



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** San Damaso courtyard

Wednesday, 9 September 2020 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Catechesis “Healing the world”: 6. *Love and the common good*

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; otherwise, 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 division: by seeking economic or political advantages, generating or exacerbating conflicts. Others are simply not concerned about the suffering of others; they pass by and go their own way (cf. *Lk* 10:30-32). They are the devotees of Pontius Pilate, washing their hands of the suffering of others.

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 (cf. 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 also those who do not love me, I also love those who do not know me and I also love those who are strangers, and even those who make me suffer or whom I consider enemies (cf. *Mt* 5:44).

This is Christian wisdom, this is the attitude of Jesus. And the highest point of holiness, let's put it that way, is to love one's enemies, which is not easy. Certainly, to love everyone, including enemies, is difficult. I would say it is an art! But an art that can be learned and improved. True love that makes us fruitful and free is always expansive and inclusive. This love cares, heals and does good. Often, a caress does more good than many arguments, a caress 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 (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 1907-1912), including the relationship with nature (cf. Encyclical *Laudato Si'* [LS], 231). Since we are social and political beings, one of the highest expressions of love is specifically social and political, which is decisive for 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 “civilization of love”, as [Saint Paul VI](#) loved to say^[1] and, in turn, [Saint John Paul II](#). Without this inspiration the egotistical, indifferent, throw-away culture prevails — that is, to discard anyone I do not like, whom I cannot love or those who seem to me as not useful in society.

Today at the entrance, a couple said to me: “Pray for 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, we help him”. All of their lives as parents for that disabled son. This is love. And the enemies, the political adversaries, according to our opinion appear to be politically and socially disabled, but they seem to be that way. Only God knows whether they truly are or not. But we must love them, we must dialogue, we must build this civilization of love, this political and social civilization of the unity of all humanity. All of this is the opposite of war, division, envy, even wars in families: 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. (cf. CCC, 1905-1906). If a person only seeks his or her own good, that person is selfish. Instead, a person is more of a person 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.

A virus that does not recognize 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, and 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 for the common good emerge.^[2]

And this is true 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 and bears fruit. If you in your family, in your neighbourhood start out with envy, with fights,

there will be “war” in the end. Instead, if you start out with love, sharing 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 exacerbated. Therefore, be careful not to build on sand (cf. *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 does not often have a good reputation. But we should not resign ourselves to this negative vision, but instead react to it by showing in deeds that good politics is possible, indeed dutiful^[4], one that puts the human person and the common good at the centre. If you read the 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, root their action in ethical principles and nurture it with social and political love. Christians, in a particular way the lay faithful, are called to give a good example of this and can do so 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 community, national and international level and even in harmony with the environment (cf. *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. 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 all together for the *common good*, not only for our own good but for the common good of all.

[1] *Message for the 10th World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1977: AAS 68 (1976), 709.

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

[3] *Ibid.*, 10.

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

APPEAL

Today for the first time the International Day to Protect Education from Attack — in areas of armed conflict — is being celebrated. I invite you to pray for students who are seriously deprived of the right to education due to war and terrorism. I urge the international community to do its utmost to ensure that the structures that must protect young students be respected. May efforts that guarantee safe environments for their education not wane, above all in situations of humanitarian crises.

Special greetings

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. May the Lord's grace sustain all of you in bringing the Father's love to our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. Upon all of you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly my thought goes to *the elderly, young people, the sick and newlyweds*. Yesterday we celebrated the liturgical memorial of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. May her example and her maternal intercession inspire and accompany your life.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our reflections on the current pandemic in the light of the Church's social doctrine, we have seen that the common good must be the goal of our individual and collective efforts to heal our wounded world. Our Christian commitment in this regard is inspired by God's unconditional love, which calls us to set no limits on our love for others and our concern for their welfare. As members of the one human family, our wellbeing is a public not simply a private good. By placing every human person and the common good at the centre of our cultural, economic and political activity, we will create a genuinely healthy, just and peaceful world, and so contribute to the building of a true "civilization of love". The coronavirus heeds no cultural or political barrier or distinction – nor must we impose any barrier or distinction on our love as we work for the common good in responding to the grave problems brought to the fore by the pandemic, in fidelity to our Christian vocation.
