

## **CHOOSING TO EXERCISE THE POWER OF LOVE**

In the December 2010 National Mailing, we wrote about *Developing an Intimate Relationship with Christ* through an authentic life of Piety. The Cursillos of Christianity Movement provides us with a sure method to enable us to live what is fundamental for being a Christian in our God-given environments. This method is our interior tripod of Piety (Heart), Study (Intelligence), and Action (Will). These three attributes correspond to the basic functions of the human person; namely, to think, to want, and to act; actions which themselves correspond with the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love.

Let us remember that God loved us first. How do we know this? Because our Lord Jesus Christ, in doing the Will of the Father, incarnated Himself in humanity in order to redeem it, and bring us the knowledge, life, and love of the Father prolonged through and in the Holy Spirit who makes Christ present in our life, living temples of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was so obedient to the Will of the Father that He underwent His Passion and Death and in so doing, died for you and me. In these actions, He was consciously introducing into this world an original love which was unknown until He himself lived it. By doing so, He was able to concretely and undeniably demonstrate how He understood and manifested His love: “No one can give a greater proof of his love than by laying down his life for his friends.” (Jn. 15:13)

In the February 2011 National Mailing we read about *Discovering Self, Christ, and Others* through the means of Study. Cursillos of Christianity presents us with a different concept of study from what we are used to. To most people, when they hear the word ‘study’, they immediately relate it to its academic aspect. Cursillo presents the concept of study in a new dimension. Cursillo defines Christian study as a progressive search for the meaning of life itself, the most basic question of humanity.

We are called to perfection, in the image and likeness of God. Study is an important part of developing ourselves as a person and of understanding what a human being is, and what our life is. All persons study. What they study is governed by their ideal. Study is a natural quality of the human being, and we should study to live efficiently and productively. Study calls for the person to be open to God, Self, and Others.

In this article, we will explore the consequence of *Choosing to Exercise the Power of Love* in and through apostolic action. It is important to continue discovering the love of Jesus through our study. We come to know Jesus better by using our intellect and forming our mind to the mind of Christ. There are many ways in which God reveals Himself to us: in Scripture, the lives of the Saints, nature, and the teachings of the Church. As God reveals Himself to us, both our mind and heart respond. Henri Nouwen stated it this way: “Spiritual reading is food for our souls. As we slowly let the words of the Bible or a good spiritual book enter into our minds and descend into our hearts, we become different people. The Word gradually becomes flesh in us and transforms our whole being. Thus spiritual reading is a continuing incarnation of the divine Word within us.”

It has been said that Action is the perfection of piety, dedicating our very lives to God by aligning our will to His will, and then doing what we have been asked to do. Action is responding to the command of Jesus written in John 13:34-35. “I give you a new commandment – to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are to love one another. Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.” Simply stated, Action is exercising the power to love God, self, and others just as Jesus has loved us.

Typically, after a Cursillo weekend, the Cursillistas' hearts are burning with fire because they have experienced the deep penetrating love of Jesus. In addition to experiencing this love, the Cursillista develops a better understanding of the role of the laity and understands that they are a unique creation of God with a special purpose. There is an urgency to act! The Cursillo Weekend can create such an interior restlessness that many are inclined to leave the Weekend and immediately get involved in as many church activities and ministries as possible and tell everybody about Jesus and the Cursillo Movement.

This burning and impulsive desire to act often occurs before we have even begun to more fully develop our relationship with Jesus or taken the time to understand His will for us. In many ways, it is like soldiers running into battle without training, weapons, or orders. Similarly, it is like someone engaging in an Olympic event without proper training. In either case, we may have some early successes, but we are very vulnerable to failure. Undoubtedly, many good things have come from these actions, but this is not the type of action we are talking about when we discuss living the third leg of our tripod.

Anyone can perform acts of kindness such as working in a soup kitchen, visiting the sick, helping a neighbor, etc., including Christians and non Christians. Additionally, any Catholic can participate in parish activities and ministries with little or no relationship with Jesus. This is action, but it is not apostolic action. Apostolic Action is action that is taken because of a genuine love for God and neighbor, and it occurs when one dies to self and allows the Grace and love of God to penetrate his or her entire being. Then, one can share this love with others by actually living the Gospel just as Jesus did. It is more about "being" than "doing".

Apostolic Action that is not rooted in the love of Christ is fragile and can quickly fade in times of trials and temptation. We can often generate sufficient energy and enthusiasm ourselves to persevere in certain Christian acts. However, this is a forced behavior and it is not part of our natural being. If our action does not stem from our love of God and neighbor, we will always be vulnerable to a failure to act. This type of action lacks the power of love, which is the greatest force in all of creation.

Our Apostolic action will be more efficacious when it is done in and through the power of love – the desire to serve the other. St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:3-4, tells us: "If I gave everything I have to the poor people, and if I were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever." Love is patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way....."

There is nothing timid or ambiguous about these words from scripture. Think how incredibly hard it would be to actually give away everything you owned to the poor. Sometimes, it is difficult to even let go of some of our excess. To give away everything would be a tremendous effort. To be burned alive for preaching the Gospel is almost too much to think about. Nevertheless, the divine Word of God says: without love, these actions would have no value whatsoever. This is a very sobering thought, and it helps us to see the need for a change of heart, mind, and will. Performing all the duties in the world would mean nothing if they are done without love.

Jesus wants to fill our hearts with His love so we can in turn love others. To do this, we need to rely upon His Grace, nurture our relationship with Him, and follow His ways . . . His criteria. Then we will be better prepared to make the decision to love with conviction and constancy. Choosing to love is an act of the will, and it involves making decisions about how we choose to live our lives. Jesus said: No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends (John 15:13). The giving of life isn't necessarily death but rather the willingness to share our life in friendship with others.

The Piety and Study legs of the tripod are what prepare the heart and mind and enable us to engage the will to exercise the power of love through our actions. Eduardo Bonnín said: “Man finds Himself more in the reaction than in the action.” As mentioned previously, we can force ourselves to do almost anything, feed the poor, care for the sick, etc. However, it will be in something like a chance encounter with the poor or finding a relative in need where we will discover our true feelings and the condition of our hearts. Discovering the reaction of the heart and mind helps to see the things that may need to change. If we spend the time to come to know and experience the deep love of Jesus, and if we use our minds to better understand the mind of Christ, we are then well prepared for the encounters with the many people God has put into our lives – in our environments. With the right disposition, we will be in a position to love them as God loves us. God revealed to St. Catherine of Siena, that the more the soul grows in love for God, the more the soul will grow in love for its neighbor.

In his document *Evangelization Through Conversion* Eduardo Bonnín stated: “When we speak of “Evangelization” in the context of the Cursillo, we do not only mean it, or even mostly mean it, in the sense of simply passing on or spreading the Gospel’s Good News, but rather to succeed in making the person “Become” the GOOD NEWS, that joyful good news that Christ is alive in and amongst His people today just as surely as He was 2000 years ago. This in essence was the vision and mission of the Cursillo Movement from the beginning. To find the best possible method of bringing about this conversion — of moving a person from where they are to where they could be; from human to fully human; from alive to fully alive in recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of their true identity and dignity as beloved children of God.”

Cursillos of Christianity is designed to help each person understand that Jesus has called them “to be” disciples and to actually “be the Good News” in the place He has put them to live. The goal is to know Him, love Him, and imitate His way to such an extent that the world is bathed in His love. Imagine how the world would be different if each of us used all of our unique talents and gifts, found our definitive position within the Church, drew upon the Grace of God, and then lived the Gospel of Jesus each day.

How different would life be for our family and friends if we loved as Jesus loves? How different would life be for your spouse and children if every day we demonstrated the justice, mercy, compassion, and self-giving of Jesus? How different would life be for your neighbors, co-workers, and fellow parishioners if they encountered a disciple similar to Peter, Paul, or John? We have been called “to be the Good News,” to live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ right where we are at this moment.

It can be very easy to simply enjoy friendship for its many social benefits and not make any effort to bring Christ into the relationship. Without authentic friendship, we sometimes feel awkward or uncomfortable discussing spiritual matters with a good friend, son, daughter, mom, dad, or other family member. However, when we don't help bring our friend or family member closer to Jesus, we miss a great opportunity to exercise true apostolic action.

If we lack a desire or the courage to bring a friend or family member closer to Christ, it is again time for us to examine our own heart and honestly assess our own relationship with God. We can't give away what we don't have ourselves. To share the love of Christ, we have to know and believe in the love of Christ. Then, as we surrender our will to His will, the love of Jesus works in us and through us and touches every person we encounter. In *Conformity to the Will of God*, St. Alphonsus Maria de Ligouri writes: Perfection is founded entirely on the love of God: "Charity is the bond of perfection and perfect love of God means the complete union of our will with God's." It follows then, that the more one unites his will with the divine will, the greater will be his love of God.

At the center of the Cursillo's method for evangelization is friendship. We share the love of Christ by offering ourselves in true friendship to others. As we all know, this takes time, effort, and sacrifice, but the rewards are tremendous. In the book of Sirach we read: "A faithful friend is a strong defense and he who has found one has found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend and no weight of gold and silver is able to unbalance the goodness of his fidelity. A faithful friend is the substance of life and immortality, and those who fear the Lord will find one."

It is this type of friendship that allows us to discuss with others the most important matters in our lives. A true friendship presents many opportunities for us to share what we have found in Christ. Also, there are many opportunities to lift our friend up in prayer and offer palanca on their behalf. Finally, we can use our intellects to study the situation, be open to the Grace of God, and develop a plan of action to bring our friend closer to Christ. Then with courage, conviction, and the love of God in our hearts, we exercise our will by choosing to actually follow through on our planned action.

As Father John Corapi talked to a group of men to share how he had modified the soldier's pledge, he read: "I am a holy warrior for God, and I pledge not to leave my comrades behind in battle." He explained how our U.S. soldiers pledge not to leave a fellow soldier behind on the battlefield, whether healthy, wounded, or even dead.

He indicated that we should all make the same pledge on the spiritual battlefield. He reminded everyone that we are all involved in a spiritual battle, and it is sin that wounds and destroys our comrades. When we see a person that is selfish or unkind, gossiping, etc., we shouldn't judge them and then avoid them. Rather, we should see each person as a precious child of God and recognize their limitations.

Father Corapi's modified pledge can help us to think differently about people and to see the faults of others in a different light. This can provide an opportunity to examine the heart. Do I shun those who are not like me? Do I take the time to be with and nurture the wounded, or do I step on or around them. Do I try to bring them along or do I leave them behind? How did Jesus interact with sinners? Will I love as He loves? Will I care for my enemies in the same manner as I care for my friends?

When the Lord said: "Love your enemies," he commanded us to be people of love and action; "Do good to those who hate you" (Lk. 6:27). Scripture also says: If your enemy is hungry feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink (Rom. 12:20).

God never said it would be easy following Jesus; He only said it would be worth it. All disciples face difficult work when we willingly pick up our cross in an action of love. St Teresa said: “. . . forget your own good for their sakes no matter how much resistance your nature puts up.....Don't think it won't cost you anything or that you will find everything done for you. Look at what our Spouse's love cost Him, in order to free us from death; He died that most painful death on the cross.”

Cursillos of Christianity Movement envisions that all Cursillistas living the Cursillo would desire to be at the vanguard position for Christ and His church. Vanguard is a military term that means at the forefront, the point of the spear, the front lines, at the place of the battle. For us, the front line is the environment in which we live and the many encounters God places before us. We can choose to engage in the battle, surrender, or simply do nothing. However, a desire to be at the vanguard and to share the love of Christ is the only response that makes any sense from a true disciple. How would any other response sound? Lord, put me in the back. Put me someplace I am not needed or noticed. Put me some place where I don't have to take a stand, or love the way You love.

Being at the vanguard doesn't involve going to a far away place. The battle front is in your home, neighborhood, workplace, etc. If we are at the vanguard, it means we have chosen to follow Christ and decided to love despite the circumstances. Each and every person we choose to love is a victory for Christ.

God the Father revealed the following to St. Catherine: “. . .I want to make you dependent on one another so that each of you would be my minister, dispensing the graces and gifts you have received from me....I have made you my ministers, setting you in different positions and in different ranks to exercise the virtue of charity... All I want is love.... If you are bound by this love you will do everything you can to be of service wherever you are.” And later God said to her: “This is why I have put you among your neighbors; so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me, that is, love them without any concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whatever you do for them I will consider done for me.”

If we want to be at the vanguard, we need to properly prepare ourselves. It requires a commitment to live a life of piety, study, and action. To live courageously for Christ, we must know Him, love Him, and then choose to serve Him. When the heart and mind of a person is well prepared and when they have come to know and experience the deep love of Jesus, the only thing left to happen is the encounter with others. It is in these encounters that we will have a choice of whether or not to exercise our wills, engage in the battle for Christ, and choose to love as Jesus loves. This is how many of the people in our lives will encounter the risen Christ.

Not everyone we encounter will choose to follow Christ. However, the love of Christ is the most attractive, powerful, and fulfilling force in the universe. If we choose to live the Gospel at home, our spouses, sons, and daughters will be changed by the love of Christ. If we choose to be the leaven at work, our neighborhoods, and parishes, these areas will become more loving places. Gradually all of society can be won for Christ. However, it all begins with our personal encounter with Christ, and this will be followed by a series of personal decisions of whether to get to know Him better and follow Him. When we surrender to Him, our hearts are filled with His love and grace. With Christ, all things are possible. When we allow Christ to dwell in our hearts and to use our talents, we reach our fullest potential and live our lives as God intended when He gave us the gift of life.