be loved. Love faithful, requited, delicate, is the deepest desire of the heart. Our entire existence consists in a search for true love, a struggle to overcome the obstacles which rise up before us and inside each one of us. Jesus Christ is the fullness of Revelation: in Him we know God; in Him we know man fully, as Vatican Council II teaches and as John Paul II used to repeat frequently.

In Christ we discover our vocation and our grandeur. And an essential part of this discovery is charity, the love that Jesus Christ ennobles and

purifies. Because Christ has brought us, with his Love, "gaudium", joy and peace. With the word "love" a kind of inflation has been produced: we use it perhaps too much, at times to refer to ephemeral feelings, or even - as the Pope points out - to manifestations of egoism. Perhaps the opposite has occurred, however, with the term "charity", a sort of semantic restriction: we use it too little, only to refer to certain activities, carried out by some people. in special cases. But charity does not express itself in an exceptional way. On the contrary it forms part of the Christian identity: "in this will all men know that you are my disciples: if you for one another", says our Lord. The pagans will recognize Christians by this feature: "See how they love one another", they used to exclaim.

Christian love constitutes a moral disposition that projects itself in an

enormous variety of actions. Charity means to serve, understand, console, listen, smile, accompany, correct, encourage, ask for forgiveness and forgive, to give and to receive.

Charity expands as in concentric circles: from personal relations to the whole of society. In the origin of the family is found the love of the spouses, which creates the atmosphere where love is born; the home which welcomes the new being with affection; the favourable climate to mature as persons. The world of work sees itself enriched by charity. Exercising one's own profession in accordance with the evangelical precept means to carry it out for love, with the desire to serve, putting one's heart into it, thinking of the others. Sanctifying work is equivalent to converting it into an expression of love for God and an opportunity for giving oneself to the others, imbuing it with justice and charity.

The geography of the Church is embellished with these focal points of light: places where Christians try to work and serve in silence for love. We only have to think of Africa, the continent most in need of everyone's cooperation. There, the Church shows her love, "also as an ecclesial act", with words of Benedict XVI, as an essential part of her mission. Charity spurs on to magnanimity, to not remaining indifferent when faced with the needs of others. The Holy Father sums up this process of expansion of charity thus: "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'." (No.18). Here we find the perennial youth of the Church.

The key to the "new evangelization" also stems from charity. Substantially, the task of spreading

the Gospel consists in managing to get many persons to experience Christian charity, to get their intelligences to open up to the light of faith thanks to the language of love, that universal language that we are all in the condition to understand. Faith, in fact, as St. Paul writes, works through charity. St. Josemaria Escriva affirmed very clearly: "the main apostolate that we Christians have to carry out in the world, the best testimony of faith, is to help so that within the Church there will be a climate of authentic charity."

Christ, at the Last supper, qualified as "new" the precept of charity: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you". It was new then and goes on being so now for everyone, two thousand years later. If we approach the reading and the meditation of the encyclical with the healthy curiosity

of one who knows that he is about to discover something new, with our intelligence and heart open, we shall find the permanent novelty of this marvelous revelation: God is love, which spreads out to all and each and every one of mankind.

And the desire of Benedict XVI that this encyclical "may enlighten and help our Christian life" will be fulfilled.

The Guardian, Lagos.

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