

Love and the Common Good

Continuing his catechesis on the Church's social teaching, Pope Francis explains the meaning of the "common good" in his 9 September general audience.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

The crisis we are living due to the pandemic is affecting everyone; we will emerge from it for the better if we all seek the *common good*

together; the contrary is we will emerge for the worse. Unfortunately, we see partisan interests emerging. For example, some would like to appropriate possible solutions for themselves, as in the case of vaccines, to then sell them to others. Some are taking advantage of the situation to instigate divisions: by seeking economic or political advantages, generating or exacerbating conflicts. Others simply are not interesting themselves in the suffering of others, they pass by and go their own way (see *Lk 10:30-32*). They are the devotees of Pontius Pilate, washing their hands of others' suffering.

The Christian response to the pandemic and to the consequent socio-economic crisis is based on *love*, above all, love of God who always precedes us (see *1 Jn 4:19*). He loves us first, He always precedes us in love and in solutions. He loves us

unconditionally and when we welcome this divine love, then we can respond similarly. I love not only those who love me – my family, my friends, my group – but I also love those who do not love me, I also love those who do not know me or who are strangers, and even those who make me suffer or whom I consider enemies (see *Mt 5:44*). This is Christian wisdom, this is how Jesus acted. And the highest point of holiness, let's put it that way, is to love one's enemies which is not easy, it is not easy. Certainly, to love everyone, including enemies, is difficult – I would say it is even an art! But an art that can be learned and improved. True love that makes us fruitful and free is always expansive, and true love is not only expansive, it is inclusive. This love cares, heals and does good. How many times a caress does more good than many arguments, a caress, we can think, of pardon instead of many

arguments to defend oneself. It is inclusive love that heals.

So, *love* is not limited to the relationship between two or three people, or to friends or to family, it goes beyond. It comprises civil and political relationships (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 1907-1912), including a relationship with nature (see Encyclical *Laudato Si'* [LS], 231). Love is inclusive, everything. Since we are social and political beings, one of the highest expressions of love is specifically social and political which is decisive to human development and in order to face any type of crisis (*ibid.*, 231). We know that love makes families and friendships flourish; but it is good to remember that it also makes social, cultural, economic and political relationships flourish, allowing us to construct a “civilisation of love”, as Saint Paul VI used to love to say[1] and, in turn,

Saint John Paul II. Without this inspiration the egotistical, indifferent, throw-away culture prevails – that is to discard anything I do not like, whom I cannot love or those who seem to me to not to be useful in society. Today at the entrance, a married couple said to us: “Pray for me (us) because we have a disabled son.” I asked: “How old is he?” “He is pretty old.” “And what do you do?” “We accompany him, help him.” All of their lives as parents for that disabled son. This is love. And the enemies, the adversarial politicians, according to our opinion, seem to be “disabled” politicians, socially, but they seem to be that way. Only God knows if they are truly thus or not. But we must love them, we must dialogue, we must build this civilisation of love, this political and social civilisation of the unity of all humanity. Otherwise, wars, divisions, envy, even wars in families: because inclusive love is

social, it is familial, it is political... love pervades everything.

The coronavirus is showing us that each person's true good is a common good, not only individual, and, *vice versa*, the common good is a true good for the person. (see *CCC*, 1905-1906). If a person only seeks his or her own good, that person is egotistical. Instead, the person is kinder, nobler, when his or her own good is open to everyone, when it is shared. Health, in addition to being an individual good, is also a public good. A healthy society is one that takes care of everyone's health, of all.

A virus that does not recognise barriers, borders, or cultural or political distinctions must be faced with a *love* without barriers, borders or distinctions. This love can generate social structures that encourage us to share rather than to compete, that allow us to include the

most vulnerable and not to cast them aside, that help us to express the best in our human nature and not the worst. True love does not know the throw-away culture, it does not know what it is. In fact, when we love and generate creativity, when we generate trust and solidarity, it is then that concrete initiatives emerge for the common good.^[2] And this is valid at both the level of the smallest and largest communities, as well as at the international level. What is done in the family, what is done in the neighbourhood, what is done in the village, what is done in the large cities and internationally is the same, it is the same seed that grows, grows, grows and bears fruit. If you in your family, in your neighbourhood start out with envy, with battles, there will be war in the end. Instead, if you start out with love, to share love, forgiveness, there will be love and forgiveness for everyone.

Conversely, if the solutions for the pandemic bear the imprint of egoism, whether it be by persons, businesses or nations, we may perhaps emerge from the coronavirus crisis, but certainly not from the human and social crisis that the virus has brought to light and accentuated. Therefore, be careful not to build on sand (see *Mt 7:21-27*)! To build a healthy, inclusive, just and peaceful society we must do so on the rock of the common good.[3] The common good is a rock. And this is everyone's task, not only that of a few specialists. Saint Thomas Aquinas used to say that the promotion of the common good is a duty of justice that falls on each citizen. Every citizen is responsible for the common good. And for Christians, it is also a mission. As Saint Ignatius of Loyola taught, to direct our daily efforts toward the common good is a way of receiving and spreading God's glory.

Unfortunately, politics does not often have a good reputation, and we know why. This is not to say that all politicians are bad, no, I do not want to say this. I am only saying that unfortunately, politics do not often have a good reputation. Why? But it does not have to resign itself to this negative vision, but instead react to it by showing in deeds that good politics is possible, or rather that politics[4] that puts the human person and the common good at the center is a duty. If you read history of humanity you will find many holy politicians who trod this path. It is possible insofar as every citizen, and especially those who assume social and political commitments and positions, roots what they do in ethical principles and nurtures it with social and political love. Christians, in a particular way the laity, are called to give good example of this and can do it thanks to the

virtue of charity, cultivating its intrinsic social dimension.

It is therefore time to improve our social love – I want to highlight this: our social love – with everyone's contribution, starting from our littleness. The common good requires everyone's participation. If everyone contributes his or her part, and if no one is left out, we can regenerate good relationships on the communitarian, national and international level and even in harmony with the environment (see *LS*, 236). Thus, through our gestures, even the most humble ones, something of the image of God we bear within us will be made visible, because God is the Trinity, God is love, God is love. This is the most beautiful definition of God that is in the Bible. The Apostle John, who loved Jesus so much, gives it to us. With His help, we can heal the world working, yes, all together for the

common good, for everyone's common good. Thank you.

[1] *Message for the X World Day of Peace, 1 January 1977*: AAS 68 (1976), 709.

[2] See Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38.

[3] *Ibid.*, 10.

[4] See *Message for World Day of Peace, 1 January 2019* (8 December 2018).
