

THE MEANING OF CHARITABLE WORK

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GOAL

1. Above all, our very nature requires us to be interested in others. When there is something beautiful within us we desire to communicate it to others. When we see others who are worse off than we are, we desire to help them with something of ours. This need is so original, so natural, that it is within us before we are conscious of it. We call it the *law of existence*. We do charitable work to satisfy this need.
2. We become ourselves to the extent that we live this need and this requirement. Communicating to others gives us the experience of completing ourselves. This is so true that, if we are not able to give, we experience ourselves as incomplete beings.

To be interested in others, to communicate to others enables us to fulfill the supreme and, indeed, the only task in life: to become ourselves, to complete ourselves. We do charitable work so that we may learn to fulfill the task of becoming ourselves.

3. But it is Christ who has enabled us to understand the ultimate reason for this, revealing the ultimate law of being and of life: charity. The supreme law of our being is to share in the being of others, to live in communion. Only Jesus Christ reveals this to us, because He knows what everything truly is, who God, from whom we are born truly is, what Being truly is. I am able to understand the word “charity” when I remember that the Son of God, loving us did not send us His riches (as He was able to do) and revolutionize our situation; instead He became poor like one of us: He “shared” our nothingness. We do charitable work in order to live like Christ.

CONSEQUENCES

1. Charity is the law of being and comes before natural likes and dislikes and feelings. Therefore, we can “do for others” while lacking any enthusiasm. There may very well be no so-called “concrete” result. For us, the only “concrete” attitude is attention to the person, that is, love for him. All the rest can come as a consequence: like Jesus who only after He manifested His love, performed miracles and fed the hungry. We must note two initial points which are not usually clear regarding our openness to others:

A) *Meeting the need of others:*

This is an insufficient starting point and motive. What is the real need of another? This way of viewing things is unclear, because it depends on what we believe to be others’ needs. But what if that which I bring is not truly that which the other needs? What the other person truly needs I do not know, I do not measure, I do not have. It is a measure that I do not possess: it is something that changes. Therefore I cannot think that I am giving another what they really need.

There are three important considerations to think about before you look to do charitable work:

a) Know why

Until we know well, with clarity and simplicity, the ultimate reason or the goal of our work, we must never be satisfied. Our goal is to bring forth the true meaning of what we do, that is, the main reason for which we will succeed in being faithful even when we are no longer enthusiastic and experience no satisfaction from it. To achieve this it will be necessary to have an open dialogue about it in our assemblies in our groups with the leaders of our community, with those persons who are more mature and experienced. Above all it is necessary to verify our journey with the leaders of the community.

b) Doing in order to comprehend

In order to *understand* it is not enough to *know*, it is necessary to do, with the courage of freedom. Freedom is the adherence to that Being which is seen in our lives, that is, to the truth. If the law of existence is living in communion, then we must share everything, every instant. This is the supreme maturity, which can also be called humanity or sanctity. It is much more difficult to educate ourselves to this ideal if the

motive of our action is a scene of obligation because of external circumstances (“duty” in the normal use of the word).

It is the *free time* that I have which educates me: that which gives the exact indication of my availability to others is the use of that time which is mine alone, with which I can do whatever I want. By choosing to use our free time in this way, we form a mentality, an almost instinctive way of conceiving all of life as a communion.

The small amount of free time redeems all the rest. And, little by little, in doing charitable work, one begins to better understand one’s colleague at the bank, one’s father and mother, one’s coworker.

This mentality can be more easily developed in one’s youth. And it is only in beginning to do, to give of one’s free time as an essential act of your freedom, that Christian charity will become a mentality, a conviction, a permanent dimension of your life.

It should be noted that the number of activities and the quantity of time that one dedicates is not important. It is important that in our lives and in our conscience the principle of *sharing* be affirmed at least through some gesture, even minimal, as long as it is systematic and brought to realization. Therefore once a month would be enough as a beginning. Regarding the frequency of this work, one should consult the community.

c) Order

It is our free time that we must use. There are two limits which maintain the order of this free time:

- (i) Do not neglect study or work
- (ii) Do not neglect one’s family

Here also a person’s dialogue with the authority in the family and with the authority in the group will help you to find the criteria to determine how much free time you actually have.

Therefore, rules and regulations can be oppressive, if they forget or attempt to substitute for the only “concrete” reality that exists: the person, and your love for the person.

d) Friendship

Using friendship as one’s point of departure and as the final goal of one’s actions, with all the ambiguity that this encompasses, is also not enough. Friendship is something that one may or may not find; it becomes the road to our destiny, but not the end in itself.

To freely go to others, to share a little of their lives and to put in common a little of ours, enables us to discover a sublime and mysterious thing which one understands while doing it.

It is the discovery of the fact that precisely because we love them, it is not *we* who make them happy; and that not even the most perfect society, the most legally solid organism, the greatest riches, the surest health, the purest beauty, the most educated civilization will ever be able to make them happy.

It is *Another* who can make them happy. Who is the reason for everything? Who made everything? God.

So Jesus is not only He who announces to me the truest word, who explains the law of my reality, He is no longer only the light of my mind: I discover that Christ is the meaning of my life.

The testimony of those who have experienced this value is very beautiful: “I continue to do charitable work because all of my sufferings and all of theirs have a meaning”.

Hoping in Christ everything has a meaning: Christ.

I discover this, finally, in the place where I do charitable work, precisely by means of the final powerlessness of my love: it is the experience in which the intelligence discovers wisdom, true culture.

But Christ is present now: it is not that “He was”, not that “He was born” but rather “He is” and “He is born” today: this is the Church. The Church is Christ, present now, as He willed.

And the Church is the community of us, precisely us, poor and attached to Him. Therefore hope sustains us; God Himself is among us, is present among us. One of us, in a discussion said: “I continue to go to...because of all of you”. This is true: precisely the meaning of our being together, of the ecclesial community makes us go forward in our work among the handicapped, in the hospices, with whoever is needy and, tomorrow in the factory, in the city, in the country, in the world which is so large and awaits Him.