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Very Human, Very Divine (XVII): The Gentle Force of Trust

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No man or woman is an isolated verse. “We all make up one divine poem.”[1] The individual stories that make up the history of mankind are woven with relationships of filiation, fraternity and friendship. Our heart begins beating thanks to the concern of others, and throughout our life we will be encouraged, consoled, strengthened – and also wounded – by those who walk alongside us on the path of life. The fact that we depend on them, and they on us, is not the result of original sin, something we need to resign ourselves to, but a constitutive part of our being created in the image of God.

Although our life in society can sometimes seem like a frantic rush that tries to force us to be concerned only about ourselves, we know that we are only fully ourselves in our relationships with others, in our interdependence. We only truly find

ourselves when we are ready to get out of ourselves. Those who fully discover this reality stop seeing their own limitations as preventing them from being happy. Rather, they come to see their relationships with others as “bridges” that expand their own limited world.[2] But not everyone makes this discovery, or at least not to the same extent. Therefore, in equal conditions of social position, education and character, people can live in radically different ways, depending on the quality of their relationships: some, lost in the lonely crowd; others, always accompanied and always accompanying.

A transforming look

At the end of his life on earth, Jesus said to his apostles: *I have called you friends* (*Jn* 15:15). The one who is perfect God and perfect Man, the model we look to in order to learn to be truly human, during his life lives

alongside others. We already see this in his first meeting with the Twelve. Jesus establishes a relationship of friendship and love with each of them that grows ever stronger as their knowledge of one another increases, to the point of opening wide his Heart to them. Every reader of the Gospel knows the limitations and defects of those who would soon become pillars of the Church. And surely He himself saw them clearly. But the words of the Word are creative. His look of love strengthens them, because it is a look filled with trust. Those rough men know they are loved, chosen, and they mature more rapidly than anyone could have dared to hope, because they see our Lord's trust in them. This also happens in our own lives, when we realize how much God loves us. Although we often talk about the importance of believing in Jesus, we shouldn't forget that what most powerfully transforms us is the trust

He shows in us. Hence a clear sign that our faith is maturing is that we find our support ever more firmly in the trust God has in us.

Let us recall the disciple who remained faithful to Jesus at the foot of the Cross. What is the secret of that young man's strength? Perhaps we find it in the way he refers to himself: "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John discovers his own identity in being loved by Jesus. From there comes his new strength, his expanded heart, which makes possible his admirable fidelity. John's account of the Last Supper shows us how deeply he had entered, through his trust, into the heart of Jesus. For trust enables us to attain a much deeper knowledge than is possible with reason alone.

Just as He entered into the lives of the Apostles, his friends, God wants to enter into our life as well. Our

friendship with Him can then also deepen quickly, and expand our capacity to love. With great respect for our freedom, Jesus offers us his friendship; there we discover a trust that reveals who we are for Him.[3] In order to grow in and exercise our freedom fruitfully, we need to have a certain self-confidence; a security based, above all, on knowing that a Person like Him (and who is like God?) is committed to us. Such a conviction makes it possible for us to grow, because when we find it hard to do something that we know is good, when we don't seem to be able to overcome ourselves, God's trust in us strengthens our trust in ourselves. Sincere trust unlocks the potentialities hidden inside each person, often buried under low self-esteem or fear of failure. It encourages us to develop our qualities in the service of others, and enables us to grow in a natural and

harmonious way; it makes us capable of much more.

That is how Jesus loves his own. He knows whom He has chosen. He knows them better than anyone – better even than they know themselves – and takes the risk of relying on them. He knows how far they can go and, counting on time and each one's correspondence, He leads them forward little by little. He is in no hurry to shape them to his heart's longing, because He knows this is an art that requires patience. He is a good teacher who knows how to "waste" time with them, just like friends do. He earns the trust of his own with his affection and makes mutual knowledge easier through his patient availability and understanding. This way of loving, so divine and so human, forges a true friendship between the teacher and his disciples that makes them eager

to respond and draws out the best in them.

Letting God enter

Our Lord "is interested in your joys, your successes, your love, and also in your worries, your suffering and your failures."[4] That is why we need to speak to Him with confidence, to open wide our heart, to share with Him all that is ours. When we truly trust someone, we can remove the masks we often put on to protect ourselves, since these now seem useless to us. We sense that we can be ourselves without any fear. This trust enables us to reveal the truth of how we really are and gives us great inner freedom. And since we know that no friendship is more sincere than Christ's, we can let Him enter deep into the "house" of our soul. Or are we going to leave Him in the waiting room, where we receive guests?

As friendship grows, it's only natural that we will want to show Him every corner of our life: the place where we work, so that He can watch us in our quiet efforts; the place where we relax, the dreams that inspire us. We will also show Him the storage room, filled with all kinds of objects, some more useful than others, and with pieces that have broken off along the way. If we let ourselves be known, if we turn on the lights, He will illuminate the dark corners and help us see what needs to be put in order. And He will do so with great clarity, but above all by instilling hope, for His is not a look that judges, that intimidates; it is a look of love that strengthens and elevates: it is a creative and redemptive look.

Trust calls for trust

Human love, in its best expressions, speaks to us of God's love. Experiencing the inspiring force of

trust in a friendship, discovering that someone truly believes in us, spurs us to give the best of ourselves. As we come to realize that God is looking at us in this way, we also have to try to look at others as Jesus did, learning from Him to be light for those around us. Experiencing the transforming value of God's trust in us and our trust in God shows us the need to offer this help to many others.

"God often makes use of an authentic friendship to carry out his saving work."[5] The mutual trust between good friends is often the means God uses to help us see what perhaps we wouldn't dare to face alone. If we are lucky enough to have real friends, people who want what is truly good for us, who want us to be better and happy persons, and we dare to open up to them the intimate corners in our heart, we will often experience

how our inner world is enriched by sharing it.

When an atmosphere of trust exists, we have no fear that others may see our weaknesses and struggles, and we are eager to share our plans and dreams. We know that the one who loves us will help us to overcome our limitations and prevent them from becoming barriers. In the human dynamic of giving and receiving, “giving ourselves” entails sharing our uniqueness, showing ourselves authentically as we really are. Doing so gives us great freedom, but it requires the effort to get out of ourselves. We need to be willing to show others the truth about ourselves, even while knowing that this makes us vulnerable. Trust calls for trust, and the risk of being hurt is not comparable to the gain of truly loving and letting ourselves be loved.

Words that strengthen, heal, encourage

Trust is the foundation for any successful relationship; for people to grow personally and professionally; for the whole work of formation. Hence, when we want to help others, we first emphasize the importance of listening, understanding and patience, etc. But in reality much more is needed. Trusting people leads us to look at them with optimism, to believe in them, to dream about their potentialities, to have hope in what they can become, so that we are also eager to assist them in their struggles.

“Following our Lord’s example,” Saint Josemaría wrote, “you need to understand your brothers with a very big heart, not being surprised at anything, and truly loving them . . . By being very human, you will know how to overlook small defects and

always see, with a mother's understanding, the good side of everything."[6]

This does not imply closing our eyes to reality, failing to see the limitations and defects of the others. If we truly love them we want them to be better. While knowing them and loving them as they are, the friendship and fraternity that unites us will enable us to warn them of possible dangers they may not be aware of, or to suggest to them something that at first they may not understand. And we will accompany them in the discovery of the good that is hidden in this new perspective.[7] Sincere affection towards others makes possible an atmosphere of freedom and trust, shown in the clarity with which we explain the need for them to make an effort in a specific point of struggle, so that they feel accompanied by us in their efforts, and not pushed to act

irrationally. “The role of the spiritual director is to help the person to want – to truly and deeply want – to fulfill God’s will.”[8]

Sometimes, when trying to help someone who doesn’t seem to listen, we can let ourselves be overcome by the prejudice that that person really doesn’t want to, and won’t let themselves be helped. We should never forget that we are all fragile, and that the path of life, besides teaching us many new things, can sometimes open wounds that take time to heal. Not infrequently, the pain caused by these clashes can lead someone to put up barriers that isolate, that protect them from possible suffering, but that also make it difficult to regain the trust they need to continue growing.

Words that strengthen, that heal, that encourage, are the most effective words. Only if there is trust, sincere

and gratuitous affection, will we connect deeply with the others, and our words will share, with God's grace, in his creative power. They will be a manifestation of his love, and will help to heal these wounds. "God knows each of us in depth, also our suffering, and He looks on all of us with tenderness. Let us learn from our Lord to look at everyone in this way, to understand everyone, . . . to put ourselves in the place of the other person."[9] We have to be patient and sow trust with love, through small details that show our sincere interest. God has wanted us to need one another, and He acts in human history through specific men and women, counting on each of us to help one another.

Whoever has responsibility for others should be aware of the risk of always wanting to provide solutions or answers. At times, almost unconsciously, we can think we are

helping the other person when we convince them to take on our own way of obtaining the best results. But the task of formation is not to get the other person to be as we would like. Trying to make others conform to predetermined molds does not allow for opening up new horizons for them; rather, it could condemn them to the frustration of failing to meet certain expectations.

Forming people well means enabling each person, with God's help, to be the true protagonist of his or her own life. The role of anyone who wishes to collaborate in this effort is to accompany them and help them grow in self-knowledge, by asking good questions that lead them to reflect, giving clues rather than answers, even if this requires more effort. When each person is the one who discovers a broader horizon and sets goals for themselves, it is much more effective, since it stems from an

interior conviction. Even if it takes more time to achieve the “results” that one would like, this effort will help the person to live in a stable and virtuous way. Having experienced this so often in our own lives will lead us to always give great importance to personal initiative, and to foster each one’s personal conviction.

Trust arises in the atmosphere of God’s love, which is patient, and is not irritable or resentful, but bears all things and believes all things (cf. *1 Cor* 13:4-7). A person who loves like this becomes a teacher, a firm reference point, a gentle force that leads others much further than might have seemed possible. How many surprises we receive when we respect the “sacred ground” of the lives of the others! The Holy Spirit can help them then to attain the best version of themselves. If we have hope in what they can become, if we

trust in grace and in all the good that God will grant them, we will give them wings to fly.

[1] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 111.

[2] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* no. 1937.

[3] Cf. *Ps* 8:4-7: *What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands.*

[4] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 218.

[5] Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2019, no. 5.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Letter* 27, no. 35.

[7] Cf. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 16 February 2023, nos. 3-6.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *Letter* 26, no. 38.

[9] Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 16 February 2023, no. 15.

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