

Essay #5:
**Sanctification—
Serving Others is the Christian's Seal**

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Introduction

My dear brothers and sisters, on this occasion with the good will of those present and with infinite thanks to God for his multiple blessings, I come to expound on the topic of sanctification, which I am sure has already been ringing in your ears. Sanctification is a word directly associated with the church. Sanctification is the song that is heard every Sunday. Sanctification is the melody found deep in every sermon. Paraphrasing the words of James—without sanctification, faith is dead.

We are not the first to amble down this road. Many have already gone before us. Much ink and paper have been used to talk about sanctification. This theme is too wide to cover in a simple paper, but we are going to give it our best, and we ask the Lord for his help and his guidance so that we can say something edifying about sanctification.

I will start by presenting some basic concepts. First, we need to know what sanctification means. Holy Scriptures speak of sanctification in two different ways. Sanctification in the wide sense encompasses all the acts of grace by which the Holy Spirit leads a person from sin to holiness. Sanctification in the strict sense refers to the new life that God allows the Christian to lead in answer to his grace. It is a new life of thankfulness for everything that God has done for us. God first loved us, and then we give him thanks, doing his will.

In this paper we will be talking about sanctification in its strict sense. We will concentrate on the answer to God's grace that we give as Christians. Our emphasis will be sanctification according to the second table of the law. We have a responsibility to love our neighbor as ourselves. We serve others. In particular we will focus on three ways we serve our neighbor: maintaining sexual purity, with our vocation, and with our charity.

The Holy Spirit Gives Us the Ability to Lead a Sanctified Life

Natural laws cannot be broken without intervention of an exterior force. For example, water that comes from a hill will only rise as high as its source; it cannot go higher unless you use a pump. The same happens to human nature. Scripture informs us that our righteousness is like a dirty rag (Isaiah 64:6). For that reason we can't expect a sanctified life to come from a perverted human nature. Can fresh water come from a bitter well? In the same way as poisonous fruit doesn't grow on healthy trees that provide fruit to eat, you can't grow fruit good to eat on poisonous trees either. We can't expect to find a sanctified life in natural man for the reason that Jesus told Nicodemus: If you are not born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Therefore it is vain and useless to think that sanctified life can sprout and grow in natural man.

Then the logical question has to be: "From where does sanctification come?" Our answer is that sanctification comes from a true conversion produced by the Holy Spirit through a spiritual birth that is only produced through the means of grace (Word and sacrament). Until the moment of our conversion, there isn't even a shadow of good in us. The Bible tells us that we are dead in our transgression and sins (Ephesians 2:1). In the eyes of the world we may have a decent reputation and be honorable, but in God's eyes we are nothing more than sinners. If we could see our hearts in the mirror of the law, we would see things there that would chase from our minds any concept of a sanctified life. Our heart is so depraved and lost that we are convinced that as long as nothing changes, it is impossible to find sanctified life in an unconverted and unjust man.

Sanctified life emanates from a constant spiritual influence worked on us from the time of our conversion until the time of our death. Psalm 1:2 tells us that the person is blessed "whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night."¹ We cannot pretend to have a sanctified life if we do not remain in his Word. In order to produce fruit we need to be watered by the streams of living water of the Word of God. It is

¹All Scripture quotations are from the NIV2011.

not enough to plant a tree and then leave it on its own, but we need to water it, fertilize it, etc. This happens to faith which is created in our hearts. If we do not feed it, it soon will be dead.

Besides, we are not independent trees but only branches grafted to the true vine. Sanctified life results *from a union with Christ*. We believe that as long as a man recognizes that and sits alongside of Jesus, he will live a fuller sanctified life. The very fact that Christ and the Christian are joined as one makes the Christian similar to Christ. Why does that branch produce grapes? The branch produces grapes simply because it has been grafted to the vine, and therefore participates in the very nature of the trunk. For that reason the only way that you can produce fruit for God is being grafted into Christ and joined with him. Therefore, sanctification results from the vital union with Christ. This union is established through faith. "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). The branch which does not bear fruit is not a true and live branch. In the eyes of God a union with Christ which is merely formal and without fruit has no value whatsoever. Faith that does not influence sanctification in the character of the believer is no better than a faith like the demons have. It is a dead faith, not the gift from God. Where there is no sanctified life, there is no real faith in Christ. True faith works through love, and is moved by a deep thought of gratitude for redemption. True faith moves the believer to live for his Lord and makes him feel that all that he can do for Jesus who died for his sins is insufficient. He who has been forgiven much, loves much. He who has been cleansed with his blood, walks in the light. Whoever has a real and living faith in Christ purifies himself, just as he is clean (James 2:17-20).

Now, because we have been grafted into Christ Jesus and because the Holy Spirit lives in us, let us bear fruit. Let us love God and our neighbor. Let us be not only hearers of the Word but doers of the Word. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). For this reason, let us respond to the work that the Holy Spirit has done in us. It is the will of God that we do good to all, especially to those who belong to the family of faith (Galatians 6:10). Let us show our seal as a Christian helping our brother in the different situations of his life.

I. Sexual Purity in a World of Impurity

Sexuality is one of the most wonderful gifts from God. Through it mankind can experience intimacy between two people and procreation. However, if one goes out of the limits marked by the Creator, sexuality is converted into brutal passion. A river is a blessing for agriculture, but when it goes out of its banks, it ruins everything. In the same way sexuality, which is a blessing, becomes a destructive weapon for the moral and physical life of mankind.

From History

If we want to understand what full and correct sexuality is in order to guide our sanctified lives, we need to return to creation. The Bible says that each species was made “male and female,” and when God determined to create the crown of his creation, man, he designed a companion for him. However, what was God thinking in those moments when he made a companion for man? If in creation he made her a “woman,” it was because he was making a sexual distinction and difference. He gave her a different sexual nature so that a specific end could be accomplished: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (Genesis 1:28). And how can he multiply if he does not have a female? Then God observed the man, analyzed his need and his mission, and said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18).

Why this thought on God’s part? Was it because man did not have someone to wash his clothes? He didn’t have clothes. Was it because he needed a woman to clean his house, to cook for him, to make his food? He didn’t need any of this. Then, what moved God to make a companion for man? God saw man’s loneliness. He needed someone to complete him—a helpmate. He knew that man alone could not reproduce. It was then that God performed the first surgical operation in history. God put man to sleep, and took from his side a rib and formed the woman, and when the man woke and saw his companion he exclaimed: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’ [Hebrew *Ishshabab*] for she was taken out of man [Hebrew

Isb) (Genesis 2:23). The Bible goes on to say: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). It is clear from these verses that sexuality between a male and female is a mutual service.

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve began to experience their sexuality without evil distortion or perversity. Man lived to satisfy his wife, and in the same way his wife satisfied her husband, because their bodies did not belong to themselves, but each one to the other. Paul reveals this principle when he affirms: “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:3,4). At this point in history man and woman were pure sexually before and after having a sexual relationship. This is the target that we aim for when we talk about sexual purity. Let us not look simply for our own satisfaction but the satisfaction of our spouse according to the order that God has established.

As we continue with the story of Adam and Eve we see that as long as they hadn't disobeyed God, and the voice of Satan had not entered into their hearts, they lived for each other. But when sin entered, the first thing that man did was “see himself” and bury himself in this egotism that from that point forward would characterize all mankind. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and [*seeing themselves*] they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Genesis 3:7).

This egoism, completely embedded in human nature, lead mankind into an attitude of looking to please himself, rather than mutual pleasing. Unbridled sexual passions appeared. Everything came through a process of degradation. If we study the book of Genesis, we discover that a great majority of the men of God practiced polygamy. Abraham had relations with his wife's maidservant, with his wife's consent (Genesis 16:1-3), since she was sterile and could not give him any descendants. God did not condemn this action, even though he didn't like it. But he only recognized Isaac, the son of his wife. Jacob, in the same fashion, had other women besides his own wife with whom he had children. All of

these actions God allowed, but this tendency degenerated, because the main thought was procreation, and the legitimate wife authorized these relationships in order to present descendants to her husband. But the moment arrived in which man changed the end (having descendants) in order to look for a means (satisfy his carnal appetites). Then legislation about divorce came about (Deuteronomy 24:1-5). Jesus analyzed this reality, and gave his thoughts about divorce.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:3-9).

Let us analyze the expression "your hearts were hard." Mankind began to abuse sexuality. Not only did they join together with other women with the approval of their wives, but they also began to do it simply for the pleasure without thinking about their wife's feelings. Even more, they abandoned their wives. They allowed themselves to be carried by their own carnal desires instead of following God's commands. This is what Jesus calls "hardness of the heart." But he affirms that God's purpose was not that, but an intimate union only between one man and one woman until death separates them.

In this way God, when he created a male and a female, did it for mutual satisfaction, but only within the permitted limits, that is, marriage. The Lord was permissive in some situations, but he could not tolerate so much depravity and the destruction of marriage. For that reason adultery and fornication are condemned as sin, and the foundation of marriage is the proclamation that "the

marriage bed [should be] kept pure” (Hebrews 13:4). This is what was given at the beginning and the aim toward which we lead our sanctified life.

Sexual Sins

It is natural for a man to lie down with a woman. But when this is done from the perspective of “freedom,” outside of marriage, the natural act enters into the dimension of sin which is breaking God’s law. Sexually speaking, there really are only two categories of sin: fornication and adultery. Adultery is a sexual relation between a married man and a woman that is not his wife, or between a married woman and a man that is not her husband.

Fornication expresses a sexual relationship before marriage and outside of marriage. Living together without marriage, and habitually practicing sexual relations with various women without being married, etc., is fornication. This attitude reflects a life dominated by the flesh, possessed by sin, and this is not keeping yourself sexually pure. “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery” (Galatians 5:19). In both Greek and Hebrew, “fornicate” means any type of sexual immorality, and not only pre-matrimonial relations. It can be used to refer to adulteries (Matthew 19:9, Hosea 1:2), and also sexual acts that go against nature, such as homosexuality and lesbianism (Jude 7).

Therefore all action that misses the mark of what is laid down by God in his law is catalogued as sin. Even though sin is an infraction of the law (1 John 3:4), we can say that some actions can be considered more dangerous than others—not because God has different categories of sin, but because of the implications that sins have for those who commit the sin and how much they can affect our neighbor. For example, homosexuality affects the whole society. Practice it, and there is no more nuclear family, no more children, etc.

However, today there is a desire to legitimize homosexuality. Some create a defense and a theology of homosexuality, ignoring what the apostle Paul affirms when he says:

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnat-

ural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error (Romans 1:26,27).

Mankind lives thinking that it is time for change. Some call this change “modernizing.” In the area of sexual relations many civil union groups have appeared. They think they need to accept homosexuals, because in the 21st century you cannot live stuck in the tunnel of times past. Some congressmen promote rights for homosexuals. But everyone forgets that God’s law does not change. God is immutable. For that reason, keeping ourselves pure sexually is not just for men who lived in the past but for every one of us today.

Is Sexual Purity Possible in Our Times?

In the time in which we live, sex has been converted into a profitable business. Among the illegal industries that are destructive and dominate the modern world, besides drug trafficking, illegal weapons trade, and corruption, there is sexual exploitation. This inducement to sexual depravity favors those who do business with prostitution, pornography, human trafficking, aphrodisiac medicines, and doctors who practice sex changes and abortion. To support this business of sex it is necessary to exploit the female image, using that which is attractive in a woman as a way to hook people with advertising, besides creating a series of theories that favor fornication and sexual perversion. One of these theories is the absurd affirmation that it is impossible to keep yourself pure for marriage, and recommending to teenagers to live an active sexual life, with industry promoting the use of a condom as a supposed guarantee of sexual protection.

In our world being a virgin for most women is a unicorn that lived in the past and in fantasy, because the reality is a great majority of the women arrive at marriage with some degree of sexual experience. And what about men? Men are encouraged to have early sexual relations. There are even fathers who take their sons to a brothel so that they can have their first sexual relation and become men. Others make fun saying that if you don’t have sexual relations you will get cancer. One of the missionaries was telling us

an anecdote from his life: when he was an adolescent he went to a camp and a girl told him that if he had not had sexual relations, then he had not lived.

The liberal tendency of society is to promote safe sexual relationships, accepting as normal fornication by adolescents and young people, and thereby creating advertising campaigns for the use of condoms to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. The message in the schools of Peru basically is that if you have sexual relations, be careful not to contract sexual diseases or become pregnant. The parents of a great majority of families will often tell their male children: "Son, if you're going to go out with your girl friend, then here is some extra money for your condoms." But little or nothing is done to promote the biblical principle of chastity, the only guarantee to prevent AIDS and the cause of the existence of thousands of single mothers or children without fathers, as well as the increase in the terrible cruelty of abortion.

We need to cultivate chastity in our lives following the biblical principle of holiness. Our children need to grow up from little on in the fear of God as the beginning of all wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), and with correct sexual education, in order to resist the tremendous sexual propaganda that feeds eroticism. We need to teach them from little on not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world. If they love the world, the love of God will not be in them. "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:16,17). Here is where we need to emphasize sexual purity, defining the line between what is licit and illicit, right and wrong, good and bad, what is according to God's will, and the will of friends and mass media (the world). The seal of Christianity is following the will of God and not of the world.

It appears that in this age it is more difficult to keep ourselves pure sexually. However, we can say that the Corinthians suffered the same temptations that we have today. For example, in the city of Corinth there was a temple dedicated to the pagan goddess Artemis, where the religious rites included sexual activity. There were approximately 1000 priestesses who in reality acted as prostitutes. The pagan religion was closely connected

to sexual immorality. However, despite this reality, Paul tells the Corinthians that they should flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

Today, however, we hear many talking about themes related with sexuality, even by church leaders. Sexual themes now are more brazen, more commented on. What are the themes of the television programs? What are the most awaited scenes on the *telenovelas* (Spanish soap operas)? Simply talking about sex. In our time sexuality is more liberal, people are less alarmed, and our sermons attack sexual immorality less. It is tolerated more, to the point that premarital sexual relationships are justified even by some members within our own churches. On one occasion a church member asked me: "Pastor, why did that seminarian stop attending the seminary?" I answered him: "Because his fiancée was pregnant." And he answered me: "What's so wrong with that?" For this church member it was a simple weakness; just a natural expression of love between two people.

In the middle of all this soft pedaling about sexual themes, God's call does not change in the least: God calls us to maintain ourselves in sexual purity because this commandment does not only have individual repercussions, but also affects our relationships with others. For example, it is egotistical on the part of the man to say to his girlfriend, "Give me proof of your love" (asking her to sleep with him). Another expression of egoism is to say that women are like Huggies diapers. You use them, and later you throw them away. Women have unfortunately been made a sexual object since ancient times: "The sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose" (Genesis 6:2).

We know that God has created us to respond differently to sexual stimulation. Men respond more to visual stimulation; women respond more to emotional stimulation: words, details. For this reason God made women beautiful, and put in the heart of every man gallantry and chivalry. But this blessing has been marred when we take advantage of it to seduce someone else to sin. For example, women, to feel wanted, dress up in clothes that accentuate their body. Some put on miniskirts, tight blouses. Men use their chivalry and their colorful language to seduce the women.

Let us remember that everything is born of desire, and later words are used, and it ends in the physical relation. But some people consider only the last thing something that is bad. The thought and the words are thought not to be that important. Jesus tells us: “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). Therefore without considering how far someone goes with another person, it’s enough just to wish for it with the desire in your heart and you have fallen from sexual purity.

But not only the thought but also the words can be bad. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29). So in order to keep us pure at this time we need to avoid things like dirty jokes, double entendres, and especially those things which suggest something sexual, lusty insinuations, relating stories of immoral adventures, etc. Let us not be a stumbling block for the rest, but as Luther says, let us lead a pure and decent life in words and actions (Small Catechism).

It is important to note that of all the evils that a person can do, the one that causes the most damage to his body is that of sexual immorality. “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). The apostle Paul asks, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Note the emphasis on temple, or sanctuary, and it is inconceivable that the Holy Spirit could dwell in a filthy or profane sanctuary.

By this time more than one listener is probably asking themselves: “How can we keep ourselves pure sexually?” Flee—that is the answer for the Christian. “Flee from sexual immorality.” We have examples in the Bible of men and women who were faithful to the Lord. We remember the life of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was unjustly sold as a slave by his brothers, and after becoming a steward over all the house of his master, the wife of his master seduced him and tried to get him to sleep with her.

After a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he refused. “With me in

charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:7-9)

Joseph was confronted by this sin but emerged victorious. Not because he himself was great but because he remembered the Word of God. The Word of God is our principal weapon. David asked God for a clean heart (Psalm 51:10). Prayer is another of the elements to fight against sexual temptations. Why did King David commit adultery? It was because he was idle. Work and sports are activities that help us keep our minds occupied so that the evil one will not have an opportunity to tempt us. Another element is not to use illegal substances and alcoholic beverages and drugs that stimulate sexual appetite. Let us flee from solitary places when we are with a woman. For example, you can avoid inviting your girlfriend to your house if you know that you're alone. Luther said that you cannot leave a young boy and a young girl alone and hope that nothing happens; it's like starting a fire in straw and hoping that nothing will burn.

The body is for the Lord! Your body has been given to you for a reason: to be an instrument to glorify Christ. Help others keep themselves pure, giving them the advice that has been previously mentioned. If we have a spouse, let us do everything in accordance with God's Word and not serve our egoism. We serve others by helping them remain sexually pure.

II. Vocation

Vocation can be understood in three different ways. It can refer to the proclamation of the gospel (being called to salvation), the place where God has called us as his children (occupation), or the calling to the pastoral office. Vocation has its origin in the Greek; it comes from the noun *klesis*. In his *Dictionary of New Testament Words*, William Barclay says: “This word has to do with one of the most basic and fundamental concepts of the New Testament. *Kalein* is a verb which means ‘to call’; *klesis*, the noun, means ‘called’; *kletos* is an adjective that means ‘called.’” Overall the base of these words is the calling.

Some interpret vocation as only the calling from God to serve within the ministry—that is, only to serve directly proclaiming his word. Roman Catholics in this aspect made a distinction between the profane life and the sacred life. They considered that service to God consisted only in the following: whoever kept the festivals, whoever prayed, whoever fasted, while the rest of the occupations were simply profane. It's because our natural tendency is to seek to serve God in the extraordinary when we should do it in the ordinary matters. Barclay in his interpretation of the word *klesis* said:

The Christian life is a calling to duty. The Christian is always called to carry out a task. God is continually offering the Christian something to do. In the *Republic* of Cicero (1.20, 33) Lelio is asked, "What do you believe we should teach the people that we have to instruct?" He responded, "Everything that will benefit the nation." God calls the Christian to be useful in this world.

God calls the Christian to a privilege. *Kalein* and *klesis* are intimately associated with an invitation to a festival, a banquet, to welcome someone to your table and home. God calls the Christian to come and rejoice in his fellowship, his hospitality, in his joy and riches of being his guest (*Greek Words of the New Testament*).

Therefore it is quite clear that the most appropriate way of understanding vocation is as the place in which God has put you to carry out your job faithfully whether it is an ecclesiastical labor or a "profane" labor. The Augsburg Confession mentions some examples of how we can carry out faithfully our "profane" calling: "that the father brought up his offspring, that the mother bore children, that the prince governed the commonwealth" (*Concordia Triglotta*, Augsburg Confession, Article XXVI:10). St. Paul says, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" Ephesians 4:1. He confirms: "Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them" (1 Corinthians 7:20). It is clear that vocation is the place where God has put us, and we only need to be faithful to our calling. Vocation is what we do, or what we are supposed to do, in our various callings. But it is important for understanding the magnitude of this teaching to understand first the sense in

which vocation is God's work. God is milking the cows through the calling of the milkmaid, said Luther. According to Luther, vocation is "the mask of God." He is hidden in vocation. We see the milkmaid, or the farmer, or the doctor, or the pastor, or the artist, but, appearing behind this human mask, God is genuinely present and active in what they do for us and in what we do for others.

Martin Luther arrives at the following conclusion that is summarized by Gustaf Wingren: "A vocation is a "station" which is by nature helpful to others if it be followed. It is important to emphasize the fact that vocation is not confined to an occupation, but includes also what Betcke calls biological orders: father, mother, son, daughter" (*Luther on Vocation*, p. 4).

One premise that we should always emphasize is that vocation is especially connected with service to others. In modern culture the one who serves is considered inferior, but Jesus teaches us to serve. His words are: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). God has commanded us to serve from the position in which we find ourselves. How beautiful is the expression: "I can help you," and doing it is even more beautiful! Jesus taught us: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Also let us remember that God doesn't need our help, but our neighbor does.

When someone is born, he comes into a world full of opportunities. God is faithful and just. He calls everyone to live his or her special vocation; each person is assigned a role in the history of salvation of the world and assigned the means necessary to accomplish it. In his power God governs the world according to the law of variety. Nothing is ever repeated. God enriches each one of the called with a precise, exclusive, absolute, and new identity, laying out in each case a unique and unrepeatable road.

On this path Martin Luther makes a contrast between vocation and imitation: "Each is to do his own work, without eyeing others or trying to copy them. Christ is not to be imitated by us, but rather to be accepted in faith, because Christ also had his special office for the salvation of man, an office which no one else has" (*Luther on Vocation*, p. 172).

That is why it is extremely difficult to write a manual about how we are to respond in our life. The Christian life is not about learn-

ing a variety of courtesies, but serving everyone else from the position or situation in which we find ourselves. For example, let us analyze how each of the three people in the parable of the good Samaritan used the situation that they experienced and dealt with the individual who was severely injured. The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan all handled it differently. The first two people simply passed by when they saw the man tossed to the side of the road. Perhaps someone could think that they were rushed because they had to get to worship, but it was not that way. The biblical text tells us that they were going down, that is they were already returning from worship which they had experienced in Jerusalem. Juan Carlos Cevallos considers that:

Apparently, they didn't offer help to the unfortunate soul for fear of ceremonial contamination, perhaps because they believed he was dead. It is possible that they were protecting themselves even from the shadow of a supposed cadaver, because the Pharisees believed that even the shadow could contaminate them. Their ceremonial laws were more powerful than compassion. Jesus' model was the exact opposite: touch the leper, the dead, the prostitute, and more (*Comentario Bíblico Mundo Hispano*, p. 198).

On the other hand the attitude of the Samaritan was different. He acted being moved by mercy. He did not think about laws, he didn't even think that this gentleman was not his countryman. He only saw an injured man who needed his help. He served his neighbor in the situation in which he found himself. This is the model for our vocation. When something enters into our life, we respond as Christians in the heart, not in name only. Not according to the law and what people would say, but according to love and mercy.

Another example we can see is the attitude of Joseph whom the Bible labels as "righteous" (Matthew 1:19). Joseph, realizing that Mary was pregnant even without him touching her, could simply not settle the situation by marrying her, as if the child were his; but he also didn't want to ridicule her publicly. Remember that according to Jewish law she could have been stoned. To avoid this, he decided to separate from her secretly, knowing that this action would set him up for all kinds of evil thought and criticism. Almost everyone would say, "He did not want to take responsi-

bility for his child. He is a bad man.” But even knowing all the consequences, Joseph wanted to separate secretly from her. This is to act in love. Joseph knew the law, but he acted in love.

God has put us in a work situation and from that point we serve him. God has a plan for each and every one of us. Every human being is unique and unrepeatable. Each person has been created to be a light and to shine the glory of Christ. We don't have our own light; we only reflect the light which is Christ Jesus. Let us reflect him. No one sees God naturally, but people see us, and for that reason it is important that we be the mask of God for others. Let us be children through whom others can praise him and not curse our heavenly Father. Let us serve others, fulfilling faithfully the vocation to which he has called us.

Christian Vocations

There are many vocations. Luther spoke of the callings of God in terms of three institutions which God has established, together with a fourth area of human activity. A particularly brief treatment of this theme can be found in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. After criticizing monasticism, through which some thought that they would receive salvation by merit, there is a contrast between these humanly invented orders with the orders which God himself designed. In the cited text, it talks of the three orders which God has established: the priestly office, the family, and civil government.

All those who are involved in the pastor's office or in the ministry of the Word are found in an honest, holy order and work. God is greatly pleased with this, when they preach, administer the sacraments, preside over funds for helping the poor, and direct the deacons and other ministers who help in such labors, etc.

On the other hand, those who are fathers and mothers, who govern their homes well and have children for God's service are also in a true holy state, doing a holy work and being members of a holy order. In the same way, when the children or servants are obedient to their parents or masters, this also is true holiness and those who live in such a state are true saints on earth.

Finally, the princes and governors, judges, officials and chancellors, employees, servants male and female, and all other servants, as well as all those who offer the service which they should ren-

der, are all found in a state of holiness and are living holy lives before God, because these three states or orders are all included in the word and command of God. Anything which is included in God's order must be holy, since the Word of God is holy and consecrates all it touches and all that it includes.

Above these three states and orders there is the common order of Christian love, by which we help not only those who belong to these three orders, but in general anyone who is in need, as when we feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, etc., just as when we forgive our enemies, pray for all people on earth, suffer all sorts of evil in our earthly life, etc.

III. Christian Charity

The term charity comes from the Latin *caritas* and is translated from the Greek word *agape*. Concerning the gift, Christian charity is mentioned in Romans 12:8, when it refers to "someone who has mercy, with joy," and urges everyone who has the gift, "may he share it, freely." The NIV gives us this expression—"if it is giving, then give generously."

The expression "give generously" has a full and rich meaning. The Greek vocable *metadidous* comes from a verb which means to make someone a participant of something. In Alfred Tuggy's dictionary we find this meaning: to share, to give, to impart, to distribute, to contribute. In Luke 3:11, you can see the meaning of "sharing." The central idea of the vocable is to give or share with others what is possessed, in order to satisfy their needs.

The Greek vocable *aploteti* means simply, generously, freely. This term is used often by the apostle Paul with the meaning of giving abundantly and generously (2 Corinthians 8:2). The word can also be translated "with sincerity" or "with all the heart" ("with sincerity of heart"—Colossians 3:22). Using the *Testament of Issachar* we can illustrate this better:

My father blessed me, seeing that I was conducting myself simply (*haplotes*). I was not completely focused on my actions, not ill-willed toward anyone, not envious of my neighbor, not speaking badly about anyone nor attacking the life of anyone, but only judging people with sincerity (literally—with *haplotes* in my eye). . . . I provided from my

bounties of the earth to the poor and afflicted simply (*bap-lotes*). . . . A simple person (*baplus*) does not desire gold, nor seduce his neighbor (*Testament of Issachar* 3:2-5,8; 4:2).

Many people give under obligation, and not as a fruit of a sincere attitude that goes far beyond all calculation or speculation. Many people give, well, because the Christian life demands that charity is the seal of Christianity. But the word of God declares: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). The seal of a Christian isn't just giving, but giving from the heart joyfully.

Many people feel extraordinary after they have done a small meritorious action and boast of this action as something that they should be proud of. When we work this way, these actions are not done in pure love, but because of egotism. They are done in order to win the recognition of others and show people how good we can become. At those times, we don't truly love others; we are not sons of light but of darkness; we are not Christians but Pharisees. The Word of God says:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:1-4).

True charity comes from a sanctified heart. The apostle Paul refers to this: "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). We don't say "Become an honorable worker so that you can maintain your home." But we say: "Become a worker so that you are able to have something to give to those who are poorer than you." We don't say, "Soul, you now have enough for you," but "Soul, you don't have enough for your neighbor."

Every Christian has the responsibility of giving and sharing with others from that which he receives from the Lord. Let us remember that we are only stewards, since everything that we have belongs to God, so that we ought to be generous as we give. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6). We cannot wait until situations present themselves so that we may display spectacular acts of charity; there are always opportunities. As one of our hymns says, “With your prayers and with your bounties You can do what God commands” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, #496:3).

Charity is a gift from God that allows us to love above and beyond human possibilities. Charity is loving like God—of course, not with his perfection, but with his style and manner. Having been made in his image and likeness gives us the capability to love our neighbor sincerely. John Chrysostom says in this respect: “Nothing can make you such an imitator of Christ as concern for others. Even if you fast, even if you sleep on the floor, even if as it were you kill yourself, if you do not concern yourself with your neighbor you have done little, you are still far from the image of God” (*Homilia sobre la epistola a los Corintios*).

Charity is a concrete and plausible fruit of a Christian. Without charity there are no true fruits. Charity is not looking for one’s own satisfaction, but above all charity is service to others. We do not only take care of our own families, friends, and spiritual brothers, but also those outside of our family including our enemies. Let’s remember that people cannot see our heart, but they can see our actions. They cannot see our desires, but they can see our help. Tertullian relates this about charity:

Such work of love (for so it is) puts a mark upon us, in the eyes of some. “Look,” they say, “how they love one another” (for themselves hate one another); “and how they are ready to die for each other” (for themselves will be readier to kill each other). Yes, their indignation at us for using among ourselves the name of “Brothers” must really, I take it, come from nothing but the fact that among them every name of kinship so far as affection goes is false and feigned. But we are your brothers, too, by right of descent from the one mother, Nature. . . . But how much more fittingly are those both called brothers and treated as brothers who have come

to know one Father God, who have drunk of one Spirit of holiness, who from one womb of common ignorance have come with wonder to the one light of Truth! (*Tertullian's Apology*, Loeb Classical Library, p. 177).

Perhaps we do not have bread to help the needy. But whoever has a tongue has at his disposal a greater gift that he can distribute, because it is more important to quicken the soul that will live forever with the food of the Word, than to satisfy with earthly bread the body that is going to die. For this reason, no one should think that only providing material goods is charity. Rather, we believe that the fundamental reality of charity is giving spiritual gifts.

For this reason, offerings are an expression of our thankful response to the blessings of God. The offerings given in church are the means by which the church can fulfill its mission on earth. Our offerings are important because many people need our charity. Right now there are many people who are miserable, ready to be kindling in the eternal fire. They need our offering. They need to hear the gospel to pass from death to life.

No one has too much that he can give. But we do well to remember that the Christian ideal is to work, not to amass riches, but to share with the less fortunate. The story is told of a man who was picking up leaves from the ground to eat and thought that he was the most miserable person, but when he looked back he saw someone behind him picking up the leaves that he had rejected. Even if we think we are poor, we have something to share. Therefore let us serve others with what we have.

The Holy Spirit has empowered us to live in holiness. Let us live helping others—that is the seal of Christianity. Let us help everyone else. Let each and every one of us be faithful in our vocation. May the strong one protect the weak and the weak respect the strong; may the rich person give to the poor and the poor give thanks to God for providing someone who could satisfy his needs. May the wise person reveal his wisdom not with words, but with good works; may the humble person not boast about himself, but allow others to do it. Whoever is chaste in his body, let him not glorify himself, knowing that his chastity comes from God. May all glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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