



“The essentialness of charity; living in small things.

CHARITY MUST NOT CONSIST IN FEELINGS BUT IN WORKS”

(St. Therese, MC 13v)

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(Translation from Portuguese to English by Lucienne Delaquiz OCDS)

The subject of this conference leads me to look upon Saint Therese and perceive the practical orientations she offers us for living “*our vocation is love*”, the theme of our 2017 OCDS Congress.

I wish to recall that 20 years ago the Church proclaimed Therese Doctor of the science of love (October 19, 1997).

Today, Therese of Lisieux continues reminding us with her example of the centrality of love. Love lived in the small things of everyday life, giving us liberty to follow Jesus and develop a constant trust in the Merciful Love of Jesus’ Father for us.

I intend to point out the interconnection between some central moments of the life of Therese of Lisieux and the doctrine of agape love present in Benedict XVI encyclical *Deus caritas est*. Therese’s life tells us exactly what Benedict XVI wished to demonstrate in his first encyclical letter, “love is possible, and we are able to live it because we were created in God’s image.” Living thus helps “the light of God enter into the world”¹, a world so many times in darkness and without hope. As he himself had said some years before, when still a cardinal: “Starting from the wisdom of a heart burning in love for Jesus, Therese reaches mystical

¹ Benedict XVI *Deus caritas est* – December 25, 2005 (=DCE) 39. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* = EG; I Quote Therese Writings: MA = Manuscript A; MB= Manuscript B; MC= Manuscript C; P= Poems; LT = Letters; YN = Yellow Notebook

intelligence... she knows the type of wisdom which reveals itself only to those who have found in the cross the key to their existence”².

With an incredible realism in front of the fugacity of all things, she concentrates in the essentialness of love, “an existence rooted totally and only in the love of God”³ and sings “My life is but an instant, a passing hour. / My life is but a day that escapes and flies away. / O my God! You know that to love you on earth / I only have today!...” (Poetry 5,1).

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Introduction

As well known, we are living in a post-modern culture – at least, in the West and in our developed countries – there is a shift in the order of values: technology and nature have been placed in the center of interest. The human being and his search for truth have lost their place to a *post-truth*⁴, which generates a mentality characterized by fast and virtual. According to some people, all this has provoked real “anthropological mutation”⁵. A mentality which exalts emotions and intends to have people keep up appearances, in a continuous euphoria, unable to keep silence, at the mercy of immediacy in fulfilling unbridled desires for goods and pleasures.

Regardless of such technological advance in information and communication, from a social point of view, individualism and loneliness increase. Market economy leads to “the globalization of indifference” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 54).

When it comes to affective relationship and love, many “heresies” are being promoted: abortion, euthanasia, same marriage, consumerism, etc. Religious symbols are being eliminated from public places, etc.... Everything done “in the name of love”!

² Conference published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 7, 1998, on the 50th anniversary of John Paul II doctorate thesis.

³ Edith Stein, Conference “*Education of Young People in light of Catholic Faith*”, Berlin, January, 1933.

⁴ Word chosen by the *Oxford Dictionary* as the word of the year in 2016 and which means: “Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Cf <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth>.

⁵ Bento XVI, *Homily for Vespers October 9, 2011*, Chartreuse Serra San Bruno.

In view of this reality we ask ourselves: is it still possible to live the commandment of love today? What is the sense of Christian love? How can we live this virtue, so essential to human life, in deeds and not only virtually?

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face (1873-1897) helps us, with the example of her life, to answer these questions. During her short life, she came to understand that “*Charity must not consist in feelings but in works*” (Ste. Thérèse MC 13v). She became a privileged witness to the science of love (MB 1f). Living it radically in her daily actions. (Cf. MA 32 f). She learned that love has wings, it is free and freeing: “with love, I do not run, I fly...” (MA 80v). She lived intensely and heroically “fought” to live it. (MC 12v-13v).

1. “... I felt charity enter my heart, the need to forget myself to make others happy, and from that time I have been happy!” (MA 45v).

Without doubt, the genius and originality of Therese’s wisdom in the science of love is due to her docility to the Holy Spirit, granted to those who are small and humble (Lc 10, 21-22). Following the interior Master of sanctification, she lets the unconditional Love of God transform her in a very short period of time.

Woman of radical choices, even as a little girl, Therese “chooses everything”; she does not want to be half a saint (cf. MA 10f-v). This, thanks to the education she received in her family by her saintly parents Louis and Zeli and by her sisters. She is continuously looking for truth and thus lives her surrender and abandonment to Love in the Carmel of Lisieux, fulfilling her vocation: “In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love” (MB 3v). At the end of her life she can exclaim: “I do not repent having surrendered myself to Love” (Yellow Notebook=YN, September 30, 1897).

Benedict XVI had this same awareness of the centrality of love in the life of each human being when he wrote his first encyclical letter, *Deus caritas est*. It came to fill in a gap existing on this subject in the Magisterium of the popes. In *Deus caritas est* “the themes “God”, “Christ” and

"Love" are fused together as the central guide of Christian faith"⁶. His concern is to clarify the meaning of love. One of the most used and distorted words in current culture, with far-reaching and very different uses and meanings. Benedict affirms that the foundation of human life is *the love of God* for us (agape). To understand this truth is to catch a glimpse of *who God is and who we are* (cf DCE 2)⁷. It is interesting to note that the essential elements of Benedict XVI were already present in the life and teachings of the saint of Lisieux.

On Christmas of 1886, Therese lived in a situation which marked her parting from childhood, "the grace of Christmas" (Cf MC 44v; 86f; CT 201). Since then, she recovered the strength of soul she had lost when 4 years old, due to the trauma of her mother's death. She was entering the third period of her life, starting "to run a giant's course" in the perfection of love. (MA 44v). Here is how she puts it:

"On that night of light began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven. ... He made of me a fisher of souls. I experienced a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a desire I hadn't experienced so intensely before...In short, I felt charity enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I've been happy!" "(MA 45v).

She will experience in the following months an incredible human and spiritual growth: "Now that I was free from scruples and morbid sensitiveness, my mind developed. I had always loved what was noble and beautiful, and about this time I was seized with a passionate desire for learning". (MA 46v) She took up "special classes of History and Science" and also some

⁶ Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the participants at the meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" . 23 de janeiro de 2006. Cf http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/pt/speeches/2006/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060123_cor-unum.html.

⁷ Benedict XVI writes in the *first part* of DCE (nn 1-18) "some essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man, together with the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love". *The second part* (nn. 19-39) is more concrete since it deals the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbor. And here he insists on some fundamental elements of love of neighbor, so as to "generate in the world a renewed dynamism of commitment in the human answer to divine love" (DCE 1). The courses of charitable actions in the institutions of the Church and of society will be posteriorly developed in his social encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (2009).

drawing lessons with Celine (MA 52f). From the spiritual point of view, Jesus was instructing her “sweetly in the secrets of His love” (MA 49f).

We can see that this grace provoked in Therese an openness to others. It arouses love as a gift of oneself, “an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God” (DCE 6).

2. “Was it not at the sight of the wounds of Jesus... that my thirst for souls entered my heart?” (MA 46v)

Shortly after the conversion of Christmas, upon looking at the picture of Our Lord on the Cross, Therese received another grace, she awoke to the apostolic dimension (MA 45v; July 1887). Here is how she describes it:

“One Sunday, looking at a picture of Our Lord on the Cross, I was struck by the blood flowing from one of the divine hands. I felt a great pang of sorrow when thinking this blood was falling to the ground without anyone’s hastening to gather it up. I was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive the divine dew. I understood I was then to pour it out upon souls. The cry of Jesus on the Cross sounded continually in my heart: “I thirst!” These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a thirst for souls. “

At this moment Therese, as does the “theologian pope”, sees Christ on the Cross as a concrete manifestation of the invisible Love of God. “His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ, as John puts it, (cf. 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical



Letter: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. (DCE 12).

Therese is then 14 years old. Moved by the desire to save souls, she said: I “wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a *thirst for souls*... As yet, it was not the souls of priests that attracted me, but those of *great sinners*. *I burned* with the desire to snatch them from the eternal flames...” She dedicates herself with all her might to the conversion of Pranzini, her “first child” (MA 45v/46v).

After her discovery of the Love of Christ on the Cross, Therese finds the direction for her life and love in contemplative life. However very young, her entrance into the Carmel of Lisieux (April 9, 1888 - MA 69r), before the required age, is a manifestation of her audacious, intense and apostolic love. She thus wants to respond to the call of Jesus.

“The reason I came to Carmel was stated at the feet of Jesus in the Host during the canonical examination which preceded my profession” (September 2, 1890): “I came to save souls, and especially to pray for priests” (MA 70f). “... I came to Carmel, solely to respond to the call of Jesus” (MC 8v); she wishes to fight within a family “for the glory of the King of Heavens” (MC 9f).

In Carmel Therese unites herself to Jesus’ surrender and she is drawn into Jesus’ act of self-oblation perpetuated in the Eucharist. She is sustained by “the communion in his body and blood”, and it “becomes union with Him” (DCE 13). A union which had begun when she made her first communion (May 8, 1884), as she recalls: “it was no longer simply a look, it was a complete fusion” between Jesus and Therese (MA 35f). From then on, she understands that “Eucharistic communion includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn”, that “a Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.” (DCE 14). This is what she highlights in her poem *The Sacristans of Carmel*⁸.

⁸ “But his love has chosen us.
He is our Spouse, our Friend.
We are also hosts
Which Jesus wants to change into Himself.

Sublime mission of the Priest,
You become our mission here below.
Transformed by the Divine Master,
It is He who guides our steps.

At the same time “Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself”. Eucharist communion projects her outside herself toward Jesus and “unity with all Christians... Love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself.” (DCE 14)⁹.

3. “Yes, I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to Him, the more also do I love my Sisters”. (MC 12v)

On Trinity Sunday, June 9, 1895, Therese accepted “the infinite love” of Jesus and offered herself to Him as a “victim in holocaust to merciful love” (Or 6; cf. MA 84f). A year later she receives the “grace of understanding what charity is” (MC 11v). She is living in the night of faith which she calls the “dark tunnel” (MC 4v-7v)¹⁰.

In these circumstances, she was advised by her confessor to pray the Creed many times. She goes so far as to write it with her own blood and carry it on her heart. These are moments of intense interior suffering when she “sings what she wants to believe” (MC 7v). As for her body, tuberculosis moves on and provokes hemoptysis (the night from April 2 to 3, 1896). Everything tells her that her end is near.

Upon request of Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart, she writes Manuscript B on September 1896.

We must help the apostles
By our prayers, our love.
Their battlefields are ours.
For them we fight each day” (P 40, 6-8).

⁹ “To be Your Spouse, to be a Carmelite, and by my union with You to be the Mother of souls, should not this suffice me? And yet it is not so. No doubt, these three privileges sum up my true vocation: Carmelite, Spouse, Mother, and yet I feel within me other vocations. I feel the vocation of the WARRIOR, [35] THE PRIEST, THE APOSTLE, THE DOCTOR, THE MARTYR. Finally, I feel the need and the desire of carrying out the most heroic deeds for You, O Jesus. I feel within my soul the courage of the Crusader, the Papal Guard, and I would want to die on the field of battle in defense of the Church. I feel in me the vocation of the PRIEST. With what love, O Jesus, I would carry You in my hands when, at my voice, You would come down from heaven. And with what love would I give You to souls! But alas! while desiring to be a Priest, I admire and envy the humility of St. Francis of Assisi and I feel the vocation of [45] imitating him in refusing the sublime dignity of the Priesthood. (MB 2v).

¹⁰ “Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this precious treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys. He permitted my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness, and that the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, be no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment. This trial was to last not a few days or a few weeks, it was not to be extinguished until the hour set by God Himself and this hour has not yet come. I would like to be able to express what I feel, but alas! I believe this is impossible. One would have to travel through this dark tunnel to understand its darkness. I will try to explain it by a comparison”. (MC 5v).

It is the most profound testimony on the Mystery of Christian love¹¹ in which she explains her “little doctrine” and recalls the graces received during the previous months and the discovery of her personal vocation in the Church.

Explaining her “little doctrine”, (MB 1f), Therese starts from the principle that only love can “make us agreeable to God” and that it is the sole object of her desires. “... for love to be fully satisfied it must lower itself, and lower itself down to nothing and transform this nothing into fire ... Oh, Jesus, I know, love is only paid with love; this is why I looked for and found a way to relieve my heart paying back Love with Love” (MB 3v-4f). And the road that leads to the “divine furnace” is that of charity and abandonment, “the trust of a little child who falls asleep without fear in his Father’s arms” (MB 1f). Jesus needs only our love and our gratitude.

So, how are we to love in deeds according to Therese?

Above all with a humble acknowledgement of her weakness. Afterwards, with bold offering of herself as a victim of Love (MB 3v). In daily life, this means “she refuses no sacrifice, however small, a sight, a word, she seizes the opportunity of the smallest things to perform them for love ...” (MB 4f-v), even in the midst of sufferings and storms (cf MB 5f). If she gives in to imperfections, she keeps on trusting in Love for He never turns his back on her. To Him she trustingly exposes “her infidelities in detail”. Should she slumber, waking up she “keeps on with her work of love” (MB 5f).

Allowing the flame of charity enlighten the night of faith through which she is living, Therese comes to understand the meaning of living Jesus’ commandment passed on to us at the Last Supper: *to love even as he has loved us*, to the point of giving his life for us. Her awareness of being helpless and incapable of *loving as Jesus has* led her to allow herself to be attracted by His love, just as the butterfly by the light of the flame: “I ask Jesus to draw me to the flame

¹¹ John Paul II conferring Therese of Lisieux with the title of Doctor of the Universal Church (1997), in his letter *Divini amoris scientia* (=DAS), recognizes that in her *autobiographical Manuscripts* (Ms ABC) we find “ the most beautiful pages she devoted to trusting abandonment into God’s hands, to unity between love of God and love of neighbor, to her missionary vocation in the Church.” (DAS 6). Further on, stressing her wisdom, the Pope also highlights the unity between a trusting faith in God and the practice of fraternal charity. She herself recognizes this and asks Jesus : “To love You as You love me, I must borrow your own love” (MsC 35r); and confesses: “the more I am united to Him, the more I love my sisters” (Ms C 12v). Acknowledging this truth, John Paul II adds: “Enlightened by the revealed Word, Therese wrote brilliant pages on the unity between love of God and love of neighbor (cf. *Ms C*, 11v-19r); and she identified with Jesus’ prayer at the Last Supper as the expression of her intercession for the salvation of all (cf. *Ms C*, 34r-35r). (DAS 9).

of his love which so closely unites me to Him so He might live and act in me" (MC 36r). She thus unites "the love of God to the love of others", since "in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God" as will put it Benedict XVI. (Cf. DCE 15; MA 14f).

With respect to fraternal love, she does not consider only the natural qualities of the sisters. She knows that "perfect charity consists in bearing with the faults of others, in not being surprised at their weakness, in being edified by the smallest acts of virtue we see them practice". She has a special understanding that "charity cannot remain hidden in the depths our hearts" ... (MC 12f). We all know her charitable actions towards Sister Therese of Saint Augustin or other gestures which are unnoticed by the Community¹². She is aware that "love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God." (DCE 16). Because "love is not merely a sentiment. ... love is never "finished" and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself". Therese loves "in God and with God, the person" for whom she has no sympathy or whom she does not even know (Cf DCE 17-18).

Her loving knowledge of Jesus translates into fraternal love for the sisters of her religious Community and overflows into a mission contemplating time and eternity. We are all well aware of her missionary zeal and her desires to leave for China. We also know that as a spiritual godmother she offered constant prayers and sacrifices for Father Bellière, entrusted to her by Mother Agnes in 1895, and Father Roulland, entrusted to her by Mother Gonzaga on

¹² "There is in the Community a Sister who has the faculty of displeasing me in everything, in her ways, her words, her character, everything seems very disagreeable to me. And still, she is a holy religious who must be very pleasing to God. Not wishing to give in to the natural antipathy I was experiencing, I told myself that charity must not consist in feelings but in works; then [14r^o] I set myself to doing for this Sister what I would do for the person I loved the most. Each time I met her I prayed to God for her, offering Him all her virtues and merits. I felt this was pleasing to Jesus, for there is no artist who doesn't love to receive praise for his works, and Jesus, the Artist of souls, is happy when we don't stop at the exterior, but, penetrating into the inner sanctuary where He chooses to dwell, we admire its beauty. I wasn't content simply with praying very much for this Sister who gave me so many struggles, but I took care to render her all the services possible, and when I was tempted to answer her back in a disagreeable manner, I was content with giving her my most friendly smile, and with changing the subject of the conversation, for the Imitation says: "It is better to leave each one in his own opinion than to enter into arguments."

Frequently, when I was at recreation (I mean during the work periods) and had occasion to work with this Sister, I used to run away like a deserter whenever my struggles became too violent. As she was absolutely unaware of my feelings for her, never did she suspect the motives for my conduct and she remained convinced that her character was very pleasing to me. One day at recreation she asked in almost these words: "Would you tell me, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus, what attracts you so much toward me; every time you look at me, I see you smile?" Ah! what attracted me was Jesus hidden in the depths of her soul; Jesus who makes sweet what is most bitter. I answered that I was smiling because I was happy to see her (it is understood that I did not add that this was from a spiritual standpoint)". (Ms C 13v- 14f).

May 30, 1896. As for eternity, she wants to keep on working for the salvation of souls till the end of time (MB 3f). Her profound desire to “love Jesus and make him loved” is her ambition for after her death, as we can read in some of her letters¹³. Life or death is indifferent to her: “What matters life, what matters death? Love is my peace, my happiness”!¹⁴

4. “I feel especially that my mission is about to begin, ... of making God loved as I love Him, of giving my little way to souls”. (CJ 17 July)

This was the desire of Therese of Lisieux expressed in the last days of her existence on earth. How, then, does her testimony help us live the virtue of charity which “will never end” (1 Cor 13: 8), without which “*I am nothing*” (1 Cor 13,2) and by which we will be judged in the evening of life? (Cf S John of the Cross, *Quotes* 58)?

While today’s society compels us to face innumerable challenges to remain consistent in our lives as Christians and Carmelites, the example of the saints leads us to allow the desire of Therese de Lisieux inspire us: “I would like to enlighten souls as did the Prophets, the Doctors...” (MB 3f).

In the Church “the saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love”. (DCE 40). In their lives “one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them. ” (cf DCE 42). Therese of Lisieux testifies to this clearly.

It is urgent to learn from Jesus as did Therese. Being a man, He taught us to be humans and to love with all our being: body and soul, *eros* which ends up into *ágape*. The wisdom springing from Christian charity rejects spiritualism altogether and manifest itself as Incarnation spirituality. “The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism” (DCE 12)¹⁵. The Gospel shows us Jesus concretely loving each and every one of those

¹³ Cfr. LT 219, 220, 221; Poem 47 dedicated to Teófilo Vénard; Poem 48 (My weapons); Recreation 8.

¹⁴ P 45, de 21 de janeiro de 1897.

¹⁵ “We have seen that God's *eros* for man is also totally *agape*. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives. (DCE 10). “... on the one hand, the continuity between Christian faith in God and the search developed by reason and by the world of religions; on the other, however, a novelty appears that surpasses all human research, the novelty that only God himself can reveal to us: the novelty of a love that moved God to take on a human face, even to take on flesh and

for whom he surrendered his life. It is the experience of this Love which moves us to follow the Person of Jesus (cf. DCE 1). If we allow Him to attract us we necessarily will walk together with others. “I understand, Lord, that when a soul allows herself to be captivated by the odor of your ointments, she cannot run alone, all the souls whom she loves follow in her trail; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for You”. (MC 34f; cf. 35v).

Charity, as a divine gift, requires me to be aware of the real and concrete existence of each person. Only thus can I like and love my neighbor. When I notice my neighbor, I perform an act of charity towards him; I see him as someone created by the love of God, redeemed by Christ. It is only on this condition that the one and same love, present in each action performed in charity, is in truth participation in divine charity.

Therese lived charity radically and heroically with concrete attitudes in her community life; and she did it with a “smile” even when it was difficult to do so. (Ms C 14f, 28v, 29v). It was charity similar to that of the Good Samaritan, the one taught by Jesus: compassionate and in concrete acts¹⁶. This reminds us that the virtue of charity permeating our daily relations

blood, the entire human being. The *eros* of God is not only a primordial cosmic power; it is love that created man and that bows down over him, as the Good Samaritan bent down to the wounded and robbed man, lying on the side of the road that went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. (Benedict XVI, Address January 23, 2006).

¹⁶ Pope Francis on occasion of the International Congress for the 10 years of the encyclical “*Deus Caritas Est*” on February 26, 2016, thus expressed himself: “How I wish that everyone in the Church, every institution, every activity would show that God loves man! The mission that our charitable organizations carry out is important, because they provide so many poor people with a more dignified and human life, which is needed more than ever. But this mission is of utmost importance because, not with words, but with *concrete* love it can make every person feel loved by the Father, loved as his son or daughter and destined for eternal life with him”. (*Francis to participants in the International Congress on the encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” of Benedict XVI on the tenth anniversary of its publication- Feb.26, 2016*). In ChL 16. “We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation* that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ”.

Today as never before, it is urgent for all Christians to resume the path of evangelical renewal, accepting generously the apostolic invitation to “be saints in all deeds”. The extraordinary Synod of 1985, 20 years after the Council, appropriately insisted on this urgency: «The Church, being a mystery, should be seen as a signal and instrument of holiness ... Saints have always been the origin and source of renewal in the most difficult circumstances during the whole story of the Church. Today there is a lack of saints for whom we should diligently ask. » ... “But lay people are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way, they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. ». (LG 31) Thus, living and working in the world is reality for lay people, not only in an anthropological and social sense, but also specifically theological and ecclesial because it is in their in-the-world situation that God manifests his plan and communicates them a special vocation to « seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God ». (LG 31).

expresses our participation in the royal “munus” of Christ¹⁷ and allows us to live integral ecology¹⁸.

5. “I understood that love comprised all vocations, that love was everything, that it embraced all times and places.... in a word, that it was eternal!” (MB 3v)

Therese writes out of obedience and it is through her writings (MA; MB; MC, Poems, Recreation, Letters and paintings) that her doctrine is made known to us. They also are other examples of concrete love in her life. She is “an *authentic teacher of faith and Christian life*”¹⁹. How many people and institutions of charity exist on the face of the earth who have been inspired by her life and doctrine!

When she lived in her family, Therese used to give alms to the poor in the name of her family or even save her coins and offer them for the Works of the Propagation of Faith, (cf. MA 11v; 15f; 22v). In Carmel, it was different. Living in absolute poverty her only resources, besides fulfilling faithfully and the best she could the tasks confided to her by the Community, were “prayer and sacrifice” for sinners, priests and missionaries. (MA 50f; MC 31v).

Those are examples in which I detect the social aspect of *Christian charity*. It is what is evident in the second part of DCE. Benedict XVI ponders over the social aspect of charity in the Church, “Community of love”, and which needs organization. It is a consequence of loving our neighbor practiced as a service (*diaconia*), which is part of the “fundamental structure of the

¹⁷ ChL n. 41: “Through charity towards one's neighbor, the lay faithful exercise and manifest their participation in the kingship of Christ, that is, in the power of the Son of man who “came not to be served but to serve” (*Mk 10:45*). They live and manifest such a kingship in a most simple yet exalted manner, possible for everyone at all times because charity is the highest gift offered by the Spirit for building up the Church (cf. *1 Cor 13:13*) and for the good of humanity. In fact, *charity gives life and sustains the works of solidarity that look to the total needs of the human being*.” ChL 59: “every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the “places in time” where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility-as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture-are the occasions ordained by Providence for a “continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity ».” (AA 4)

¹⁸ “Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms”. (Francisco, *Laudato si'*, 230).

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Divinis amoris scientia* 8.

Church together with the proclamation of the word of God *and of the witness to the word and the liturgy* (cf. DCE 21.25). The Church does not replace the duties of the State. However, it should contribute, through the activities of lay people, in establishing an order of justice in Society, including political activity to be performed as “social charity”. “The Church can never be exempted from practicing charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love”. (cf. DCE 29).

Concrete means to practice charity as mentioned in DCE can take up various forms, such as, cooperation with civil and philanthropic institutions, with non-profitable organizations, voluntary work, participation in services for the benefit of life (against drugs, human traffic, helping refugees and immigrants, etc.). In this respect, it is important to have professional competence for the services to be performed and equally important is to be moved right from the beginning by an “encounter with God in Christ” which “awakens love and opens spirits to others”. As a result,” love of neighbor will no longer be a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. *Gal 5:6*)”. (DCE 31 a).

We must go beyond political partisan, since “We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programmes. The Christian's programme —the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is “a heart which sees”. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly”, voluntarily. (DCE 31 b-c).

Facing the immense needs of so many people and nations who overcome the capacity or the possibility to correspond adequately: “In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord” (DCE 35), without falling into an arrogant contempt for man. “Immersed like everyone else in the dramatic complexity of historical events, they remain unshakably certain that God is our Father and loves us, even when his silence remains incomprehensible”. (DCE 38).

Therese lived the helplessness of faith trusting and believing in the Merciful Love of the Father. She accepted a place around the table with sinners and atheists and there believed and loved. She loved in a creative way in circumstances of absence, and also with respect to people who were naturally antipathetic; in them she saw Jesus...

Thus, Therese continues being an inspiration for social and charitable activities.

“Ah! it is Jesus alone who can give such a value to our actions; let us love Him with all our strength....” (LT May 22, 1894)

In Therese’s life “the love story between God” and her grew with her. It gradually accomplished the “communion of wills”, “of thought and sentiment”, making them increasingly coincide with those of Christ²⁰. It was a communion of life born from her “self-abandonment to God” (cf DCE 17; MA 61v; 67f; 82f; MB 1v). He became her “joy” manifesting itself even in the midst of many sufferings (cf MC 4v). Her understanding of love is valid for all times, for she knows that “I understood, too, that Our Lord’s love is revealed as perfectly in the simplest soul who resists His grace in nothing as in the most excellent soul” (MA 2v).

During her short life among us Therese walked towards the definite encounter of the One whom she had so much loved and at the end pronounced her last declaration of love: “My God... I love you” (CJ September 30, 1897). Therese was then beginning another “giant course” in eternity, where she contemplates, free from veils and in an eternal face to face, The One she had infinitely loved on Earth. She now can be missionary to “the end of times” (MB 3f), interceding and helping so many friends with her prayers and presence ²¹.

“Charity gave me the key to my vocation” (MB 3v). Living faith which works through love.

²⁰ “You know, O my God, I have never desired anything but to love You, and I am ambitious for no other glory. [35r°] Your Love has gone before me, and it has grown with me, and now it is an abyss whose depths I cannot fathom. Love attracts love, and, my Jesus, my love leaps toward Yours; it would like to fill the abyss which attracts it, but alas! it is not even like a [5] drop of dew lost in the ocean! For me to love You as You love me, I would have to borrow Your own Love, and then only would I be at rest” (MC 34 v-35f; cf. DCE 17-18).

²¹ The capacity Therese de Lisieux has to lead people to Jesus was acknowledged by John Paul II when he proclaimed her Doctor of the Church : “Thérèse of the Child Jesus possesses an extraordinary wisdom and with her doctrine helps so many men and women of every state in life to know and love Jesus Christ and his Gospel.” (DAS 4).

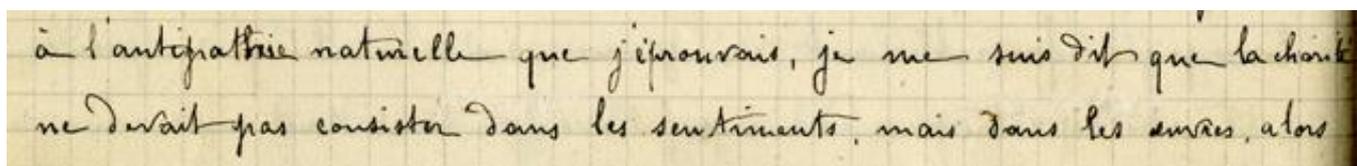
(Gál 5,6) in concrete deeds, as did Therese of Lisieux, we establish a contact point between time and eternity, we bring into this world Light and Love which is God. Only being transformed by Love will we live the so beautiful theme of our Congress: *Our vocation is love*. This will guarantee the survival of the person, the family and any community. Love which becomes service is a condition to be recognized as true disciples of Jesus. (Jo 13,34-35).

Living on Love is sailing unceasingly,
 Sowing peace and joy in every heart.
 Beloved Pilot, Charity impels me,
 For I see you in my sister souls.
 Charity is my only star.
 In its brightness, I sail straight ahead.
 I've my motto written on my sail:
 "Living on Love."

(Ste. Therese, Poetry 17, 8)

Quotes from the writings of were taken from site: <http://www.archives-carmel-lisieux.fr/carmel>

Church documents were taken from site: www.vatican.va



Picture 1: (<http://www.archives-carmel-lisieux.fr/english/carmel/index.php/c11-20/c13/c13v>: «charity does not consists in feelings but in deeds » (MC 13 v)