

supernatural intuition that the gifts of the Spirit, the charisms and fruits are not beyond me; I do not need to go looking for them. I sense that they are within me, living in me; that they are a part of my life, that they function and I consider them as blessings. The Holy Spirit lives in me like one who acts in complete liberty, without fear of breaking a friendship. I realize that I am made for him and he is all mine.

To carry on this experience of supernatural life, I must consider the absence of criticism as a sympathetic person, a friend, an angel who constantly stands guard over me so that I do not lose the deposit of faith. If the presence of God opens me to a climate of intimacy, if it floods my heart with the peace that no enjoyment or human value can give me, it is because the absence of criticism plays its part well and is careful to see that my relationship with God is undisturbed. The *absence of criticism* is a friend who keeps an eye on me in all my relationships with others so that charity will be safeguarded. This absence of criticism must, like an angel, live at my side, accompany me day and night and warn me of dangers. It must teach me the value of silence and discretion in my speech, the irresistible and contagious force of true love, and the powerful effects of mercy and pardon.

Why not consider the absence of criticism like the archangel Raphael who accompanied young Tobias to protect him against dangers, to send the evil spirits fleeing and to save him from certain death? He brought Tobias home with the power and means necessary for healing his elderly father

and to discover in this voyage the presence of God and his will.

4. Unconditional Love of Our Neighbor

An excellent means for combating destructive criticism is love of our neighbor. On many occasions, I have pointed out the way to combat criticism, which comes from tendencies that we do not sufficiently control. As St. Francis said: "*Where there is hatred, let me sow love.*"

Love, peace, joy and amiability are antidotes for criticism. Although it is true that the tongue can bring about pernicious effects, it is nonetheless true that it can be one of the greatest riches that we possess. The prophet Isaiah said that to give speech to the mute is a Messianic work: "*Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God... he comes to save you. Then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing.*" (Is 35:4-6)

The well-trained tongue speaks marvels; it conveys the riches of the heart; it can lift our whole being to the summits of God's praises. The author of Proverbs affirms: "*The tongue of the just is like choice silver...*" (Prv 10:20) "*It recounts the justice of the Lord, it proclaims the praises of God.*" (Ps 35:27) It confesses the universal power of God; like our lips it makes known our heart.

All the same, we must always keep in mind the advice given by the apostles James and John and it is also useful to know the thoughts of King David, a

man close to the heart of God, even though he had his hour of sin. James tells us: "*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, his religion is vain.*" (Jas 1:26) David a long time before had warned us: "*Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile. Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and follow after it.*" (Ps 34:14-15) He adds that in his conduct, he will guard his tongue from error: "*O God set a watch before my mouth, a guard at the door of my lips. Let not my heart incline to evil, of engaging in deeds of evil...*" (Ps 141:3-4)

St. John, the preacher of hope and love, tells us with his usual gentleness: "*Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. ...if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask...*" (1 Jn 3:18-22)

We will be able to block our evil tendencies if we develop the presence of God, if we keep watch over our tongue, if we endeavor to concretely love our neighbor. I want to insist on this love, this welcome, this warm relationship that we must have with our neighbor.

At times we can ask if it is a good thing to have a free will which permits us to make choices. We do not need to be faced with many choices or many alternatives to become hesitant, confused and awkward. Our approaches to our neighbor are varied, therefore it is dangerous to be satisfied with merely superficial contacts.

In fact there are three avenues that lead to our neighbor: our *feelings*, our *intelligence*, and the *profound richness of our being* which has at the same time exquisite feelings, a precious intuition and a warm heart.

a) *Feelings*

I feel drawn toward a certain category of people, I like meeting them, greeting them, smiling at them, showing a certain interest in them. What is it that draws me? Their physique, the beauty of their face, the regularity of their features, their distinguished way of acting, their way of dressing, their overall appearance: phlegmatic, calm, poised, stylish? Or perhaps their enthusiasm, their sensibility, their emotivity? In any case, whenever I see them I feel my heart open to welcome them; I sense that such a friendship could bring me much good.

Throughout our lives, we have rubbed elbows with hundreds of people whom we found sympathetic, who exercised a certain sensible attraction, an attraction that released in us a whole chain of emotions which upset us interiorly and gave us the impression that our senses had been turned upside down. This is one way of going to others, of welcoming them but it is not the best way because the criteria for these friendships is too fragile; we are too selective. Instead, we must go to everyone, welcome everyone. Feelings are like magnets that only stick to certain kinds of metal. This sensible attraction is too limited, it limits our capacity to love.

If this is the only avenue I use, I will find that whenever my feelings have been disappointed I will become hypersensitive, open to all kinds of destructive criticism.

b) *Intelligence*

I can go towards others on a second avenue: that of my *intelligence*. I can allow myself to be drawn by those who have titles, diplomas, a certain way of thinking, of explaining techniques and of presenting ideas and principles. I like their way of reasoning, their method of arguing, of writing a thesis, of demolishing another. When I am with these people I strive to reason; I, too, want to appear intelligent. I admire the culture of this one, the business sense of that one, their education, their humor, the solidity of their practical judgement.

Those on the first avenue caused me a bit of excitement. Those on the second avenue fill me with admiration and respect. If I limit my friendships simply to those on this second way I am still being too selective and each time I make a selection I reject from my friendship a crowd of interesting people.

These two avenues must open out onto a third avenue otherwise I will be superficial, hypersensitive, a neo-intellectual bound by the limits that my imagination has created. The first two routes are useful, we cannot avoid them but they lead to a dead end if we stop; they are good only when we use them to go forward.

c) *The Profound Richness of Our Being*

Nature can give us excellent examples. We can say that the third avenue is that of the bees. They leave their hive and travel for distances of up to forty kilometers in one journey. They fly over fields of forage or flowers; they land, draw out what is best in the flowers, go back to their hive, and work to produce the finest honey. The honey depends on the richness of the flower, the instinct of the bee and its work. The bee does not analyze the flower which shares a part of its riches with it, nor does it allow itself to be captured by its sensibilities. It knows that it must return to the hive, that its work is waiting and it wants to be faithful to its mission. The bee is concerned only about the quality of the flower.

There is a third route open to each human being for reaching others: the *profound richness of our being*. A richness made up of talents, gifts, aptitudes, energy, dynamism, various capacities such as the power to love, to understand, to use free will, to be capable of making choices, to create a climate of confidence in others and to assume responsibilities.

This combination of values constitutes our personality, that which comes forth from the hands of God at the hour of our birth and which was embellished by grace on the day that we became Christians. This avenue leads to others and helps us to discover the best that is in each of them; this helps to produce in us a quality of intimacy with God.

Intimacy with God is always proportional to the quality of the love we have for our neighbor. On this third avenue, there is no selecting, no restriction. It is not appearance that counts, not a brilliant intelligence that draws us but the whole person, the fullness of being, the complete image, the total child of God.

These three avenues coexist in every human being, but only one — the third — permits us to overcome destructive criticism because it enables us to accept others for the best that is in them: their richness of being. Our movement towards others must be unconditional and not be released by a simply sensible or intellectual attraction.

In fact, that is the route Jesus used in the course of his life on earth. Why did he call Matthew to be an apostle? Matthew, because of his trade, had the reputation of being dishonest. What sensible attraction could have drawn him to Zaccheus who was seen as petty and avaricious? Why this disconnected conversation on the cross with one who had been judged a bandit, was condemned and was going to die in twenty minutes? We only have one answer: the third avenue, the unconditional acceptance of the other. Jesus was more interested in the salvation of Mary Magdalene than by what could have been considered a flirt.

One of the most efficacious means of combating destructive criticism is endeavoring to love our neighbor gratuitously.

5. The Disinterested Encounter with Others

a) *Love Our Enemies*

The Lord asks us to love our neighbor, even our enemies if we have any. This love is not based on gratitude or on the kindness of others, but on the words of Christ. Therefore, we must no longer build friendships by calculating what advantages others can bring us, what they can do for us. Our love must find its source in the capabilities of our own being. It must be stimulated by the word and example of Christ. Thus we will be able to emulate the 22nd president of the United States, William McKinley, who was shot to death by an anarchist and socialist worker, Leon F. Czolgosz. This worker wanted to kill the president simply because he did not accept his way of running the country.

On September 6, 1901, the President arrived at the Panamerican exposition of Buffalo, New York. That day, at the "Temple of Music," a reception was being given in his honor. He had a dozen bodyguards all around him and eight others who minutely surveyed the situation. Eleven soldiers were inside the Temple, while three secret service agents and four police inspectors from Buffalo escorted him step by step; they did not leave his side for a second. Numerous visitors wanted to greet the President. They were placed in line and were inspected one by one. Leon F. Czolgosz got in line with the others, he pretended to be wounded and

had a bandage on his arm, but his bandage hid the murder weapon, an Iver Johnson, 32-caliber pistol.

Smiling, President McKinley shook hands with each one. A little girl accompanied by her father drew the benevolence of the President. She was followed by a robust, tough-looking Italian, who drew the attention of the bodyguards; they hurried him on and let the young worker, who hurried have a wounded hand, come forward. McKinley, saw the bandage, smiled, and went towards the young man, who suddenly shot twice. The President crumpled to earth; the guards overcame the assassin. A tall, black, athletic-looking man named Parker sought to grab the worker; he had a knife in his hand ready to kill him. McKinley, seeing his assassin lying on the ground under a barrage of kicks, painfully lifted his right hand, red with his own blood and in a feeble voice begged: "*Gently, my friends, gently.*" Then he turned toward his secretary and asked him to make sure that no harm be done to the worker.

McKinley died eight days later murmuring, "*If it were not for Ida, my spouse, I would have liked to go like Lincoln...*" That is what he did early the morning of September 13, 1901. McKinley had love in his heart even for his enemies because he believed in God. (*Mirror of History*, no. 283, p. 87)

The Lord tells us to love but he does not want us to demand a recompense. The good that we sow must be given freely. We must not expect to receive only good from others. This kind of love is profound and goes beyond the idea of capitalism; it is a way of reasoning that mocks natural philosophy.

It is the Gospel, it is Divine. We can love others with our senses allowing ourselves to be attracted by their physical qualities, their features, their affability or the suppleness of their gestures. We can love others and take the time to listen to them, to let them tell their story, to admire the limpity of their thoughts, the logic of their reasoning, their sudden burst of brilliance, but we still have not gone far enough or deep enough. We must search carefully to discover what is in their hearts: their way of loving, of letting themselves be loved, their way of being honest, loyal, just, true, tender, comprehensive human beings. We must discover the profound riches of the other. The presence of God is nourished when we clarify the why of this deep attraction.

We will love others, if we put our hearts into serving them, into accepting our differences and avoiding animosity whatever their mood happens to be. We will love others if we listen to them and we strive to understand them, if we avoid monopolizing them, if we have confidence in them, if we discover positive qualities in them and have the courage to give them credit for these qualities; if we are happy when others seem to be exalted, acclaimed and congratulated. We will love others, even our enemies, if we do not allow the spirit of vengeance to infiltrate us and if we are able to pardon.

To love is a duty of the heart not of the senses or the mind. This duty is given us by the Lord; the presence of God makes it possible insofar as this presence is not weakened by destructive criticism.

When we avoid destructive criticism we dispose ourselves to love others profoundly and we can be sure that we do not extinguish the Spirit in us, that we do not sadden him.

b) *Let the Profound Love of Others Be Born in Us*

This love is neither a product of the intellect nor of the will. It does not originate from a series of resolutions we make to love. Nor does it come from the demands of a will resolved to overcome all difficulties and repugnances in order to carry out its duty to love in a suitable fashion. This profound love surges forth from the heart without effort. It is like the sap in a maple tree or a light produced by a little wick that allows itself to fall into the oil that will impregnate it. This love is obtained without violence, without exertion. We must simply endeavor to discover in ourselves the presence of a living, acting, loving God, who manifests himself each time we become aware of one or another positive qualities of our being.

If we were to set out to discover the positive in others, we would have the same impression as the sculptor who liberates from the strong trunk of a tree the image that dwells within himself. In order to find his work of art in a tree, the sculptor must first of all be aware that the work of art is within himself, in his own heart.

Profound love springs forth from our inner self, from the depths of our being, and takes on the form of those positive qualities which are most

important and most agreeable. These qualities are in our depths, we have had them since birth. At our baptism they were enriched, ennobled, and reinforced sufficiently so that we could understand Jesus, his teachings, his examples, his way of loving. As Isaiah states: "*If you would harken to my commands, your happiness would be like a river, and your integrity like the waves of the sea...*" (Is 48:18) The whole being is irrigated with peace, silent joy and stabilizing serenity. This deep love orients and stimulates the energies within us, liberating them from all danger of aggressivity, of contestation, of disputes and criticisms. This love is at the service of all the positive that we can easily detect in our neighbor.

We do not seek to avoid criticism through wise reasonings or harsh resolutions, but by focusing our energies on discovering the qualities of others. These qualities become a nourishment that pleases love which needs substance in order not to become anemic.

c) *Let the Love of Others Grow in Us*

Love was meant to grow; whatever the path we are walking, progress is always possible. Perhaps we are on the threshold of a depression, on the point of breaking off a friendship or ready to leave our team. No matter; nothing is lost; it is never too late. We must examine our love. Have we perhaps ceased gathering the positive? Do we put a brake on our imagination when it spouts out destructive

criticism? We must adjust our love and start over again every 24 hours. This is the normal task of a Christian; thus we will merit our salary.

Starting over again signifies:

— that we return to our search for the positive in others, especially in those who upset us. We will try to overcome feelings, and susceptibilities in order to detect the riches in the hearts of others. To make a meditation is not a waste of time, it is in fact a form of prayer agreeable to the Lord. *"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother..." (Mt 5:23-24)*

— that we do not allow ourselves to be overcome by negativity. Our neighbor seems to be hateful, his conduct inconceivable, his unkindness and lack of consideration are unexplainable. We must not hold on to such reasonings otherwise we will poison our own existence and may harm the person we are speaking to for years to come. We must willingly look for the positive in the other. If necessary, we will consult his best friends to find these positive qualities.

Only the positive suscitates wonder. Wonder is the solid platform of profound love. Profound love presupposes that our self-forgetfulness is strong enough to bring about sincere pardon, which touches the heart and even the memory. It is here that Christians give themselves fully and become witnesses to Christ. They become facsimiles of

Christ that even the blind are able to read. We must run away from negative or destructive criticism realizing that it can empty us of profound love. Normally, when we find ourselves caught up in conversations that describe the misdeeds or faults of others, we should withdraw quietly. Critics wound themselves each time they succumb to their habit of demolishing others.

d) *Protect Our Way of Loving Others*

It is necessary for us to protect ourselves by:

— fighting our lack of personal depth. We must avoid living uniquely on the feeling level of our being. We are easily startled; disagreeable judgments can pile up to our detriment and to the detriment of our neighbor. We must not allow ourselves to be guided only by our instincts, by an unhealthy sensitivity or a susceptibility that is always on edge.

— avoiding to meet others only on the intellectual level, otherwise we provoke endless discussions that cause hearts to shrivel up and die.

— exercising the practice of the presence of God often throughout the day. Thinking of the damage caused by destructive criticism, of the richness of the Lord who is the rightful proprietor of all those whom he made in his own image and likeness. Our neighbors give us the chance to discover in them this image of God; why let our

search be aborted because of a few idle or negative words?

If we want to learn to love in depth, we must free ourselves from an overemotional sensitivity in order to consider the riches deposited in us by our Creator. We should think of the enthusiasm that the search for the positive creates in each of us. It is a marvelous way of seeking God. The psalmist says: "... *those who seek the Lord want for no good thing.*" (Ps 34:11)

If we want our love to become more profound we must take the time to deepen it. If one day someone says to me: "This year I have sought daily to find all the positive qualities in myself and in others; at times, I gave others credit for the results of my discoveries. I have had no other form of prayer, except the frequentation of the sacraments, an ordinary liturgical life and the daily recitation of some psalms," I would congratulate them because their instinct for criticism would be completely weakened and their presence of God would be strong and healthy. As Jesus used a wild flower to lead his apostles to the presence of his Father, so the one who seeks the positive will find qualities that will lead him right to the Father.

Let's not be afraid to take time to discover positive qualities in other members of your team, in your work milieu, in your social milieu, in your family, in the hierarchy of the Church, in our institute, in our community.

Let's take time, either individually or with others, to create favorable occasions for discovering

what is positive. This is how we will regain a sense of wonder, an optimistic joy, a durable light-heartedness and a contagious dynamism. Then our faces too, like those of the apostles on Pentecost morning, will reflect Christ.

May Mary Immaculate help us to revise our personal lives, anesthetize our natural tendencies to destructive criticism, reinvigorate our ardor for discovering the qualities of others and live the presence of the Trinity. Our five attitudes of soul create in us a way of thinking and acting in conformity with the Holy Spirit. This is marvelous for opening us to the riches of the Church: the sacraments, the liturgy, apostolic action, the sense of Scriptures and a love for prayer.

If every Christian would accept to live these five attitudes each 24 hours, the world would become a furnace of warmth for the heart of Jesus, a warmth that attracts and comforts others.