



THE RELATIONAL CHARITY

or THE CHARITY IN THE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

THE WORD OF GOD (Gal 5,16-25)

«¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh; ¹⁷for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; ²³ against such things there is no law.

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. “

“THE FRUIT”

St. Paul speaks of 'the fruit' in the singular and not of the 'fruits', because basically it is a single attitude that is expressed in numerous behaviours.

In this very passage of the Scripture, St. Paul compares the fruit of the Spirit to the "works of the flesh." His reasoning is simple: the person acting alone, without reference to God, produces "deeds" but they stem from the "flesh". For their characteristic of limitation, for the impossibility of moving them from an earthly level, because of the limits of the sin; they are typical of the human condition, decayed and sinful.

Instead, the fruit of the Spirit raises the deeds to a spiritual level: it enhances the natural aptitudes, and it gives a new strength.

In addition, the word "fruit" tells us of something wonderful, almost unthinkable. We can explain this with an example taken from nature: when we see the trees in winter it seems impossible that after a while they can sprout and produce leaves, flowers and fruits; this is why we speak of "miracle of the nature". The fruit speaks of maturation: it passes from the flower, to the unripened fruit, to the ripe fruit.

It is the same dynamic as the one of our life, when we live it under the influence of the Spirit: we produce fruits that even ourselves we could not imagine.

The idea of the fruit also speaks of something tasty, enjoyable, nutritious, refreshing, delicious and also beautiful to see. We think that this image was not chosen by chance by St Paul, to mean the trust we can have in the deeds done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

CHARITY IN THE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS (or THE “RELATIONAL” CHARITY)

This unique fruit, with many facets – almost like a kaleidoscope - refers to the world of interpersonal relationships. It is like saying that charity is expressed in the relationships. We could do some well, but the presence of the Spirit confers to our doing, to our doing well, this pleasant



mark in the relationships.

Out of the nine aspects of this unique fruit, let us stop briefly only on some of them:

Love and meekness

St. Paul speaks of love as warm-heartedness. It exists a severe goodness, demanding, that lets little space to the world of feelings. Here we speak of a type of love that expresses itself through gestures and words characterized by warm-heartedness and kindness.

The behaviour of Christ seems to be meaningful, except in rare moments and situations characterized by interventions a little hard (with the Pharisees, with the vendors in the temple, towards some disciples who did not understand his point of view).

He receives everybody with heartiness: poor people in pain, marginalized ones, individuals who have taken wrong decisions and feel the need to have an interior sight of their life, women, foreigners. Also his words and his attitude must have been welcoming and kind. People liked staying with Him, listening to Him and following Him. The tiredness of the long walks, the uncomfortableness in taking food and lodging were put into the background.

Many passages of the Gospel show the sincerity of Jesus' human relationships, his sympathy, kindness, tenderness and love with which He was used to approach the people, hurt by the circumstances of life. His natural behaviour, together with his respect and his human warmth, used to gain the people.

In his letter to the Philippians (2,5) St. Paul exhorts: *"The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had."* As disciples of Christ, our warm-heartedness and kindness should be known first of all by our way of communicating. The image emerging from the verse of the Letter to the Galatians is that of "affable" persons, that is people ready to exchange words and messages.

The contrasts and conflicts never miss: to understand each other and to be in agreement are almost always the point of arrival, but not of departure.

It seems there is a shortcut to reach the aim of an agreement: the use of force. It can be by means of physical strength (by violence), or intellectual (by the reasoning that obliges the other one to say 'yes you are right'), or emotional (by the manipulation of feelings), or the force of power, or of the posts of responsibility or of money. The outcome is always the same: we impose ourselves to command the others.

To this point, Christ presents Himself with diametrically opposed attitudes: respectful of the freedom and dignity of the person He is talking to. The episode of the temptations is emblematic: that is the refusal of any instrument to manipulate the conscience of others (the economic power, the power of magic, the use of religion for material or earthly purposes).

There are some attitudes and behaviours that must characterize the believers:

- The aversion towards any form of conflict (some people feel a special pleasure in the conflicts, in gossips, in adding negative details, or in murmuring).
- The capacity of not persisting in arguments on marginal matters, or on details.
- The moderation in the fits of rage, in the uncontrolled outpourings, in improper manifestations.
- A certain tolerance towards the evil we are victims of, evil that provokes in us feelings of anger or desire of revenge.



SECOND LCF INTERNATIONAL MANUAL OF FORMATION

- The attention to catch the positive aspects present in the personality of the person we are talking to.

However meekness must not be confused with the weakness to consider ourselves as losers. It is a strength, a strength to resist to evil, provocations, injustices. It is a strength to not react because of a risk to provoke a major pain or injustice.

The indignation to face evil or injustice is morally compulsory, but it cannot be manifested with violent actions: *"Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good."* (Rom. 12, 21).

This "icon" of meekness, Christ proposes it to us by a method to follow: respect for everybody, control of our own emotions and behaviours, attention to promote the "sane" aspects of the character of the person we are talking to, use of the reason and appeal to freedom ("If you wish...").

Meek but... steady. Jesus in the palace of the High Priest renounces in keeping quiet, and to the soldier who slapped Him, his response tries to arouse, to provoke a critical reflection on this action: *"If I have said anything wrong, tell everyone here what it was. But if I am right in what I have said, why do you hit me?"* (Jn 18,23)

Paul, when he writes to the Christians, certainly has his own experience of life in mind. He has himself experienced God's meekness; and being a violent man, used to coercive methods, he converted himself – surely with a hard work on himself and pain – in the apostle of the Christian's freedom and consciousness. He will always refuse violent methods.

Affability, goodness

They are similar words. They could also be translated into kindness, gentleness, sweetness. These words are used in Greek to describe the aged wine, the easy yoke, that is that it does not decant, does not irritate, does not hurt; they are words that express the character of a pleasant person in everything. In his coming into the world, Jesus himself is defined by these words: *"But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour was revealed, he saved us. It was not because of any good deeds that we ourselves had done, but because of his own mercy that He saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us. God poured out the Holy Spirit abundantly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior."* (Tt 3,4-6). It is the goodness of God made visible in Jesus: *"...in the love he showed us in Christ Jesus."* (Eph 2,7).

It is not just only doing some well, but it is doing it with delicacy, with love, gentleness, measurement. Do what needs to be done and say what needs to be said, but do it and say it with kindness, consideration, education. Sometimes it seems that, knowing that we are right, makes us harsh and uncompromising as if having the truth gave us the right to be impertinent with those who, in our opinion, do not have it: *"... by speaking the truth in a spirit of love"* (Eph 4, 15).

We always must act with total respect towards people, and this respect is reflected in the language, the behaviours, in the difference. Truth without love loses its credibility and its attractiveness. The Spirit who dwells us is the one that teaches us to combine firmness with delicacy, to keep us firm in our beliefs and to stand for them.

Meekness, kindness, sensitivity: those are all the aspects of what one can consider as a gentle touch, a soft breeze, a human warmth that bring the presence of the Spirit in the depths of our soul.

Especially among them the adolescents use a rough language, sometimes offensive, coarse, which debases the "victims"; also some ironical expressions or tacky jokes can hurt. Some of the signs of maturity, growth, adulthood can be manifested in a more attentive, respectful and delicate language. We must not be afraid: with no doubt, there are men and women who, in the vocabulary they use, do not show of the strong features of our sexuality. We do not need to demonstrate



SECOND LCF INTERNATIONAL MANUAL OF FORMATION

anything to anyone. The respectful and gentle language, an attentive listening without prejudice and coarseness, speak of a mature, secure and free personality. A coarse or vulgar language manifests much insecurity. It can be a step in the path of growth of the adolescents; this is understandable; but it has to be overcome to demonstrate maturity.

Temperance

Paul completes his vision of the “fruit of the Spirit” with a final aspect: the temperance and self-control. This means to avoid being carried away by our passions and indolence; but to be on control in any circumstance and not to yield up the excesses.

To speak of self-control, control of the passions, seems to detonate with all what is heard about the contemporary culture. The latter says to be the champion of human freedom and spontaneity in the expression of oneself. This is why the Christian discourse on self-control must be proposed in an appropriate way, showing its values and its attractiveness.

Self-control is sign of maturity and integration of the various dimensions of human personality. It shows strength of spirit and firmness of will.

It has a link with the skills in sports, in fact the athletes are always asked for training: *"Surely you know that many runners take part in a race but only one of them wins the prize... Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline, in order to be crowned with a wreath that will not last; but we do it for one that will last forever."*(1 Cor. 9, 24-25).

Self-control implies the ability to renounce, but it is a voluntary renunciation for a good that strongly attracts us.

The charity in the interpersonal relations (or “The relational charity”): this is the target. We are not savages, but we are people who promote the dignity of each person through a lovable language and behaviour. St Thomas used to say that a matter of justice do not force anyone to live with unpleasant people: a demand of justice first must be a matter of charity.

LCF SECOND INTERNATIONAL MANUAL OF FORMATION