**A Society of Love**

**Translator’s Preface**

This book is for lovers, although it could be called a book of sermons, or a treatise on the spiritual life, or an outline of the spirit of the Institute of Charity. In it, we hear Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855), priest and founder of the Institute of Charity, speaking to his brethren as he develops theological truths precious to spiritual writers throughout the ages and offers fresh insight into the nature of the religious congregation which he founded. None of this, however, goes to the heart of the matter. Rather, Rosmini is describing with great intensity God, whom he would love with his whole heart, and his neighbour, whom he would love as himself. In doing this, he also provides, albeit unconsciously, a portrait of himself as lover whose deepest interest is found not in what he knows but in what he loves. Lovers will understand his purpose and penetrate his heart.

The book is also for those who want to love, but either feel themselves incapable of love or ignorant of how to love. Rosmini, for whom there was no other Way than Christ, shows how we are placed in the Way of love and carried along by it in this life until we come to perfect union with Truth and Life in the Spirit before the Father.

The book is not always easy to read. Rosmini, the lover, is also an original thinker, a theologian of note, a great scholar in many fields and a person endowed with awesome concentration. Commended by Pope John Paul II as one of those masters whose spiritual journey is also a significant example of a process of philosophical inquiry enriched by engaging the data of faith (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 74), he seems, even for the Holy Father,

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|   | at times a man of contradiction [in whom] however… we find a deep and mysterious convergence which ensured that, although very much a man of the nineteenth century, Rosmini transcended his own time and place to become a universal witness, whose teaching is still today both relevant and timely (*Address to the General Congregation of the Institute of Charity*, 1998) |

We are face to face with a lover of God and neighbour who is also a master of the spiritual life prepared to use his great powers of thought and immense erudition in the service of faith and love.

The difficulties experienced by readers today can be summed up under the headings: style, vocabulary, concentration. The style, dependent to some extent on Rosmini’s youthful enthusiasm for the flowery Italian romanticism of his time, and combined with his determined efforts to make himself clear at all costs, is the antithesis of the ‘sound bites’ which are our order of the day. Steps have been taken in translation, therefore, to overcome what is often seen as Rosmini’s rhetorical excesses, and it may be that the heartfelt meaning of his words is clearer as a result. Little can be done about the length of the sermons, however, except to read them slowly and reflectively, and perhaps feel a pang of commiseration for the brethren who listened to them.

Rosmini’s vocabulary presents difficulties of a totally different kind. The precision of his words is often dependent upon a mind-set which necessarily escapes those approaching him for the first time through these homilies. In addition, the restrictive significance given to many of his words in recent times detracts considerably from the basic sense which Rosmini saw in them. They are, however, unavoidable if Rosmini’s thought is to be presented faithfully. Examples are: justice, object, perfection, end, charity and society, all of which are explained briefly by the editor in the appendix to this volume.

The last difficulty — the call to concentration — cannot be eased by translator or editor. But a word of encouragement may not be out of place. Often the concentration needed to assimilate the teaching in these pages seems to be gifted by the text itself. The intimacy of loving union which Rosmini describes in the great sermon on charity (4th in the series), and the breathless urgency of sacrifice to which love calls (5th sermon) is sufficient not only to sustain interest but to enthrall minds and hearts as the beauty and dignity of union are unveiled to the listener.
At this point it becomes clear that Rosmini is thinking not only of his own brethren but of all Christians. The members of his Institute will have their own *means* of reaching the perfection of love, but they will not have a different *end* from that of others.

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|   | All Christians, that is, the disciples of Jesus Christ, in whatever state or condition they find themselves, are called to perfection… Our divine Master spoke to each and every Christian when he said: *You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*. Gospel perfection consists in the total fulfilment of the two precepts of charity towards God and neighbour (Rosmini, *Maxims of Perfection*, First Reading, 1–2). |

In spirit Rosmini’s heart reaches out to all:

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|   | As I think of the end which the Institute of Charity holds out to us, I imagine many holy souls, scattered throughout every part of the Catholic Church and known to God, offering with Christ to the eternal Lord and Father of mankind and angels this beautiful prayer: *Open to me the gates of justice; entering them I will praise the Lord*. Almighty God, listening to their passionate longing, answers in their hearts: ‘Unite in my name to profess justice; bind yourselves tightly together for this end alone; sacrifice yourselves entirely for this, sacrifice all you have as my Son did for your example; sacrifice even lawful pleasures and decent, earthly goods, and time and health and life itself, and your will. In a word, sacrifice everything without exception.’ Brothers, your Institute was born in this way. This is its spirit (2nd Homily, p. 9). |

And this is the spirit of the whole Church, the only charism left by Rosmini to his Institute. The society of love on which Rosmini has set his own heart is the Church herself to which his Society of Charity is wholly subject.

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|   | With the rest of the faithful we have the gospel of Christ as our great common codex. We must use it night and day. Our *Constitutions*, taken from the gospel, must lead us back to it. Hence the members of this society should not set themselves apart from other people, but rather unite with all in the one body of Christ (*The Constitutions of the Society of Charity,*464E) |

These homilies are offered so that all may be encouraged to love, and to share in love. *God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him* (1 *Jn* 4: 16)

**First Homily**

This talk was given by Rosmini (Don Antonio to his brethren) on 25 March 1839, feast of the Annuntiation, when he made his religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience before Fr. Giacomo Molinari, the first of the brethren, and then received the vows of the eighteen members of the Institute of Charity. The ceremony took place with special solemnity at Mount Calvary, near Domodossola in Piedmont, Italy, a little more than ten years after Rosmini arrived there on 19 February 1828 in response to his call from God. The Institute of Charity, for which he wrote the *Constitutions* during his first weeks at Mount Calvary, had been approved by the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars on 20 December 1838, despite great opposition to certain points contained in the summary of the *Constitutions*which Rosmini had presented for examination by the Congregation. January–March 1839, were months of intense spiritual preparation in prayer and penance prior to profession of the vows.

The Institute was solemnly sanctioned on 20 September 1839, by Gregory XVI in his Apostolic Letters, *In Sublimi*, which contained the summary of Rosmini’s *Constitutions* under the title *Rule of the Institute of Charity*. In the meantime, Rosmini, with seven of his priests, had made two further vows, one of obedience to the Holy Father and another of not permitting any relaxation in the observance of poverty in the Institute. These ‘Presbyter’ vows, proper to certain members of the Institute, were made in the catacombs of St. Sebastian at Rome, 22 August 1839.

**The Golden Chain**

***God loves us from all eternity***

The Lord has numbered the days, laid his command upon each of them and shone his light on this joyful feast-day dedicated to the Incarnation of the eternal Word in the womb of the Virgin. He himself has brought about this longed-for moment when we, his lowly creatures, intend to restore and consecrate to him, with an act of loving will and through our self-offering, all that his almighty generosity has given us.

Dear brothers: he spoke, and we began to exist; he spoke again, and he existed in our mortal flesh; he spoke a third time, and we began to exist in a new, divine way — incorporated in his humanity through the waters of baptism.
But this was not enough. His word does not fall silent; the wonders of his word are endless. The word has made himself heard by us, called us from our different occupations, and bound us together in the tender charity that comes from the word. We were strangers to one another; now we are no longer Italian, French, German, English. We are only one thing in Christ Jesus, to whose love we want to consecrate ourselves completely and irrevocably.

If each of us considers his own calling, he will find some marvel worked there by the One who made all things.We have a single purpose, but who has guided us to consent willingly to the same single object? We are in the same place, but who has brought us to this holy mountain consecrated to the justice of the Father who sacrifices his Son, and to the charity of the Son who allows himself to be sacrificed for our salvation? Finally, who has moved God’s supreme Vicar on earth to seal our union with his divine authority and give us the Rule that must guide us to perfection?
In all this we see the finger of God. Each of us feels how sweet and safe it is to abandon himself to divine providence, and to lay aside human thoughts for the sake of following with great docility the counsels of providence.

We must be grateful, brothers, to the charity of him who, without needing us, has loved us first. Our hearts have every reason to expand with holy joy at this moment. There is no happier moment for human beings than that in which they, who come from God, are once more grounded in God, or that in which creatures, moved by the Creator, consecrate themselves to the Creator.

***Love of justice comes from God alone***

The very end — the attainment of justice, nothing more — is a clear sign that it is God, not ourselves, who brings us to this point. Our courage, exultation and consolation spring from this certainty. This end can come only from God where justice is at home and whence it extends to all creatures.

The evil spirit cannot put the desire for justice in our heart, nor can flesh and blood lead us to justice. The world finds its greatness in anything but justice. The world scorns what appears so humble and paltry to its eyes, and mocks the simplicity of the just. It is quite different for God, who extended the heavens above us. God, when he wanted to found a kingdom here below and a city worthy of himself, discovered its solid foundation in his own eternal wisdom. JUSTICE was its foundation, as he says himself through Isaiah, who wrote of the mystic Jerusalem:*You shall be founded in justice* (*Is* 54: 14). In holy Scripture this unshaken foundation of justice is represented by Mount Sion, on which the holy city arose. Yes, justice is the solid foundation, but it is a rock hidden underground, invisible to humankind which does not see God.

***God protects and guides those who seek justice***

Human beings overlook the sublimity of the justice of God and of his Son made flesh. We must not expect the world to see anything sublime in this extremely simple end for which we come together. Yet that end — the justice at which we aim — is for this very reason the source of our trust and exultation. The Almighty himself has promised us that what is base in human eyes is dear and powerful in his.
This infallible promise is our assurance that if, through his grace, we obtain justice, the end of our Society, everything desirable will be ours. Without knowing the future we shall have the future itself in our hands and be able to rule ourselves with as much prudence as if we knew what was to come. As you know, brothers, God has committed himself to guiding our steps along the road of life. It is written: *He guided the just through the right ways* (*Wisd* 10: 10). God, you see, has promised solemnly to actas guide to the just man in the right paths, where there are no obstacles. Those who attain justice lack nothing; God’s providence, their loving mother, is herself at their service.That is why we now intend to abandon ourselves to this dear mother, and not move a single step of our own will without her guidance. Our great hope is founded on the justice of Christ, on the justice of faith, not of works.

***God leads the just to charity***

The Lord’s providence, our sure, loving guide, brings the just to love, to the charity of the Lord. Charity is the fulfillment and necessary perfection of justice: *He who does not love dwells in death.* (1 *Jo* 3: 14). Indeed, charity, led by God himself, guides by the hand both the just person and the person who truly hungers and thirsts for justice. Charity draws inner, invisible justice from its hiding-place, making it shine brilliantly even to the eyes of the spiritually blind who previously had either ignored or despised it. Yes, brothers, *let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven* (*Matt* 5: 16). *A city placed on a hill-top cannot be hidden*(*Matt* 5: 14)*.* This is why we want to name our society after universal CHARITY, and why we want it to tend to charity — because it is founded in justice.

***Charity and sacrifice in Jesus Christ***

There is no name more attractive than charity. But charity is also strong, brothers. The charity of Christ is as strong as death: *love is as strong as death* (*Cant* 8: 6). True love is blood-love; love and sacrifice are inseparable. For this reason, the aim of our Society requires from us total renunciation of all things, detachment from the world of sense and from ourselves, and complete abnegation.

Daily, we see our divine Teacher of love, the only lawgiver for our Society, bleeding and wounded as he hangs from a cross. There he remains, hands and feet pierced not so much by spear and nails as by the arrows of love which alone account for his death. He is the supreme exemplar in whom every Christian and each member of the Institute of Charity has to be mirrored. He is the first member, the head, and great founder of the Institute. Justice has led him directly to charity; charity has immolated him.
This is the lot, brothers, which we must all choose; it is our sure sign of discipleship: *the disciple is not above his master* (*Matt* 10: 24; *Lk* 6: 40). But this corpse will rise again. Charity slays, but only to restore to life immortal.

***The five links of the chain of gold***

Let us exult today, therefore. The different links of this chain of gold, which must now bind us forever, are beautiful and delicate. *Justice*, the first link, leads us to find the Almighty and to choose his *providence* and goodness, the second link, as the guide to our steps. God then directs us to *charity* towards our neighbour, the third link. Charity leads us to *sacrifice*, the fourth link, and sacrifice to imperishable *glory*, the fifth and last link.
There, briefly, you have the outline of our society to which we shall belong forever. With the eyes of faith you see it drawn for you by the very hand of the Lord, in beautiful white and red.[(1)](file:///C%3A%5C%5CUsers%5C%5Csanca%5C%5CDownloads%5C%5CSL_Homily_1%20%281%29.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_5)

But before you come to the great act of the everlasting self-oblation contained in your vows, you have to state publicly that you have a firm will to submit yourselves to the yoke of such a humble, sublime law. You have to reply in the sincerity of your heart to the following question, in the sight of our crucified God, and of the Virgin Mother who conceived him on this day: *Do you wish, therefore, to preserve chastity*, etc.

(*At this point the vows were taken*)

**Notes**

[(1)](file:///C%3A%5C%5CUsers%5C%5Csanca%5C%5CDownloads%5C%5CSL_Homily_1%20%281%29.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22r_5) A dramatic figure of Christ, bleeding and crucified, hangs over the high altar of the church where the service was taking place.

**Second Homily**

Rosmini gave this talk on the feast of the Annunciation, 1844, at Calvary, Domodossola, at the religious profession of members of the Institute of Charity.
Between 1838 and 1844 he had been subjected to severe, unwarranted attacks on philosophical and theological grounds. Gioberti was responsible for the philosophical opposition which resulted from comments made by Rosmini on a book by Gioberti. Rosmini made no reply. The theological assault, occasioned by Rosmini’s *Conscience,* denigrated his faith and devotion to the Church and the Pope. Rosmini defended himself openly in several works, despite the anonymity of his assailants. At last Pope Gregory XVI forbade further attacks on Rosmini and imposed silence on both parties.
During the whole of this period Rosmini’s soul was immersed in the serene atmosphere of virtue and love of God; his gaze was fixed on justice, whose work and activity he describes, as well as its presence in the divine Exemplar. This is the first link in the chain of gold.

**Justice**

*Open to me the gates of justice, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the just shall enter through it* (*Ps* 117: 19).

***The most solid foundation: holy, powerful, blissful***

Brothers, in the name of God, of the Catholic Church and of the Institute of Charity, I am about to receive the offering you will make of yourselves to the Creator. Allow me first to say what springs from my heart.
There are so many matters I would speak to you about. I could remind you of the extremely grave responsibilities undertaken by those who intend to make profession in the Institute, which is what you are asking. I could encourage you to make the great offering of yourselves on the altar of the Lord with generosity equal to the magnitude of the sacrifice. I could pour out my heart in joy at the precious grace given to you by your Lord as I accept you into the society of love through that mystical gate described in the Psalm: *This is the gate of the Lord: the just shall enter through it* (*Ps* 117: 19).
I think I can do all this by reminding you, to our mutual consolation, of the foundation of our union wherein those called to the great adventure by Almighty God from every corner of the earth become one heart and one soul, provided they remain faithful to their calling.
They are joined in unity which reflects the more sublime unity wherein the heavenly Father and his divine Son are united.

Brothers, the foundation of the society to which we bind ourselves is so *holy* that it includes all our duties. Simply by speaking of this foundation, I remind you of them. It is so powerful that we have only to know it to feel strengthened and encouraged; so blissful that the upright of heart, whose highest hopes are based on it, can only count themselves happy a million times over, even in the greatest trials.
Indeed, as I think of the end which the Institute of Charity holds out to us, I imagine many holy souls, scattered throughout every part of the Catholic Church and known to God, offering with Christ to the eternal Lord and Father of mankind and angels this beautiful prayer: *Open to me the gates of justice; entering them I will praise the Lord*.

Almighty God, listening to their passionate longing, answers in their hearts: ‘Unite in my name to profess justice; bind yourselves tightly together for this end alone; sacrifice yourselves entirely for this, sacrifice all you have as my Son did for your example; sacrifice even lawful pleasures and decent, earthly goods, and time and health and life itself, and your will. In a word, sacrifice everything without exception.’
Brothers, your Institute was born in this way. This is its spirit. Justice is its sole foundation. We can truly say of the Institute: *This is the Lord’s gate; the just shall enter through it*. So I want to speak about this foundation. Listen.

***Human beings led astray by imagination and the senses***

Imagination prevails over reason in Adam’s children, whose sinful father squandered their inheritance of eternal light. Because the light of reason has been darkened, the light of justice also (the dictate of reason faithfully followed by the will) was eclipsed in mankind. This light lost its value in human eyes, surviving like invisible, buried treasure.
Untrammelled imagination, the enemy of the light, created illusory, deceitful good in place of justice. The human spirit became the slave of imagination which flattered instinct and subjective passions; imagination emerged as the servant of the angel of envy, who used it to cover the face of the world with his own darkness. The God of truth was disavowed by intelligent beings whom he had drawn out of nothing and created for himself. Visible idols that could be touched were substituted for God, as mankind lost almost entirely its mental capacity for seeing beyond matter and its own phantasms.

Mankind’s idolatrous gods also became the object of human affection, and the means of achieving imagined greatness. From that moment human beings were persuaded that their happiness consisted in an abundance of sensual pleasure. Material wealth alone was precious; greatness was to be found when one human being dominated others; wisdom consisted in feverish activity to gain all these things: the height of glory lay in attaining them. Finally, mankind deluded itself that these things and what it knew about them would make it self-sufficient.

And justice? In the midst of the false splendour that alone seemed to absorb mankind’s deluded phantasy, justice necessarily remained overshadowed by the gaudy colours of other things. It no longer attracted the attention of human intelligence, totally absorbed by the blinding glitter of sensation and arrogant imagination.
A glance at the world, brothers, will show it is still bewitched by deceitful power of these objects. The world, unconscious of the hidden force of moral good which alone perfects the human person, places all its wisdom in the pursuit of physical or purely intellectual good. All its desires end here.

***Mankind’s restoration achieved by Jesus Christ***

Yet God, although offended and forgotten, could not forget his creatures with their false wisdom and empty prudence. In his eternal, merciful counsel, he undertook once more to enlighten mankind’s blindness. For centuries he overlooked *the times of ignorance*, as St. Paul says (*Act*s 17: 30), until he called mankind to acknowledge its ignorance and repent: *For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, ‘he catches the wise in their craftiness’*and again,*The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile (1 Cor* 3: 19, 20)

He had already announced from of old his sublime decision to overthrow the false wisdom of mankind. Even through Isaiah he says: *And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid* (*Is* 29: 14). And because the eternal One foresaw his work as complete, he asks: *Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* (1 *Cor* 1: 20).

Yes, brothers, God has made it foolish. He has taught us that human wisdom, by forgetting and turning its back on the humble, invisible good that is justice, has deprived itself of the only good that can save mankind. Justice alone can ennoble and satisfy human beings; justice alone can make them great, immortal, happy, most glorious. In a word, justice alone can give them all that they are seeking, all that their nature longs for. Specious, sensible good, which mankind esteems and pursues exclusively, brings nothing noble or great in its wake. It does not raise people from the dead, calm their anxieties, heal their sorrows, or free them from fear; it contains no promise of stability. Rather it truly diminishes and disorders us; it breaks our heart, darkens our mind, takes away our freedom.
Death comes inevitably, and sensible pleasure foresees a future that the imagination can picture only as uncertain, dark and mournful, while conscience rightly regards it as terrible in the extreme.

The wisdom of the world is condemned as foolishness because, like a foolish virgin, it wants to light the lantern of joy without the oil of justice. True wisdom belongs to those alone who give all they have to buy the field with its buried treasure or the precious pearl worth more than all the purchaser possesses.
Justice, brothers, is precisely that immense, buried treasure hidden from mankind; it is the precious pearl known only to expert buyers. Those who go and sell all they possess to acquire such a great good inevitably appear stupid to the world at large, despite their very great wisdom.
Justice is humble, and silent; it is spiritual, invisible to the eyes of the flesh; and despised because invisible. But God, who enables it to be seen and appreciated once more by human beings as true good, restores our spirit so that we may see the emptiness and deceit which result when we scorn justice and rely on material things or on ourselves.

Darkness can be overcome only by light. God’s only-begotten Son, subsistent Wisdom and Truth clothed in human nature, was heard to proclaim: *To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the sons of men. O simple ones, learn prudence; O foolish men, pay attention. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips* (*Prov* 8: 4–7). Our Lord Jesus Christ had no other aim in his mission than to teach justice. He wanted to make it visible again to the blind by restoring, or rather giving them sight. The Father spoke to the future Messiah through the prophet: *I am the Lord, I have called you in justice, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness* (*Is* 42: 6–7).

***The divine message***

So Christ is called the *Sun of Justice* in the Scripture; no one receiving the rays of this Sun, which illuminate and revive dead souls, can ignore the worth of justice. Note, however, that the great work committed to Christ was not simply external; he had to renew the inner man, to create in the old man, blinded by sin, a new, sight-filled being who would restore wisdom to its rightful place through the attainment of justice. Wisdom would not be found through the earthly vanity characteristic of Adam.
This wholly internal work was carried out by eternal Wisdom as it unveiled its face to shame human ignorance. But it was also proclaimed in human words by the God-man; outwardly, too, human beings needed to recognise the wonders worked within themselves.

Incarnate Wisdom wanted to penetrate by means of the senses to the spirit of this creature composed of soul and body. The good news preached by our Saviour was aimed entirely at convincing the world of the folly of seeking peace and greatness through the corruptible good presented by the flesh, and exaggerated by imagination. Special protection was given to all those who, deprived of human good and weighed down by sorrow, considered themselves totally unhappy; under this protection they could declare themselves blessed. Human judgement was dumbfounded on hearing these ineffable words: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth* (*Matt* 5: 3–5).

In fact, poverty, sorrow, weakness dissipate the illusion brought by false good and prepare human beings to appreciate justice, which does not come and go with fortune. Jesus goes on to say to those who desire it: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied (*Matt* 5: 6). This dear promise, brothers, is made to us by the Lord as he draws to himself those who have abandoned the illusion of the senses to seek true good, unknown to the senses. The Lord himself will supply the noble object of their desire.

***Our divine Master’s disciples***

Still greater confusion was to be inflicted as the real Wisdom of God came into the world to give the lie to false, worldly wisdom and shame it. Not content with declaring worthless the things which the worldly-wise consider the height of happiness, divine power sustains and confirms the sublime effectiveness of its assertion by calling to itself the wretched, the unhappy, the neglected and despised. God dries their tears and offers them true good, that is, justice and the heavenly kingdom.

Christ did indeed found his kingdom, his Church, on such people. It was first made up of the illiterate, and of uneducated fishermen, and then of very ordinary people. St. Paul says: *For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God* (1 *Cor* 1: 26–29).

So, the uneducated entered the Church of the Redeemer before the wise, the weak before the strong, and ordinary people before aristocrats. Indeed the well-born were accepted only on condition that they recognised their imaginary wisdom as ignorance, their imaginary power as weakness, and their imaginary nobility as empty boasting. They had to change entirely the way they judged and loved; they had to confess the nothingness of everything outside justice. They had to acknowledge and revere as their sole master a Man despised and accounted stupid. They had to adore in the Crucified, in the most scorned of mortals, the powerful One of Israel, the Offspring of the most High, eternal, uncreated Wisdom.
As St. Paul says: *He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our justice and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord’* (1 *Cor* 1: 30–31).

***Justice is the end of the universe***

Brothers, this justice, unknown to mortal flesh, is the end for which the universe was made. The world was created from nothing for this reason alone: that the justice of God might shine and triumph in it to the glory of him who is justice and eternal holiness.
All divine Scripture, therefore, aims solely at teaching knowledge of justice. The doctrinal books teach us how to practise it; the sacred histories paint for us the different paths of the just and impious; the Psalms and inspired poems celebrate the glory of the just alone, after the defeat of the impious. Finally, all Scripture aims at proclaiming the just One *par excellence*, anointed by God and born into the world to teach and revive perfect justice in the midst of lost humanity.

Jesus Christ was pre-ordained from eternity ‘servant of justice’. He was to bring about in all its fullness the end of the universe; the divine plan could not remain ineffectual. The great work was completed by means of the Society to which Christ called all those who wished to hear his voice. This sublime Society, whose end and foundation is justice alone, is called ‘Church’ or ‘kingdom of God’.
The Church of Jesus Christ, therefore, has as its *end* and its *foundation*, justice, the end and foundation of the universe. In this universal society, the eternal design of the Creator is fully realised. How great, how unshakeable, how precious is this foundation of the Church!

It is eternal because God’s justice is eternal: *His justice remains for ever* (*Ps* 110: 3), and again, *Your justice is justice forever; and your law is truth* (*Ps* 118: 142). The words of the Master and Servant of justice will last forever: *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will not pass away*(*Matt* 24: 35).
In divine Scripture, justice is likened to the solidity and permanence of the highest mountains: *our justice is like the mountains of God* (*Ps* 35: 6), and Mount Sion is depicted as the unshakeable foundation of the house of David and the temple of the Lord, both of which symbolise the court of God, the Church of Christ.

Such a great, unshakeable foundation is a constant motive in the whole of Scripture for glorifying the Word. *Great is the Lord,*says the Psalm, *and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King* (*Ps* 48: 1–2). Yet King David was only a figure of the great King, the divine Master, who spoke through the mouth of his Prophet a thousand years beforehand: *I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession’* (*Ps* 2: 7–8).

With these words, the Lord proclaimed in anticipation his Church which we see planted and extended throughout the world, drawing its beauty from its solid foundation of justice of which Sion is the symbol. As another psalm says: *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth, our God comes* (that is, God incarnate), *he does not keep silence* (that is, he will preach justice), *before him is a devouring force* (that is, the fire of his charity), *round him a mighty tempest*(the last judgement). *He calls to the heavens above (*the angels) *and to the earth (*human beings) *that he may judge his people. Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice! The heavens declare his justice, for God himself is judge* (*Ps* 49: 2–6).

***Calvary: altar and throne of justice***

Yes, brothers, Sion with its solid justice is beautiful. But it has now been displaced by Calvary which, as a symbol of perfect justice, the foundation of the new Church, has a far greater claim to glory. Calvary is the hill of blood, despicable in human eyes, not mentioned by any prophet, almost forgotten in the Old Testament, a place where evil-doers die and leave their bones. Yet it was favoured from all eternity by the One who wished to overthrow all human wisdom, and glorify divine Wisdom alone. It was preferred to Sion herself, despite her splendour. And the eulogy pronounced by God through Jeremiah fits it better than any other mountain: *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘The Lord bless you, O habitation of justice, O holy hill! And Judah and all its cities shall dwell there together, and the farmers and those who wander with their flocks. For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish.’ Thereupon I awoke and looked and my sleep was pleasant to me* (*Jer* 31: 23–26).

Yes, the sleep of the Lord, his rest on Calvary, was pleasant and the cause of salvation. His immense charity sweetened all its bitterness. His death satisfied the Father’s eternal justice and filled with justice every soul that hungered and thirsted for it. Jesus then rose triumphantly and gloriously from death, as a strong man awakes refreshed, to rule over the whole earth from the right hand of his Father.

Israel had rejected the law of justice preached by this king of Judah on glorious Mount Sion; it had put in chains its peace-maker King, the preacher of justice, dragged him out of the city and crucified him on the infamous hill of Calvary which thus became a ‘sublime altar’ enpurpled by the precious Blood flowing from the veins of Christ and irresistible to the eyes of the true Israel.

All mankind felt the irresistible force of the justice impressed in souls by the Law of God. *When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the just man by a paltry piece of wood (Wisd*10: 4*). For blessed is the wood by which justice comes* (*Wisd* 14: 7). *The fruit of the just man is a tree of life* (*Prov* 11: 30). *When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the just is established for ever* (*Prov* 10: 25).

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more* (*Jer* 31: 31–34).

***The hill of foolishness, weakness and shame***

Calvary, therefore, touchingly commemorated by our sanctuary here, was the source of the living blood which made the justice preached on Zion, but brought to earth by Christ, effective for human salvation. It was Christ who rendered justice, the foundation of his Church, subsistent and alive in itself. Yes, the Old Covenant was also founded on justice, but the New, much more solid and perfect, was founded on justice personified, that is, on the just One of whom it is written: *The just is established forever* (*Prov* 10: 25).

There are, you see, two degrees of justice. With the first, at the level of precept, we are content with satisfying the obligations of the law; with the second, at the level of the evangelical counsels, we want to absorb its sublime spirit. The apostle Paul describes the two levels as follows: *We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute* (1 *Cor* 4: 10).

Brothers, no-one can aspire to the perfection of justice, unless he appear foolish, weak and base in human eyes, as Jesus Christ did first. The two levels are wonderfully symbolised by Sion and Golgotha, the glorious, happy mountain and the squalid hill of lamentation. Dear brothers, you aspire to profess an Institute which has taken its name from the charity of the crucified One. You must, therefore, carefully contemplate these two hills with the eyes of faith and choose the hill of blood where the Institute of Charity originated. It did not spring from human wisdom or power or nobility, but from foolishness, weakness and shame — from the very Mount on which we now find ourselves.
In founding the Church, Jesus instituted the religious state

Jesus Christ, in founding his Church on justice, instituted the religious state deep within it. This state is chosen only by those generous lovers who, to draw closer to Jesus, practise and profess his counsels as a sure means towards perfect justice. They seek his dear, though bloody, footprints in obedience to his clear voice: *Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’* (*Matt* 16: 24).

Yes, brothers, the religious state is one, although we see it outwardly divided into many orders. It was instituted in its beautiful unity by Jesus Christ so that those who profess it, under any form whatsoever, constitute as it were a single Society. Rooted in the depths of the universal society of the faithful, the religious state is another choice shoot, flowering from the same root of justice. The religious state is nothing more than the perpetual profession and promise made by human beings to tend willingly and more perfectly towards justice.

***Justice, the sole end of the Institute of Charity***

Our *Constitutions* are perfectly clear, dear brothers. They expressly declare this to be the sublime, noble aim of religious life. From beginning to end, they affirm that the end of the Institute for the professed and those wanting to make profession, is simply the salvation of our souls (*Salus animae in sanctitate justitae*, *Eccl* 30: 15) and perfection (*To know your power is the root of immortality*. *Wisd*15: 3).
If we are faithful to our calling, all we want is intimate, practical knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, of crucified wisdom and justice. This, brothers, is the simple, unique, but great principle from which flow all our duties. Our rules, our instructions, our customs all flow from it, just as all our thoughts, affections and actions have to return to it.

If you wish, the Society of Charity differs from other religious orders in one way only. Their holy Founders, taught from on high, were not content with justice as the sole norm. They added, as an essential end of their profession, one or more exterior ministries useful to their neighbour and the Church, such as preaching, education and so on. Our Institute has its essential rule, its only aim, in justice alone. Consequently, whoever professes this Institute obtains all that the Institute has set before itself and fulfils his calling simply by practising and reaching out for perfect justice. He is not bound once and for all to any specific good work.

In this way, we add nothing and subtract nothing from the rule of religious profession that came from the mouth of Wisdom itself, whom Joel called *the teacher of justice* (*Joel* 2: 23). Moreover, the faithful adherents of their Institute, who do not limit their inner desires or external works to a single ministry or some specific duty of charity, offer themselves to the Providence of their heavenly Father, ready to undertake all those ministries and works in which they can expect to acquire, through divine grace, greater justice and holiness.

Unlimited works mean unlimited sacrifice, of course. Each of us, therefore, must read his own rule in the lacerated body of our Saviour. The rule we have sworn, or want to swear, is written in living blood. And, as we leave the shore of this life, we grasp the wood of the cross, the ark of salvation, described by the inspired book of Wisdom in wholly appropriate words: *Blessed is the wood by which justice comes* (*Wisd* 14: 7).

***Open to me the gates of justice***

Brothers, this is why, at the beginning, I applied to the Institute of Charity the verse from Psalm 117, and pictured each of you making this request: *Open to me the gates of justice, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord*(v. 19).
This is why I attributed the foundation of the Institute to the fervent prayers of just souls scattered throughout the whole Church. From the depth of their hearts, they begged God and the angels and saints to open, not the gates of Solomon’s earthly building on Sion, but the gates of the true, spiritual temple, built on earth and in heaven by incarnate Wisdom when, on Calvary, he offered himself in perfect sacrifice. This is the deeper truth behind the words *Open to me the gates of justice. Entering them, I shall praise the Lord.*

Brothers, you have certainly prayed with these holy souls to enter the gate of this house of God. Your very presence in this place and the desires you have so often shown are your way of crying out: *Open the gates of justice*.
I am happy indeed to be able to satisfy your generous request in the name of the Lord and say, as I do so, through the trust you have inspired by your constant proofs of a sincere love of justice: *This is the Lord’s own gate. The just shall enter through it*.
I am happy to lead you into our Society through this gate of the Lord. Come, then, enter courageously and with humble gratitude, trusting in the goodness of your God. Enter this life-commitment in which you propose to fulfil with simplicity what is just, and to do so justly. As the Wise Man says: *For they will be made just, who observe just things in justness* (*Wisd*6: 10).

**Third Homily**

This talk, the second link in the chain of gold, was given at Stresa, 28th October 1847, in the church of Jesus Crucified. Since 1844, Rosmini had worked intensely and peacefully. Several of his more substantial works were written in this period. He had seen his religious family grow stronger, fortified by capable newcomers and works of Christian virtue and apostolate. Rosmini and his Institute, like the children of Israel in the wilderness were led by a single guide, the will of God and his wise providence. Under God’s leadership, they were ready to stop or to march; they were prepared for the ease of peace or the harshness of the journey. Less than a year after this hymn to the will and providence of God, Rosmini would find himself in the quicksand of politics. But he grows in virtue as he fulfils in silence and joyful adoration what the Lord had disposed for him.

**The Will of God**

*By the word of the Lord they pitched their tents, and by his word they marched: and kept the watches of the Lord according to his commandment by the hand of Moses* (*Num* 9: 23).

***Happiness in the consecrated life***

According to the Fathers of the Church, the children of Israel going out of slavery from Egypt under the guidance of Moses, wandering through the Arabian desert and finally reaching the promised land, were a figure of the Church of Jesus Christ, rescued from the power of the devil, as she journeys through the arid desert of this human life to the conquest of heaven.
The Fathers also tell us that the Israelites, chosen by God as his very own people, were more exactly an image of religious life — the many-coloured robes, as it were, of the Bride of Christ, one in nature but divided into its various congregations. It is founded on the word of the Lord: *If you will be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me* (*Matt* 19: 21).

These Christians are not satisfied with leaving the world affectively; they want to abandon it effectively as well. They want to flee from the Egypt of this world by renouncing its benefits and concerns, which they see as a yoke of slavery; they even abandon decent, worldly pleasures, the equivalent, as it were, of the garlic and onions of Egypt; they desire to move more swiftly and freely towards the holy mount where they may offer themselves as an acceptable sacrifice to God. The spirit of their sublime vocation commands them to do this and to enter into possession of the mystic land, flowing with milk and honey, promised and prepared for them from all eternity.

How bold they are! United in well-ordered ranks, that is, in religious societies, they form the camps of the Lord. *How beautiful are your tabernacles, O Jacob, and your tents, O Israel! As woody valleys: as watered gardens near the rivers: as tabernacles which the Lord has pitched: as cedars by the waterside*(*Num* 24: 5–6). Yes, it is reasonable, dear brothers, it is truly right and fitting that your heart should expand with holy joy on this memorable day, exult in its Lord, and dissolve in tears of gratitude. This is the most beautiful day of your lives. Pharaoh’s yoke is broken as you offer and sacrifice yourselves by irrevocable vows to the Almighty on the mountain of his law of perfection. Consecrate yourselves to him in sincerity of heart with the offering that incorporates you more closely in the chosen people, enrols you in the strong army of Israel, and gives you a place in the beautiful, safe tent of Jacob.
Exult, rejoice, chosen ones of the Lord, sing hymns to Yahweh and his Anointed, conscious and grateful as you are for the extraordinary grace that you receive.

***The Institute’s only guide is the will of God***

But I cannot and must not be content with congratulating you on your happiness. I want to remind you of your duties as I call you into the Institute of Charity, and tell you how these duties acquire a new character from the very perfection of this religious state. They are not only more sacred, but as it were of a different nature.
You see, just as disciples, servants and soldiers listen to the voice of their teachers, employers and officers before doing anything, so the religious of this Institute (and the whole Institute itself) has as its law of conduct the words used to describe the Hebrew people, as they wandered in the wilderness: *By the word of the Lord they pitched their tents, and by his word they marched: and kept the watches of the Lord according to his commandment by the hand of Moses* (*Num* 9: 23). This is the rule, brothers, governing pauses and progress in the Institute of Charity.

From now on neither instinct nor human decisions, but only the will of the Almighty Creator of the universe will rule and determine your steps. We follow the will of the Creator, interpreted by the Spirit of God with supernatural wisdom, *understanding what is the will of God*, as St. Paul says (*Eph* 5: 17). And it is about this sublime, sweet law, guiding us to that day when finally the gates of heaven open to us, that I want to speak briefly.

***The weakness and insufficiency of reason***

When God created us, he gave us reason as our guide. This alone, however, would not have been sufficient. As you know, we see nothing, even in the presence of light, without an object to look at. We do not see simply by looking. In the same way, reason remains inactive if it is completely cut off from what it can know. It cannot produce or create what it knows, but relies on the Creator’s power or will, which is free to present what reason can come to know. Having formed human reason, God was pleased to create for its advantage the immense, extremely ordered mass of the universe.
The cosmos is the source of the information built up by reason. Without the cosmos, human reason would be supine and useless: but when enriched and moved by it, reason gradually becomes our escort and guide.

These exact notions about the nature and condition of our rational powers bring us face to face with two highly important truths. First, reason of itself produces no results; second, its effective value springs from various objects presented to it by the generosity of the Creator. These objects are a gift of God, and allow reason to guide us.
But we still have to ask if this guide is appropriate and finds sufficient information and light in the objects of nature to lead us, directly and safely, to the great end for which we were made and to which we are ordered. Note that I am only asking if the study of nature provides enough information for this great purpose. I am not asking if reason is always an honest, faithful guide, or whether perhaps it sometimes betrays, for interested, dishonest motives, those entrusting themselves to its guidance. It may even deceive people with malice aforethought and lead them to their death. But I willingly leave that aside also, and all we hear about reason’s follies and perversions. I simply want to ask if upright reason, free from the unhappy influence of corrupt will, can gain enough knowledge from the creation to furnish us with sufficient light on our difficult journey to the great end.

This is what I would say. Knowledge available to natural reason is dependent on the limited, ephemeral things we know in nature. Our end, however, is boundless and eternal. The Creator’s goodness and generosity is such that he formed us for himself, that is, assigned as our end the blissful enjoyment of the divinity itself. So I grant that human reason, enriched with all the knowledge that comes from creation, is a sufficiently skilful guide for directing us in the order of nature. Nevertheless, it is insufficient in the supernatural order, whose object is hidden from us. God transcends the confines of the world we feel and perceive by nature.

Certainly, God is none of the objects which make up the world, nor has he any community with them nor any likeness of nature. Natural reason remains *per se* closed and blind to God, just as it would remain closed and blind to what is in the world unless it were given to the senses, and to our feeling, by God’s free will.
Whatever the development and progress of human reason, it can never show us the way we should travel to God, who always remains totally unknown and hidden.

***The will of the Father is Jesus’ only guide***

And that, dear brothers, is why Jesus Christ, the type of the perfect man, did not say that he had taken reason as his rule of life though he possessed it perfectly. Instead, as he clearly states about himself, *I came down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him that sent me* (*Jn* 6: 38); *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perfect his work*. (*Jn* 4: 34). This was the example the great Teacher of mankind set before us.
This is the rule which we find in every aspect of Christ’s life. It is also the rule of conduct for each of his disciples, and more especially for those consecrated to God in religion. It is the highest, most complete, most secure rule which satisfies every need and answers every doubt. It is the rule of that supernatural perfection of which Christ is not simply the idea or concept, but the subsistent, living type.

Yes, everything was supernatural in Christ; his food was supernatural, his life was supernatural, miraculous, theandric. In him, the will of human nature yields control to the will of the divine person. *Because I came down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him that sent me* (*Jn* 6: 38); *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will* (*Matt* 26: 39); *Father, if you will, remove this chalice from me; but yet not my will, but yours be done* (*Lk* 22: 42).
*Not my will*: this was the will of human nature, of human reason, because the will tends to the object presented by reason.
*But yours be done*: this was the will of the divine nature, of the divine person. The object of the divine will conquered and overcame that of human reason, despite the perfection of the object of human reason in Christ. Hence the opposition between the two wills, human and divine, that is, the struggle between finite and infinite in which the human will cedes and, by its very submission and annihilation, attains true greatness, sublimeness and triumph. God’s infinite will and reason, within which lies our end, are an abyss of wisdom impenetrable to the human intellect.

God’s counsels contain unfathomable secrets about humanity. Our nature is incapable of scrutinising them. It cannot sanely presume to ask the infinite Being who created it why he wanted to do this. His reasons transcend human intelligence; they can be gauged only by divine intelligence. It is sufficient for us to know the will of him who formed us. Nothing more is required: it is the will of God. All investigation comes to a halt at these words. This will is itself the final reason for human activity; it is the fulfillment of all human wisdom, the star of human life ‘which leads straight on…’

***Insufficiency of reason even in the natural order***

So far, brothers, we have assumed that reason could be a sufficient and faithful guide, at least in the natural order. Is this correct? We do indeed seek natural happiness in the natural order of things, but it cannot be achieved by following reason. Knowledge and prudence do not enable us to reach happiness. It is not even within the power of individuals to use their reason to reach happiness. As we have seen, reason, untutored as it is by nature, has insufficient understanding to provide us with counsel or direction.

In many people, intelligence is weak, sluggish and darkened. It remains untutored, without opportunity for education, either because others are negligent or because material needs leave no time for developing our noblest faculties. Things like this, which prevent the greater part of mankind from acquiring any notable degree of knowledge, cannot be foreseen or thought-out beforehand, or prevented. They are entirely in the hands of the most secret providence of God, who created and rules the world.
We have a choice, therefore. We either find in the providence of our Creator the surety and guarantee of our happiness or we have no hope of finding it. Nothing that we possess — reason, knowledge, power, or anything else — can furnish the surety we seek.

But Almighty God himself offers us the solid support of his infallible providence. He assures us that providence works for us provided we trust and believe in it, provided we abandon ourselves to it faithfully. He said to Abraham: *Fear not, Abram, I am your protector, and your reward exceeding great* (*Gen* 15: 1). The Scriptures are full of such consolation, especially when Christ is speaking to his disciples. So let us with generous hearts take as our guide God’s most sure providence, and the holy will that indicates and fulfils it.
That is why, dear brothers, the Institute of Charity chooses providence itself and the Will of God as its very own teacher and leader, not naked human reason.

***Reason can only conjecture***

This becomes even clearer when we realise that no degree of natural knowledge is sufficient to ensure our natural happiness or supernatural good — even if we were certain that we had the opportunity, the means and the rare degree of understanding needed to attain it. Knowledge, even of the finite universe, is unfathomable. How could any individual reach the final conclusions to such knowledge if the whole of mankind can only distil it drop by drop as centuries go by? And the more we endeavour to tease it out, the more we see how awkward our efforts are, how great our ignorance and how marvellous the transcendent greatness of God’s work in created nature, which we see sown with mysteries and enveloped by a kind of infinity that covers and veils the finite itself.

How can wise human beings trust sufficiently in their own learning for direction towards happiness in harmony with nature if nature shows them only a glimpse of itself? The truth of Scripture, in fact, becomes ever more clear: God *has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man’s mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end* (*Eccl* 3: 11).
Human prudence, depending solely on conjecture, provides no certainty or security about the end we set ourselves; it even becomes God’s enemy when it decides to set him aside and proceed independently. It clashes with God who has said clearly enough: *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; and the prudence of the prudent I will reject* (1 *Cor* 1: 19).

No one, surely, imagines that he can know the course of this immense universe sufficiently well to foresee all future causes and events, or to be confident of the outcome of his plans without giving a thought to the will of the One who governs all things wisely? No one is master of his own life; no one can add a day or even an hour to his life. No one can rely on tomorrow, or assure himself of life to put into practice his wide-ranging designs. He may be dead a minute after telling himself how well things are going!

***Dependence upon a supreme will amongst pagans***

Mankind, in all ages of its existence, has felt the insufficiency of reason, however well-instructed it may have been. It is conscious also of its weakness, and its inability to secure even earthly happiness.
We move on without knowing our destination; we work things out, we busy ourselves with one thing or another, but we are oblivious to whether our plans will succeed — or achieve exactly the opposite of what we intended.
Perhaps mankind never felt itself more utterly dependent upon the supreme, absolute, ineluctable will than in the period when, separated from God and almost totally out of touch with heavenly light, it was left to itself and lived in superstitious idolatry. An irresistible instinct forced mankind to trust in the existence of higher, mysterious powers, which it called upon and consulted about its own future. Over and above its innumerable divinities, the human race feared the inexorable necessity of Fate, against which the strength of heroes, the foresight of sages, the boldness and pride of tyrants were as nothing. The demi-gods and the gods themselves bowed down before the Fates and sought to second-guess their hidden decrees.

In the Greek tragedies it is always Fate — never human reason, or prudence, or heroism — which guides events and brings them to an unexpected conclusion. It was Fate, not valour or wisdom, that finally brought Aeneas to Italy to found Rome; it was Fate that kept him away from Italian shores for so long:*multosque per annos*… *errabant acti fatis maria omnia circum*’ [for many years…they sailed unending seas, driven by the Fates] (*Aeneid* 1: 31–32). For them, it was blind, inexorable, sometimes cruel and wicked Fate which did all this; for us, brothers enlightened by the light of the Redeemer, it is the most wise, inexorable, just and benign will of our God.
They were pitiable souls, *seated in the darkness and shadow of death*, and careful to consult Fate before adapting and submitting themselves to it. We are happy pilgrims, who can consult and interrogate the most holy, supremely good will that governs everything with the utmost love. Surely we can entrust ourselves to such a safe guide without wanting any other, and certainly without preferring our own limited vision and impotent will!
Yes, let the will of God alone be done! Let the will of God be our sole wisdom, the light to our feet, the star guiding our journey.

Lord, show yourself to us evermore clearly. Direct our faltering steps in the supernatural and natural orders — everything depends on you. And do this all the more because nature, even at its most perfect, could never satisfy itself. Human nature loves life, and abhors death; nevertheless, nothing created can make human nature immortal. Human nature loves total wisdom, but cannot penetrate the mystery of creation; and even if it could, the secrets of creation would not satisfy it. Human nature aspires to the highest, complete, infinite good, yet in itself has only a finite and continually changing good. Oh eternal, absolute Good! ‘You have created us for yourself alone, and our heart is not at rest until it rests in you’(St. Augustine,*Confessions*, bk. 1, c. 1).

***Almighty God is the end, the law, and the all for human beings***

Our human destiny, therefore, cannot lie in the order of nature; it belongs to an infinitely superior, wholly divine order. Almighty God alone is present in this supernatural order, and communicates himself directly to us. Nature is nothing: almighty God, who is the law, is the All for humans.
Human beings raised up to the supernatural order walk in the light of the divine face. This light is God’s holiness, the essential holy will. *Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect*(*Matt* 5: 48); *I and the Father are one*(*Jn*10: 30);*Holy Father, keep them in your name whom you have given me; that they may be one, as we also are* (*Jn* 17: 11)*.*This is consummate justice which satisfies and beatifies human nature.

So, dear brothers, you have chosen an Institute whose members belong, as disciples of the God-man, to the supernatural order. Their profession is to live and walk in this order, this light. They recognise no other. If they were to follow any other guide or wisdom whatsoever, they would fail in their profession and in their very being.

This explains why the end of the Institute is extremely simple and perfectly one. It consists in justice, in the justice of Christ, in supernatural justice which alone is true and complete. It is the precious pearl for which we have decided to sell everything else, and renounce ourselves, renounce the natural man. It is the hidden treasure that we want to dig for in the field of this Society; it is the *one thing necessary* which draws us away from our multiple anxieties, unites many in divine friendship made of one heart and one soul, and renders each one, through the love of all, stronger in the love of justice.
But how is it possible to be just if the Psalmist says: *I said in my excess: Every man is a liar* (*Ps* 115: 11)? Note that I am not speaking about the justice *that comes from works*, but about *the justice of faith*. *Anyone of us who says that he is without sin lies*, deceived by blind pride. The natural man is a sinner. But this does not do away with the end of our union, nor frustrate the efforts we set ourselves in our pursuit of justice. *For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ* (*Jn* 1: 17).

Christ is the Truth. The law contained only an ideal which was professed, but without hope of fulfillment, by those to whom the law was given. In Christ, however, the content of the law became a fact, a reality. Thus there was no shadow of a lie in him. *One jot or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled*(*Matt* 5: 18). These are his own words.
Christ fulfilled the law in himself. Christ still fulfils it in his members, in his disciples who, like the vine, receive the sap from the branch of the vine in which they are grafted. His words dwell in them and *the words that I have spoken to you*, he says himself, *are spirit and life* (*Jn* 6: 63). These words, enlivening the soul, come from Jesus. *And he is the propitiation for our sins*, who is *faithful and just, to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity* (1 *Jn* 1: 9).

This is reformed man, supernaturally regenerated, not man according to nature. Yes, in ourselves we are sinners, but in our Head we are just and holy as long as we keep ourselves incorporated in him. We are sinners as long as we tread the dust and mire of this earth, but there is One who continually wipes and cleans our feet for us. As St. Paul says: *For this is the will of God, your sanctification* (1 *Thess* 4: 3).

***Signs of the divine will***

Theologians call the law of justice given to us by the Lord ‘his signified will’.It is the first, supreme sign enabling us to understand safely what God wants from us.
This will is the rule of our actions; our conformity to it is the end for which we come together, the end for which we live. It is a delightful, extremely sure rule. Listen for a moment, dear brothers, to the promises almighty God makes to those who trust in the rule of justice, the divine will, as a guide to their actions. This is our great consolation and comfort.

Almighty God solemnly promises to be their protector. He said to Abraham: *Fear not, Abram, I am your protector, and your reward exceeding great* (*Gen* 15: 1). He promises to be their life and the length of their days: *And that you may love the Lord your God . . . for he is your life, and the length of your days* (*Deut* 30: 20). He promises that his providence, which oversees everything in the world, will work in their service: *And we know that to them that love God all things work together unto good* (*Rom* 8: 28).
He promises, therefore, that the whole of nature, from the immensity of the stars to the tiniest atoms, whose depth seems impenetrable and course inevitable, will act in favour of the just man. And in everything which is not determined by the law of God, the Almighty himself will take the just by the hand to lead him on the journey of life, strengthening him on the way until he reaches his blessed end: *Wisdom . . . gave him the knowledge of the holy things, made him honourable in his labours, and accomplished his labours* (*Wisd* 10: 10).
Thus providence itself, through the exterior events under its control, becomes the *second sign* of the divine will. The saints, therefore, after meditating on the divine law turn next to providential happenings in which to find the path they should take. The finger of God uses these events as unfailing guides.

You see, brothers, why your own special rules first of all tell you to follow the divine law, and then go on to command you to meditate on divine providence to which you must assent in everything. As the Apostle says: *Therefore we also, from the day that we heard it, cease not to pray for you and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God* (*Col* 1: 9–10).
This knowledge of God, so much commended in the Bible, is proper to the saints alone: *he gave him the knowledge proper to holy people*. It is nothing other than the intimate recognition of the divine will.
Almighty God also promises to show his kingdom to the just man, that is, the kingdom of his will. *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*, that is, let human creatures do the will of God on earth as the angels and saints do it in heaven.

When we do the will of God, God reigns in us: he is glorified. In heaven, the kingdom of God is complete because only the will of God rules there. All other wills obey it fully. What a power this will is! *For who resists his will?* (*Rom* 9: 19).
There is no doubt that we too shall prosper if we do the will of God. The work willed by God is certain to have a glorious end: Wisdom *…made him honourable in his labours, and accomplished his labours* (*Wisd* 10: 10). But we cannot be sure of success in what we undertake of our own will. Ignorance, presumption and rashness are the hallmarks of work undertaken in the expectation of success, but without reference to the divine will. Self-knowledge alone should be more than sufficient to dissuade us from such vanity. If God allows, we may begin, but in the end we shall either harvest nothing or be justly confounded by a shameful result.

***The divine will guides us to works of charity***

What is true relative to the Christian’s attitude to self, is even more true relative to our conduct towards others. Our very works of charity should be undertaken according to the indication of divine providence and the divine will. This alone assures us of the blessings we hope to have on these works. Once more, Christ is our example. He worked his wonders of charity as occasion arose and according to the desires and requests made to him by his neighbours.
This explains the commandment unfolded in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the neighbour *par excellence*, who did not go looking, but found someone by chance on the road.

Faith in the providence of our heavenly Father suggests this way of acting to our spirit also. Our Father has numbered the very hairs of our head. Nothing is forgotten; not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his knowledge. All good comes from him — and every defeat inflicted on evil.
Can we claim to be more loving, more kind to our brethren than our heavenly Father? Can we help others without being an instrument in his hands? And if we do consider ourselves instruments in God’s hand, as our faith teaches, can we act as instruments without his guiding hand?

Human beings, therefore, should be satisfied by allowing themselves to be impelled and controlled by the hand of God himself. Herein lies glory, and far greater good for our brethren. Even in works of charity, we should not want to be the principal agent. Let us leave the first place and the glory to God who does not forget his creatures. All our duty is reduced to listening for the word of our master and obeying, whether we are guided by a necessary precept, or the request of our needy brethren, or by the invitation of external circumstances preordained by God. Otherwise, if we interfere of our own will and through some all too human impulse in matters and business which appear charitable and perhaps are not (or are not for us), we may finish by harming ourselves rather than helping our brethren. We fail to observe Christ’s commandment: *Beware of men* (*Matt* 10: 17), or that of the Apostle: *Take heed to yourself* (1 *Tim* 4: 16). We forget ourselves, neglecting the salvation of our own souls, deceived by a false zeal in doing good to others. Preaching to others, we ourselves become castaways.

***The vocation of the Institute: the exercise of universal charity***

Brothers, there have been holy men and women in the Church of God who, moved and inspired by the Lord, applied themselves exclusively to a single work of charity and founded congregations for that very purpose. Camillus de Lellis, for example, consecrated his followers to the spiritual assistance of the sick and the dying; John of God to their corporal assistance; Peter Nolasco, Raymond of Penafort, Felix de Valois assembled a wonderful group dedicated to the redemption of captives. In fact, almost every religious community has chosen to fulfil some heroic work of charity.
These saints had special enlightenment from the Lord, enlightenment and stimuli not given to our Institute which cannot therefore predetermine the works of Christian charity to which the Lord may destine it. For the same reason, it cannot exclude any work.

It must be content with the riches found in the Lord’s precept, and make its own the command common to all Christians: *This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you* (*Jn* 15: 12). Because no special work is defined here, the commandment contains them all virtually. The Institute of Charity must therefore be disposed to do everything and prepared to bear everything when the will of God is made clear in individual circumstances.
The Institute’s special perfection consists in its lack of any special perfection. Its sole desire is that God’s grace render it excellent and even sublime in the perfection of charity set before all the disciples of the Redeemer.

So, each of us who professes this rule must follow every movement of the Lord and keep his ear open for every indication that the Lord deigns to impart. We move according to the voice of the Lord; following the indications of his all-wise providence in the exercise of charity (the common norm for all), this becomes our very own particular obligation.
This plan or rule, which directs all works of charity, is much more necessary in works of spiritual charity. Human nature is even less capable here, I would say, than in other works. The conversion of the heart is the work of God alone.

If we then go on to consider the priestly or pastoral ministry, we see that a special calling and divine mission is needed. *Neither does any man take the honour to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was* (*Heb* 5: 4). No one can take such a sublime mission for himself without meriting God’s reproof to false prophets: *I did not send prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied* (*Jer* 23: 21).

***The Hebrew people in the wilderness***

Every movement of ours, brothers, must depend on God. Our zeal, our glory consists in being ready and generous to march at the first hint from our Captain. This is good and true, of course, for every individual, but much more necessary for the entire body of a religious society which, as I said at the beginning of this talk, represents a chosen army of the Lord.
The unity of an army principally consists in the unity of the leader and his command; our leader is God, and his command alone gives order and strength to our ranks.
Look at the great numbers and marvellous order of the people of God! Six hundred thousand warriors, three million faithful distributed in twelve camps, all living in thousands of tents, yet arranged with wonderful symmetry in an immense desert. They travel, they rest, their soldiers are drawn up, they fight and conquer as one man. What a sight it is! What order! What irresistible power!

How do we account for the lack of confusion and orderliness of the march? *Blessed are you, Israel. Who is like to you, O people, who are saved by the Lord?* (*Deut*33: 29). In the middle of the encampment of the twelve tribes stands the magnificent tabernacle of the Lord. There he speaks to Moses and Aaron from the Mercy Seat. This is the centre of the whole encampment, and explains its beautiful unity, the harmony of its parts, the marvellous order in the whole.
The divine will is in the midst of the people whose simple, secure rule it is on all their marches. *Now on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, a cloud covered it. But from the evening there was over the tabernacle, as it were, the appearance of fire until the morning…And when the cloud that covered the tabernacle was taken up, then the children of Israel marched forward: and in the place where the cloud stood still, there they camped* (*Num* 9: 15, 17).
That cloud was the Lord; it was his angel, his representative before Israel. *At the commandment of the Lord they marched, and at his commandment they pitched the tabernacle. All the days that the cloud abode over the tabernacle, they remained in the same place* (*Num* 9: 18).

The sacred author is not content with one mention of this incomparable law which governed the people on their march. He repeats it several times, insists upon it and explains it*… for as many days soever as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle. At the commandment of the Lord they pitched their tents: and at his commandment they took them down* (*Num* 9: 20). He mentions it a third time: *By the word of the Lord they pitched their tents, and by his word they marched: and kept the watches of the Lord according to his commandment by the hand of Moses* *(Num*9: 23). He wants us to understand the importance, greatness and beauty of the movement of an entire people at the command of the Lord. It is not human will but the will of God alone which either moves them or holds them in camp.

***The happiness and laboriousness of the hidden, contemplative life***

Be careful, brothers. Moses had no doubt that pitching camp, when it was God’s will, was as important as marching. His description of the people at rest when they have no word from the Lord is on a par with what he says about their instant reaction when they are told to march. *At the commandment of the Lord they marched, and at his commandment they pitched the tabernacle. All the days that the cloud abode over the tabernacle, they remained in the same place . . . For as many days soever as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle* (*Num* 9: 18, 20). The cloud at rest and the peaceful encampments of the Israelites, even for lengthy periods, is surely, dear brothers, a living image of the hidden, contemplative life so much recommended by our rules. How great the peace and the quiet of this life in which Christ himself spent thirty years!

Amongst the Israelites no one dares to move rashly and impatiently before he sees movement in the column of cloud, dense by day and aflame at night. This cloud is their sure guide in prosperity and adversity, in easy and difficult matters. *They did not set out as long as the cloud remained over the tabernacle*.
What did the children of Israel do during these occasional long waits of theirs? *They kept the watches of the Lord according to his commandment by the hand of Moses* (*Num* 9: 23). They watched to see if the cloud would move; if it did, they moved. They stood like sentries, like guards, around the tabernacle of the Lord, as Scripture says. They were alert lest they missed a syllable of his voice.

And this is the attitude to be taken by the religious when, not yet sent by the Lord, he still lives his quiet, hidden life of contemplation. He prays, meditates on the divine law, and prepares for himself through study the things he needs for the journey which the Lord may require of him at any moment. He does not lose a minute; he uses all his time in reading, meditating, writing, praising and exalting the Lord, and in keeping his ears open for the slightest sound of his voice.

***God’s will made clear by means of superiors***

How meritorious and pleasing to God these holy activities are! So, brothers, I urge you to love this full, holy way of life. You must watch and pray and be ready to hear the Lord’s voice if he calls through the voice of superiors who are the angels representing him for you. Be ready always to get up and march at the first call. Go forward joyfully and courageously. You cannot fail: march without hesitation.
*If the cloud tarried from evening until morning, and immediately at break of day left the tabernacle, they marched forward. And if it departed after a day and a night, they took down their tents. But if it remained over the tabernacle for two days, or a month, or a longer time, the children of Israel remained in the same place, and marched not. But immediately as soon as it departed, they removed the camp* (*Num* 9: 21–22). Listen how carefully the inspired legislator minutely describes the practice of this great commandment which ordered the way the holy people marched and encamped. What instruction for us!

Yet the sacred author goes further. He tells us that obedience to the Lord’s representative on earth was the channel of communication between the divine will and the people. He had already shown how the cloud in which the Lord (that is, his representative, the angel) lived was indicative of the Lord’s will. But the sacred text tells us the same thing about Moses when it says: *At the command of the Lord by Moses*.
Brothers, your angel, your Moses, by whom the command of the Lord is communicated to you is first of all the Roman Pontiff, and then the other superiors in hierarchical order. These have their power of governing from the Pontiff. Let me repeat, therefore, those memorable words: *At the command of the Lord they encamped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses*.

***Jesus Christ, our guide, our strength and power and life***

Word of the Lord! Word of God! Lead this tiny army of yours, this nascent people, whom you have inspired with the desire to abandon the Egypt of this world, and strengthened with the wisdom to leave it. You yourself —no other — come with us and direct all our steps; tell us when to halt and when to march; make us rest and walk with you.
When you rest in our midst, we shall rest, watching in prayer, studying your words and the desires of your will*.*When you set out in our midst, we shall set out with you, fearless under your protection and guide.
Word of God, when you command us to be quiet, help us yourself to love and choose what you command; when you command us to rise and march, make us ready and strong, and resilient for the fatigue of the journey. It is not enough for you to tell us what to do and show us your will, as you did for the Hebrew people. We expect more from you. You must do in us all that you tell us, all that you show and command us. If not, you will complain about us as you complained about your people of old, and perhaps complain more strongly still: *For forty years I was near this generation, and I said: ‘They always err in their heart’*.

You cannot expect more from us, but we expect much more from you. You are not only the word of the law, that is, the way by which we have to travel; you are also the truth which fulfils the law and the life which rewards its fulfilment. You are not the ancient column of dark and shining cloud, but the Word made our flesh for love of us. This is why we are bold enough to come to you as one of us. We promise you great things because we expect them from you.
Yes, you must carry out your own commands in us, and we shall fulfil them with you.
We choose you today. These sons of yours are here to choose you as their guide indeed, but also as the strength and power and life of their souls. They want to rest and walk with you and by means of you, and be your members who draw life from you, their Head, for ever and ever.

**Fourth Homily**

This talk was given in the church of Monte Calvario, Domodossola, 10 October 1851. It is a work of high theology, a treatise of profound mysticism and a song from the heart of a lover. It is a canticle of praise, of thanksgiving and of holy exaltation sometimes restrained, sometimes bursting like a flood from a spirit enthralled and sublimated in contemplation, adoration and full possession of love. The talk has to be read and re-read. It needs to be meditated, each phrase needs savouring. And then? We have to abandon ourselves to the impetus of charity and allow ourselves to be lapped by the waves of loving delight which lead the soul to lose itself in the Infinite. Here we find Rosmini whole and entire, in all his spiritual beauty, and greater than ever. It is not him, of course, whom we feel. A more powerful force, the force of love, speaks in him. For years, he had undergone suffering of all kinds. The political events of 1848–49, the calumnies and defamation of the following years, the heavy weight of the condemnation of two famous works, and the dark, terrifying threat of condemnation of all his writings, under examination by the Sacred Congregation of the Index (the examination lasted five years 1849–1854 and was concluded with a solemn *Dimittantur*), all were used by love to purify and transform his spirit. And all the while he moved through the boundless heavens of pain and love in unconfined joy! Adore, be silent, savour.

**Charity**

1***. What do I lack?***[(1)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Csanca%5CDownloads%5CSL_Homily_4.htm#N_1)

In Baptism, the sacrament of faith, we are reborn through the mystical activity of Christ; our soul is signed with the character, and we are prepared for divine worship.
In Confirmation this mysterious activity is renewed. The Word, the character of God the Father, is more deeply impressed in our soul, already redeemed by the spotless blood of the Word. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our own spirit grows to maturity and attains full adulthood. Strengthened in this way, we can easily practise the most difficult acts of worship, acknowledging God and fearlessly bearing witness to his son, Jesus Christ, before the whole world.

This deiform activity has been repeated a third time in those of you, my brothers, who have in addition been invested with the solemn, public priesthood and new, exceptional gifts. Nothing, it would seem is lacking to your perfection, yet your presence shows very clearly that you have listened to Christ’s voice: *If you will be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven. And come follow me* (*Matt*19: 21).
Yes, dignity from on high is not enough if we are to achieve perfection. Nor is it sufficient for us to have been spiritually prepared as adult Christians for the highest purposes, and enriched with the gift of spiritual talents entrusted to our stewardship. It is not even enough to have received and begun to practise, over and above these gifts, Jesus’ own teaching on perfection, the royal road of charity.

Think of the young man who asked Jesus Christ about the path to perfection and told him that he already loved his neighbour. He said about the great commandments: *All these have I kept from my youth*. Despite this, he still felt he lacked something: *What is yet wanting to me*? (*Matt* 19: 20) The Saviour noted that he had still not renounced worldly things: *If you will be perfect, go, sell what you have* (*Matt* 19:20).

Yes, all Christians have been called to the perfect life, and have been given the rule of charity which is the fulfilment and goal of the Law (cf. *Rom*13: 10; 1 *Tim* 1: 5), and may indeed strive to fulfil it, according to their condition in life. Nevertheless, only those reach the summit of perfection who, detached in spirit and truth, strip themselves of all worldly possessions, and of all attachment to their own life. They realise that they have no good of their own other than God, and that their sole daily work and profession is God’s own charity.

Devout they may be, but Christians can still be concerned about leaving an earthly inheritance and, in doing so, waste a great deal of their strength, thoughts and affections. In this case, they cannot bring together, unify and pour out all that they have directly on divine charity, whose treasure and only inheritance is found in heaven.

This shows the greatness of the gift given us by the Lord when he chose us and took us out of this world. It also reveals the sublimity of the self-offering you willingly come here to complete before him, and which I, in his name and in that of his holy Church, shall presently receive from your lips and hearts at this holy altar in the presence of our Lord and Teacher, Jesus Christ, and of your Angels and of the Saints. They are here, invisible but gazing upon you, listening and bearing witness for all eternity.

The sublimity of your oblation provides the theme of my talk. I want to help you, before you utter your holy vows, to recall the greatness of Christ’s charity to which you now consecrate yourselves. May you draw comfort and greater spiritual joy from my words as you yourselves pronounce the words binding you tightly and for ever to the essence of goodness, to God himself, who is charity. Listen, then, with a cheerful and open heart.

2.***Charity is its own end, and beyond human power***

Christ’s charity, dear brothers, is simply justice at its most perfect.
It is right to love God, and so the just love him. *The righteous love thee* (*Cant* 1: 3). But in the lover the special, proper object of love is simply the will of the beloved. Whoever loves, desires the fulfilment and satisfaction of the will of the beloved.
Charity, therefore, means loving and, in loving, fulfilling the divine Will. But what does the divine will want? All it wants from us — what a marvel this is — is love itself. The divine will is manifested and summed up clearly and fully only in the great commandments of love of God and one’s neighbour.
One consequence of this is worthy of the deepest meditation: holy love is its own end and, in seeking the eternal will of God as its own, proper object, finds in it its very self. Brothers, let me explain this entire, wonderful cycle.

Note first how divine providence serves the supreme will of our Almighty Lord which intends, through grace, to produce in his creatures the splendid, if still hidden, work of divine love. I am speaking of the providence which orders the chain of events and rules all that happens in the world. All who love God, therefore, surrender to divine providence as to their mother and queen, inwardly aware that *to those who love God all things work together unto good* (*Rom* 8: 28).

And here we pause to reflect on questions springing spontaneously to the mind. Which of us can ever raise himself to God? Who can ever plumb the infinite depth hidden in the concept of perfect justice? Can mortal mind soar high enough to encounter the will of God, to penetrate its secret and to love it, or to understand how the impoverished, defective will of a finite being can become attuned to the most perfect will of the infinite Being? Can we ever understand how, from these two totally distinct wills, such harmony arises from all things in the universe that, in serving the glory of the Creator, they serve simultaneously the good of his creation?
These are profound questions which in themselves clearly demonstrate the importance of charity. So, before we think about charity and celebrate it, we first have to prove how it is possible for human beings.

3. ***Christ in us is our charity***

Yes, dear brothers, it is true: charity is utterly beyond human power. It demands a living knowledge of God, and conformity to the infinite wisdom and limitless goodness of the divine will. Even the supernatural character of the loving act itself is beyond human possibility. However, it is precisely the work and glory of Christ to make it possible for us. He is God as well as man.

First, he alone gives us faith, which makes us know the object of charity. Of its nature human flesh cannot behold the Almighty but, reborn by water and the Holy Spirit, our ears ringing with the Good News, our soul illuminated by interior light, we firmly believe in God. The foundation of our belief rests on the word of the Only Begotten Son who is close to the Father’s heart, and has made him known. *No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him* (*Jn* 1: 18).
How does this light and faith communicate itself to us? How do we continually carry this power with us; how are we so splendidly clothed in it? The answer lies in the power of the seal impressed upon us in the sacraments, the character we have taken as the starting point of our argument.

What is this power? What is this faith infused in us? St. Paul says: *Faith is the substance of the things in which we hope* and again, *the proof of those things which we cannot see*(*Heb* 11: 1). St. Thomas Aquinas, commenting on this passage, defines faith as that which ‘makes subsist in us the very things for which we should hope’ (*In* *Eph* 3; lect. 5). The things we hope for, which subsist within us through the power of faith, is Christ himself, the Word of the Father, the Beloved, in short, the object of charity.
Nothing else is worthy of our affection or our ardent desire. No good, when compared with this, retains its attraction. This is why St. Paul’s sole wish for his Ephesians is that *Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts* (*Eph* 3: 17).

This sublime Word, God from God the Father, *the figure of his substance* (*Heb* 1: 3), through his everlasting mercy, impresses himself upon our souls. He does this through the sacraments which he, Jesus Christ, has instituted in his love for the sake of uniting and binding to himself all other human beings.
Through these sacraments Christ and ourselves and all those whom he has redeemed, become *one body* (just as head and limbs make up a single body), and *one vine* (just as the vine is composed of stock and branches), although the branches of this mystic vine spread throughout the whole of earth and heaven.

This, dear brothers, is how divine charity which, as I have said, comprises ‘the perfection of justice’ and ‘the fulfilment of the most high will of the Creator’, becomes possible for us. Charity is so sublime in itself that it could never have sprung from *the will of man or of the flesh*. But, because Christ was born from all eternity of God the Father, as his natural-born Son, he drew charity *ab* *aeterno* from God, along with the divine nature. Forming one body with him, we share by adoption in this eternal birth, and with him share willingly and freely in charity. This is why St. John can write: *By this has the charity of God appeared towards us, because God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we may live by him*, and: *every one that loves is born of God and knows God* (1 *Jn* 4: 9, 7).

So let us rejoice and be glad in spirit. To the blind eyes of nature we may appear rash, and the world may criticise us, but holy fervour enables us to undertake the great, superhuman work of vowing ourselves to charity, which is as far above mankind as God is. Christ lives in us and his Spirit loves in us: *I live, now not I; but Christ lives in me*... *the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit who is given to us* (*Gal* 2: 20; *Rom* 5: 5).

4. ***Christ in us is the great lover***

Because the indelible character left upon our souls in the sacraments is our Lord Jesus Christ himself, *the brightness of God’s glory and the figure of his substance* (*Heb* 1: 3), so Christ is the great lover in all of us. He is our power of love:*by the grace of God, I am what I am* (1 *Cor*15*:*10). Love is Christ’s very own Spirit diffused in our souls, where he either finds no obstacles, or conquers them.

Brothers, we are now uncovering the root of charity and its shoots. The character is the strong, healthy root; operative and co-operative grace, in all its forms — gifts, powers, fruits and activity — are its abundant shoots. And Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit are in them all. These are the great, indescribable traces of Almighty God in mankind. When you know them for what they are, you know charity for what it is.

Think of the breadth and height of the theme I have dared offer to you in trying to describe the greatness of Christ’s charity in us.
For my part, I do not complain about my own inadequacy in this matter. My weakness simply demonstrates the height of bliss at which your hearts are aimed, as you all decide to enrol among the ranks of those great-hearted individuals whose sole aim is to live for love. Through *love of divine Love,*the only pure, unadulterated love, you want to live in the *Institute of Charity,*in *the Institute of lovers,*as it were.

5. ***God’s presence in us is charity***

Dear brothers, there is no doubt that the Old Testament speaks of the traces of God in the universe. But it speaks of God as so boundless that only a very rash individual will think he can comprehend him. Although the Creator has indeed left the impress of his omnipotence and wisdom on his works, his mark remains to some degree constrained and confused by the finite nature of creation, which cannot wholly take it in. The divine traces of God’s omnipotence and wisdom fall short of God’s greatness.
This cannot be said in the same way of the impress of holiness and divine charity in the Word made flesh, which have no limit. Charity and holiness are *per se*the divine substance since *God is charity* (1 *Jn* 4: 8), and *holy is his name* and *he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit* (1 *Cor*6: 17). Am I mad? Maybe, but what I have said explains why I can dare assert that, there are in the world adequate traces of God and that they are found only as charity reveals itself and acts in human beings.

6.***Knowing the charity of Christ***

Look what Job says: *Peradventure you will comprehend the steps of God, and find out the Almighty perfectly? He is higher than heaven, and what will you do? He is deeper than hell, and how will you know? The measure of him is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea*(*Job*1: 7–9). So speaks an age prior to Jesus Christ.

But we, dear brothers, live under the law of grace. We live in an age in which human beings have been changed, and *heaven and earth renewed*. Jesus Christ has come to make comprehensible, to some extent, things which of themselves are incomprehensible to us. Of course, Almighty God can be comprehended only by God. But Christ is God, and his Holy Spirit who infuses charity into our hearts is also God, *For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God* (1 *Cor*2: 10).

St. Paul, describing the greatness of God’s charity in almost the same terms as Job, dared to transcend Job when he told the Ephesians: *Let Christ dwell by faith in your hearts; that,* *being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge; that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God* (*Eph* 3: 17–19). This is the text with which I began today’s homily.
No one said or even imagined such a thing before Jesus Christ came into the world. None of the holy Patriarchs and Prophets ever uttered so sublime a prayer. Job himself, that holy man, affirmed that God’s traces in the world were incomprehensible. Yet Paul, kneeling before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, beseeches him to grant the Christians of Ephesus the attributes of charity, the greatest, most astounding of all the divine traces impressed in the universe.
Brothers, fearlessly and unhesitatingly let us accompany St. Paul and with him look more deeply, boldly yet reverently, into the grandeur of the charity to which we are determined to dedicate ourselves.

7. ***The interaction of faith and charity***

When St. Paul called upon the Father of our Lord to allow the faithful of Ephesus to grasp what I may term the four dimensions of divine charity, he was not of course trying to say that his Christians would be able to understand the Almighty perfectly and enfold all his grandeur. What he was teaching them, and what he teaches us, too, is that the Almighty can come close to us through Jesus Christ. He can make his presence felt in such a way that human beings, having seen all distance between God and themselves vanish, may apprehend[(2)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Csanca%5CDownloads%5CSL_Homily_4.htm#N_2) and, as it were, touch and feel God himself

Now this touch of God derives from living faith, that is, from faith enlivened by charity: *planted in love and built on love*, as St. Paul says. Charity, therefore, is the only virtue which reveals its own object and makes it known more intimately, as Christ himself taught and promised when he said: *He that loves me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him and will manifest myself to him* (*Jn* 14: 21); and again, *But you see me; because I live, and you shall live* (*Jn* 14: 19).

And here, brothers, we have before our eyes the high ladder of perfection depicted as continuous interaction between faith and charity.
First, we have faith which, by making subsist in us the eternal things for which we are to hope — the infinite lovableness of God and of Christ — offers its own object to charity also. Charity itself, by its nature tremendously penetrative, then makes itself at home within its divine object which reveals itself to the lover ever more clearly with new, enhanced and hidden worth. From the light of this new object, known only to love, faith miraculously draws fresh strength and, thus strengthened, increases charity in its turn. Such is the continuous action and interaction of the spiritual life.

8.***The length and breadth, the height and depth, of charity***

So, if we wish to penetrate more deeply into the mysteries of charity, we find that it contains the circle of eternal life of which I spoke at the beginning in slightly different terms. I said that charity leads us directly to the will of God as its final object, and that the will of God takes us back to charity, which is all that God demands and wants.

It is perfectly reasonable for us to say that charity has charity as its object and aim, and that in consequence the lover goes through a continual process of change into the beloved and the beloved into the lover. But God, essential good and the object of charity, would not be perfect good if he himself were not lover, just as this lover would not be good if he were not beloved. Everything which lacks love is not *per se*lovable. But if it is not lovable, it is not of itself good; and nothing is good unless it is loved, and is good only to the one who loves it. So the Almighty truly makes himself our good when he is loved by us.
We have to say, therefore, that the grandeur proper to charity shines out in two ways; it has two measures (or would have if it could be measured). On the one hand, its grandeur is equal to the grandeur of its object; on the other, its grandeur equals its inherent power of joining whoever is susceptible of love more perfectly to the object of love. Both measures are presented by St. Paul, as we saw a moment ago.

The object of charity, on which the first measure is based, is God, and Jesus Christ in his human nature and as Head of the Church. I mean God as lover, and Christ as lover. As we said, whoever is incapable of loving, and is not himself lover, cannot be the perfect object of love. So St. Paul prays that Christians should understand this in depth, not superficially. By the power of Christ abiding in them through faith, and by love, they should also comprehend God Almighty and Jesus Christ, the object of that very charity.
So, since God’s charity is undoubtedly equal to the grandeur of his nature, St. Paul prays that we should comprehend the divine nature, as we have seen. He describes it through the four infinite dimensions which in Job are incomprehensible. *Breadth* symbolises God’s charity, embracing all mankind; *length* symbolises God’s charity, enduring for all eternity; *height* symbolises the tendency of God’s charity to raise the intelligent creature to the supreme good and to final perfection; *depth* symbolises God’s charity which, completing the task it had set itself, works through projects of unfathomable wisdom and through mysteries, such as the Cross, concealed from the ages.

St. Paul prays, too, that the Christians at Ephesus should know the other object, inherent in the first, that is, Jesus Christ the lover in his most blessed humanity. As St. Thomas Aquinas writes:

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| --- | --- |
|   | Everything that pertains to the mystery of human redemption and to Christ’s incarnation is the work of charity. That he was made flesh is the consequence of charity. *But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)*(*Eph* 2: 4–5). He died for love: *Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness* (*Eph* 5: 2). |

St. Thomas continues:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|   | To know Christ’s charity is to know all the mysteries of Christ’s Incarnation and of our Redemption. They come forth from the vastness of God’s charity, which undoubtedly goes beyond all created intellect and every possible knowledge (*In Eph* 3; lect. 5). |

These, my brothers, are the objects of charity: God Almighty as lover, and Christ as lover. Or, as we said, charity is the object of charity because ‘God Almighty is charity’, and Christ is consumed in the One who is charity.
From these two objects, measure, if you can, the innate grandeur of charity. As we said, its grandeur must first and foremost be measured by its objects. And it is to this grandeur that you want to dedicate and consecrate yourselves in this Institute so that, with all the saints, you may be consummated in the One. *So that you may comprehend with all God’s holy people*.

9. ***Knowledge of charity revealed through the Spirit***

This vast field of thought bewilders me. If the object of charity is God himself — charity whose properties are represented according to Paul in those four infinite dimensions — wasn’t the inspired author of Job right to say that we would never comprehend them? So how can he pray that the faithful comprehend them? How can Paul say about the charity of Jesus Christ in his humanity that *it exceeds all knowledge*, and then go on to ask the Father to let the faithful know it: *to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge*? How can we know what surpasses knowledge?

This mystery, hidden from the world, is revealed to the children of God. Look at Scripture, which distinguishes two kinds of knowledge: one which goes up from the depths to the heights and the other which descends from on high to the depths. St. Paul says: *No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it arisen in the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him* (1 *Cor*2: 9). This knowledge *rises in the human heart* from our earth and ascends into the intelligent heart of human beings, which is far superior to earth. That is why Paul speaks of the eye, the ear and the senses, through which we gain knowledge here below.

But the Apostle speaks immediately of knowledge which *God has revealed to us through the Spirit*. As you see, he introduces another kind of knowledge. This is not knowledge acquired through the senses; it is revealed only by the Spirit of God. This is knowledge which descends from on high to our depths (because we are low in comparison with God); and it is this which enables us to comprehend the objects of charity. Through it, we comprehend the incomprehensible, know what surpasses knowledge and penetrate the impenetrable. *For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God* (1 *Cor*2: 10).

10. ***The effect of charity in the lover***

This is the new knowledge which makes wise all those who truly consecrate themselves to charity; it is itself charity by nature. Here lies another mystery: charity, as the object of charity, can be comprehended only by charity. As light is known only to the one who sees, so love to the one who experiences it.
As we said, faith first provides charity with its object: charity then penetrates the object and, in penetrating it, makes it its own through experience and understanding. In fact, as long as an object of this kind remains unloved, it does not possess its ultimate form, which renders it properly, proximately and actually the object of charity.
In love itself, therefore, the object reveals itself to the lover; it reveals the lovableness through which the lover loves it. This lovableness is its very self but as long as its lovableness remains hidden, the object of charity is also hidden and seems something other than itself. It can become, but is not yet, what charity alone can find fully complete. This is what I meant when I said that we have to use the second measure to understand, in some way, the grandeur proper to charity. We have to measure charity by its effect in the lover.

11. ***Subsistent charity in us***

This second measure shows charity as boundless and infinite as the first did. The first measure, you remember, was provided by the objects of charity — Almighty God and the humanity of the Redeemer and Head of the Church — which enable us to conclude that charity exceeds all our natural knowledge and comprehension. The second measure was found in the truly effective power which charity unfolds when joining those capable of love to its two infinite objects.

In measuring the grandeur of charity considered in itself according to this norm, we must prescind from accidental limits to expansion imposed by human will, and by evil will. The aim of the followers of charity is to fight every kind of vice in themselves, and endeavour to go forward, as the Apostle did, to the things which lay ahead: *One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards what lies ahead* (*Phil*3: 13). The things that lie ahead are simply Christ at the right of the Father, and our union with him. We press on to charity in its source, the subsistent ideal of charity. By ‘ideal’, I mean the essence of charity, because perfection is essential to charity. Everything imperfect withdraws from it. In other words, we are dealing with a living, not a possible, ideal like so many others found in human, finite matters. I am speaking of charity in all its infinite breadth, charity truly living and subsisting in its objects which, if they were not lovers, would not be what they are. Whoever does not love is not lovable, and cannot be loved with final love.

God Almighty, the first object of charity, is also the first lover. Indeed, he is essentially charity. And one act of this essential charity is the incarnation of Christ.
This explains why Almighty God and Christ are not only the objects of charity but, as I said, its exemplars and cause in us. We love such lovable objects because they, as loving subjects, have first loved us. As the Apostle of charity says: *In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world*. He repeats: *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation of our sins* (1 *Jn*, 4: 9, 10).

He says that *the charity of God appeared among us*, and immediately explains what charity is: *God is love*. God appeared among us, therefore, *because he first loved us*. God, in loving us, sent himself among us, himself loving, himself charity. He gave us his nature, therefore. But to give others one’s own nature is to generate children. *Charity is of God*, and because *God is of God*, God placed the Almighty among us. *And every one that loves is born of God and knows God, for God is charity* (*ibid*. 7–8).

Charity, therefore, makes known its own object, God. Just as faith proposes from the beginning the object of charity, so charity vivifies the faith by which we live and know the object of charity in its form as charity. And as faith ‘makes the things to be hoped for subsist in us’, according to St. Thomas’ commentary on St. Paul, so charity makes its own object subsist in us. This object is God in his form as charity.
What a wonder this is! Almighty God, as charity subsistent in us, is our charity! Charity in God, therefore, and charity in us, is one. It is of equal nature, of equal grandeur and of equal infinity. It is always Almighty God in himself and in us, although the act which corresponds on our part to charity placed in us — to Almighty God living in us — is necessarily limited and hence essentially, infinitely different from the act of God himself.

Charity imminent in us is one thing; the act by which we abide in charity is quite different. The Apostle of love distinguishes two correlative, but different things: God’s abiding in us (charity in us) and our abiding in charity: *God is charity; and he that abides in charity abides in God, and God in him* (*ibid*. 16). He had learned to distinguish these two things from his divine Master who had said of those eating his flesh and drinking his blood not only: *He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me*, but also *and I in him* (*Jn* 6: 57).

In measuring the natural grandeur of charity according to the marvellous power it has to unite lovers to the object of their love, we have to distinguish the two ways, distinct but never divided, in which the union takes place. First, when charity places itself in and subsists in the human spirit; second, when human beings keep themselves in charity and cling to it. In other words, Almighty God dwells in us (the first way): we hold ourselves in charity, in God (the second way). Charity always remains what it is. It never loses its nature, it is always God, always God-charity, dwelling in his finite creature. God knows this finite creature of his; he searches within the intimate depths of creatures, reaching to their very foundations, penetrating them entirely and reigning over all that they are.

Charity’s power to unite its lover to itself is immeasurable. No one can place a limit to charity, or say how charity, which pervades the whole of human nature, is now distinguished from it. We cannot indicate any line of separation, nor unveil the mystery of this ineffable union, although I have said enough to indicate that we are speaking about an infinite power.

12.***Our act of charity***

If we consider the power of charity from the point of view of creatures themselves who cling to God-charity, immanent in themselves, this act is indeed as finite as its subject. But we must not conclude that charity loses its infinite nature. We are face to face with another of the many mysteries which partly reveal and partly hide charity.

The human act is finite, but here revolves around God-charity, an infinite object. Clearly, the finite act does not and cannot limit its object, charity. At the same time, this act seems to lie outside charity because it does not constitute the essence of charity. Nevertheless, it is not only taken up with charity, but penetrates it and dwells in it: *he who abides in charity abides in God, and God in him*.

This act, therefore, does not finish in itself. It goes beyond itself because it abides in charity, in God, in Christ. But it cannot abide in charity, in God and in Christ, without becoming charity, without being united to God, without being transformed in Christ. This is the new mystery I indicated; here we have two apparently contradictory truths which, however, are not mutually incompatible.

There is no doubt that we abide in God-charity and that God-charity remains distinct from us. Nevertheless, one is in the other: God is all in the human being, and the human being is all in God. The finite act loses itself, or rather finds itself again in the infinite, and the infinite act in the finite. The union is complete, the union is perfect. At one and the same time, the two are both two and one.
If this seems inconceivable, we must conclude that both the power of charity and the grandeur with which it is furnished of its own nature are inconceivable.

13***. Love in us is our eternal life***

What, then, is charity in human beings? I can only reply: ‘Charity of charity, love of God who is love. This God-Love is love in himself; he is love in us.’
Love in us is our eternal life. The acts of those who live are love of that love through which they live: *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He that does not love, abides in death* (1 *Jn* 3: 14).

What does love of love do, what does charity of charity do? You remember what we said: the object of charity cannot be what it is unless it is loved proximately and fully? Only the lover perceives what is lovable in this object; it remains hidden from one who does not love. But here the object of charity is charity itself. God-charity abiding in us. Consequently, human acts neither fulfil us in ourselves nor render us lovable. But they do fulfil us and render us lovable by receiving in themselves an object which, because it is charity, is already loved *per se*. Charity in us is not founded on our acts. It is the work of God; it is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ says: *In this we know that we abide in him, and he in us; because he has given us of his Spirit* (1 *Jn* 4: 13).

Our acts, brothers, are acts of charity not because charity comes from us, nor because charity can be formed by our acts in so far as they are ours, but because these acts are the effects of charity placed in us. This charity is God himself whose life we live, and whose acts, proper to this life, we carry out.
Here, too, we catch a glimpse of charity’s infinite power to join its lover to itself. Charity is so sublime, so beyond both what we expect and what falls within the experience of natural affections, that it exceeds the ordinary laws of human love and totally inverts their order. The unbelievable grandeur of this subject has led me into apparent contradiction with myself. First, I said that the lover with his act provides the final form for the object of his love, that is, the lovableness without which there is no object of love. I now have to declare that this, although true for all ordinary, human love, can be turned upside down in the case of charity. Here we can say exactly the opposite.

In all natural love, the lover forms, through his act of love, the object of his love. But in charity, both things happen: the lover forms his object of love, and the object forms its lover. The contradiction, however, is only apparent.
If we consider charity in itself, as it dwells in its divine source, we see that its object is not understood without our simultaneously understanding the act of the one who loves, the act of God who loves himself eternally. If, however, we think about charity as it is communicated to human beings, the object of such love possesses something proper and peculiar to itself which finite beings cannot have, no matter how good they are or how wonderful the qualities they possess. This object of love is *per se*lovable because *per se*it is loved essentially and before the ages. And this is so because it is of its essence charity *per se.*

Light from on high shows how wonderful this truth is. I have tried to describe the origin and birth of the divine lover, who cannot be found within this creation. The whole of creation, without exception, is devoid of any capacity for forming even the tiniest act of charity. The immense extent of our universe lacks this kind of fire, this spark, and consequently the lover whom we are seeking. But the spark of love can still be enkindled here. As I said, and will go on saying, the object of charity produces its lover; and the object of charity, which is itself charity, exists prior to us and before creation. When eternal charity posits itself in what is created, and amongst created intelligences, including human intelligences, new life is immediately enkindled. Intelligent beings, human beings, now live in another way. The acts of this new life, produced by charity, are themselves acts of charity. At this point, the lover is born in this world, the limitation of the universe is overcome and created being is loosed from the bonds of its impotence. It too shares in the life of God.

14. ***Charity is always unlimited***

So, dear brothers, our difficulty vanishes. We need have no hesitation about the infinite grandeur of charity despite human weakness and the limitation placed upon the free acts of the creature. The finite, imperfect acts of the creature do not impose their finiteness on charity. If these acts were causes of charity, and charity their effect, this is exactly what would happen. An effect can be less but never greater than its cause. But acts of supernatural love, as we have seen, come from supernatural life which was first absent from nature, but has now been placed there by God. God, who is *per se*charity, has placed himself, God-charity, in nature. Charity, therefore, is the cause; the effects of this infinite cause are the spiritual life and its free, spontaneous acts. The cause is infinite; the effects, limited by the condition of the nature in which they arise, cannot limit it. If the cause is infinite, and if it is charity, it has infinite power. Yes, we are limited in the acts of life communicated to us by charity and exercised by our free will. Charity, though, retains its unlimited nature.

15. ***God’s charity in the incarnation***

We cannot, therefore, love with the love which is charity without being given charity, which furnishes us with deiform life and with the power to carry out the acts of this life of charity. The Baptist went even further when he taught that both charity, and the power to receive it, is given from on high. With charity, comes the power to receive charity. He speaks even more generally when he says: *A man cannot receive anything unless it be given him from heaven* (*Jn* 3: 27).

As John the Evangelist tells us: *Life was in him* (*Jn* 1: 4); it was in the Word before it was communicated to us. The Word, who was life, became flesh: *And the Word was made flesh*. Thus life was in humanity. God is charity; the act of God’s charity was the incarnation. *By this has the charity of God appeared towards us, because God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we may live through him* (1 *Jn* 4: 9).

But if God is charity, surely all divine acts, the creation as well as the incarnation, are acts of charity? Yes, this is true, but there is this great difference. All the other acts of God in the work of the world, other than the incarnation, are acts of charity, but they do not have charity as their proximate term. The incarnation is not only an act of charity; it also has charity as its term. God, as we have seen, sent his only-begotten Son so that we may live through him with a life of charity: *that we may live through him*.

The immediate term of the incarnation, and of everything that follows from the incarnation and completes the eternal project, is to make charity subsist in the world. Christ says: *I am come to cast fire on earth. And what will I, but that it be enkindled?* (*Lk*13: 49). Jesus is the only one who could bring this fire of his Spirit. As the Apostle says: *The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit who is given to us*(*Rom*5: 5). For charity to be in the world, it was necessary for God to come into the world because *God is charity*. Charity came into the world in Jesus Christ. When charity was in the world, the world could share in it: *And of his fullness we have all received*(*Jn* 1: 16).

16. ***God-charity in us***

Let us see how charity is in Christ; later we shall see how it is in us.
The person in Christ was God. Life, the Holy Spirit, God-charity, was in Christ. The humanity assumed by Christ, although entire in its nature, did not form a human personality. Nature, moreover, is subordinate to person, and acts are attributed, not to nature, but to the person from whom, as from first principle, they derive. Christ’s acts, therefore, were acts of the Word and proceeded from his Spirit. They were acts of charity, which is God.

But human nature in Christ was incapable of placing any limit to the grandeur that charity, God himself, possesses of its nature; the infinite grandeur of charity accompanied all the acts of our Redeemer.
Human nature in Christ, whether it received passively or acted with the most extreme activity, never constituted the personal principle of these acts. Superior to human nature, there was a principle from which all these acts began and went forth. This was God, the Word intimately united through the same nature with his Spirit, essential charity.

These vital acts, whether considered in their supreme principle (in the life which *was the Word, and the Word was God*) or in themselves (distinct according to the various powers and activities of human nature — its instrument, as it were) require as symbol of their infinite grandeur the four dimensions used in Job, perhaps the oldest of the inspired books, and by St. Paul, to express incomprehensible, divine majesty.

Christ’s greatest act, which was communicated in the most extraordinary way to human nature and infinitely overcame it, was to lay down his animal life through a free choice of his intellective soul.
No one took Christ’s animal life away. He alone laid it down with an act of his divine personship and of his human nature, which obeyed his divine Person. As man, he laid it down through pure love: *No man takes it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. And I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again* (*Jn* 10: 18).

17. ***God-charity in the death of Christ***

This great, incomprehensible act of the most holy will of Christ was also an act of the divine Person. As such it was the apex of God’s charity as it appeared in creation: *In this we have known the charity of God, because he* (God) *has laid down his soul for us* (1 *Jn* 3: 16). He says: ‘his soul’, because the soul, that is, his animal life, was the life of God; it was the animal life proper to the intellective soul which in turn was subject to the divine Person with whom it was personally united. The act of man, who laid down his life, was at the same time an act of God, and the most stupendous manifestation of Almighty God-charity.

18. ***Christ in us***

This is the beginning of charity in the world. Charity came here on earth with the God-Man, and from the God-Man was sent forth into other human beings.

Brothers, if we are to see how this took place, we have to return to the very beginning of this talk, that is, to the incorporation of other human beings in Christ. *He is the head of the body, the Church* (*Col* 1*:*18), and *speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in charity* (*Eph* 4: 15–16).

St. Paul’s words show that the spiritual nourishment of grace has to be given to us by Jesus Christ, our head, in whom we have been incorporated. As we saw, we are incorporated into Christ by the impression of the indelible character, Christ in us. He makes himself our head; he makes us his members. The sacraments which we receive, incorporated in Christ, are those ‘ligaments’ of which the Apostle speaks. They are channels or veins coming to us from our head with his Holy Spirit, and bearing nourishment and life.

This is how Christ’s charity is shown in the sublime work of our sanctification; this is how Christ transfuses charity in us: *Behold what manner of charity the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and be, the sons of God*(1 *Jn* 3: 1). *And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him* (*Rom*8: 17).

19. ***Living faith and charity***

But did we not say that it is faith which saves us? Yes, it is true *that he who believes in the Son has everlasting life* (*Jn* 3: 36). And we will not take away from faith what we attribute to charity. But we should at least pause to wonder at the harmony found in the supernatural teaching of Christ. We saw that faith, when simply proposed to us, presents to our spirit the implicit object of charity. When, however, faith is accepted and embraced by us, this object itself becomes God-charity, on which faith lives. This is living faith which the Apostle defines as *the substance of things to be hoped for* and *the evidence of things that appear not* (*Heb* 1: 1). St. Thomas Aquinas, as we know, says of this faith that ‘it makes subsist in us the things to be hoped for.’

But what are the things ‘to be hoped for? They are all charity, glorious charity, the revelation of the glory of charity in us. St. John says: *We are now the sons of God* (you know, brothers, that this word ‘sons’ is a word of love), but i*t has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when he shall appear we shall be like to him; because we shall see him as he is* (1 *Jn* 3: 2).

We shall see Christ, the very one whom we now believe and confess. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God*(1 *Jn* 4: 15). John speaks of our faith and our confession of Christ in the same terms as he speaks of charity. Charity is not divided from living faith. He goes on: *And we have known and believed the charity which God has in us* (*ibid*. 16). He says that we have believed in the charity which God has in us. So the charity of God is the object of our faith because *God is charity, and he that abides in charity abides in God, and God in him*. The object of living faith is charity; faith, by making its object subsist in us, makes charity subsist in us.

Nevertheless, charity remains the object to be hoped for. The charity of those making their way heavenwards is indeed equal to that of those who have finished their journey. Charity on earth, however, is humiliated; in heaven, it is glorified. And it is pilgrim-charity which allows us to hope for the charity possessed by those in heaven. Listen to John again as he places the perfection of charity precisely in this hope: *In this is the charity of God perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgement* (1 *Jn* 4: 17).

The object of living faith, and of the hope that follows upon faith, and of charity, is always charity, that is, God-charity. Living faith, which makes this object subsist in us, makes charity subsist in us. So *he that believes in the Son has life everlasting; but he that believes not the Son shall not see life* (*Jn* 3: 36). This life is the charity of God in which we now believe. Believing in it, we possess it and we hold ourselves in it, hoping that one day it will break out in splendid glory.

What a marvellous circle of life this is! The three theological virtues revolve, each re-entering and in-existing in the others without confusion.
God, eternal, essential charity, made his solemn entrance into humanity at the time of his incarnation. Charity appeared in the humanity of Christ for *in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally* (*Col*2: 9). And it has passed to us: *And you are filled in him, who is the head of all principality and power* (*ibid*. 10).

It was precisely to gain full understanding of this for the Ephesians that St. Paul, kneeling with great reverence and fervour, prayed to the Father of Jesus Christ that they might *know also the charity of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge*. This knowledge, which is the knowledge of faith, places charity within us and fills us with the fullness of God himself: *That you may be filled unto all the fullness of God* (*Eph* 3: 19).
*To be filled with all the fullness of God* is the very good that you are seeking, dear brothers, in the Institute of Charity, whose end and aim it is.

20. ***Charity opposes sin***

But charity is also living action. Under this aspect, too, let us consider and admire the grandeur that lies before us.
So far, we have traced the first movement of charity which, coming down from the throne of God most high, has been transfused on earth in the God-Man and from him into those who are simply human. It has been transfused into all those who have been or will be, to the very end of time, incorporated with him through faith and through baptism, and offer no obstacle to his grace. So, in the Book of Wisdom, we find this description of the eternal Word in whom exists the life of charity: *And being but one, this wisdom can do all things; and remaining in herself the same, she renews all things and through nations conveys herself into holy souls. She makes them friends of God and prophets* (*Wisd* 7: 27).

Yes, brothers, the first and most wonderful act of charity is its transference to human beings whom it renews while remaining in itself, because God never goes out of himself. If we want to be consecrated to it, brothers, let us place no obstacle to its saving, sanctifying and glorifying action in ourselves. The obstacle is sin. Charity cannot dwell with sin because charity is holiness.

21. ***Charity does all good***

Nevertheless, John has a word for us about this: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity* (1 *Jn* 1: 8–9). He wrote in this way to the faithful so that, justified from their sins through faith and the sacraments, they would no longer sin: *My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin* (1 *Jn* 2: 1). But no one can measure human weakness or penetrate the depth of our original infection. We cannot be certain that in the depth of our heart we hide no germ of malice, no reason to provoke God’s anger. We must always fear for ourselves. Even after being justified, we can fall again, and often do fall into small sins. The Apostle of love goes on, therefore, to comfort sinners with these touching words: *But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just. And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world* (*ibid*. 2). This is our consolation; this is how we can be just — like the just who lives by faith: *My just man lives by faith* (*Heb* 10: 38), that is, by referring all his justice to Christ by whom he was and is continually justified from sins confessed with a contrite heart.

In the last analysis, justice, the effect of the living faith that justifies us, is at the same time the condition under which charity abides in us. Charity infused in us through the sacraments drives sin away; the presence of mortal sin drives away charity.
But charity abiding in us builds, on the justice of faith, another, more sublime justice. This not only renders us immune from evil, but makes us do good — all good, even to the height of gospel perfection and the fulfilment of Christ’s great commandments and counsels. This is the second action of charity.

John, after declaring that we have Christ as the propitiation of our sins, adds immediately: *And by this we know that we have known him, if we keep his commandments. He who says that he knows him and does not keep his commandments is a liar: and the truth is not in him. But he that keeps his word, in him in very deed the charity of God is perfected. And by this we know that we are in him. He that says he abides in him ought to walk even as he walked*(1 *Jn* 2: 3–6).

22.***The path followed by Christ***

All who come together with a sincere heart in the Institute have this desire. By entering a society of this nature, we all undertake to fix our gaze on the Exemplar indicated by the beloved disciple: *He that says he abides in him ought himself to walk even as he walked*. Our aim, in the union brought about by the close bonds of affection and religion, is simply this: to help and stimulate one another reciprocally to realise in ourselves this perfect, precious Exemplar. So how did Christ walk? What path did he follow?

First of all, he did his Father’s will: *I came down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me*(*Jn* 6: 38). In Isaiah, the Father calls him: *The man of my own will* (46: 11). We have already seen that the will of God is simply charity itself. God loves himself in everything, and this is charity: *The Lord made all things for himself* (*Prov* 16: 4). So Christ, in revealing the mission entrusted to him by his Father’s will, says: *Now this is the will of my Father who sent me: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have life everlasting. And I will raise him up on the last day* (*Jn* 6: 39–40). This is the object of God’s will: everlasting life for all who believe in the one sent by the Father.

But if we now ask what is everlasting life, don’t we find ourselves led back once more to charity? As we said, eternal life is simply exalted and glorified charity; eternal life is God-charity abiding in us forever with unveiled face, with no cloud to hide his essence. The sublime aim of Christ’s mission is, therefore, magnificent, eternal, perfect charity. This mission was to be completed by the very charity which dwelt in Christ: *In this we have known the charity of God, because he has laid down his life for us* (1 *Jn* 3: 16). In the ineffable counsel of the incarnation and redemption, charity is both the end and the principle at work in Christ to obtain that end. Christ’s actions, like a means binding principle to end, are also charity. Every breath Christ took was charity. And this is the example freely chosen by us. It is summed up in the words: *He has laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our loves for the brethren*(*ibid*.).

23. ***The four dimensions of charity***

Words and thoughts are insufficient to understand the grandeur of the charity abiding and burning in all Christ’s actions. Nevertheless, the Apostle prays for the faithful at Ephesus *that, being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth* of God-charity, and *know also the charity of Christ which surpasses all knowledge: that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God* (*Eph*3: 17–19).

Brothers, let us unite our prayers to those of the Apostle, and to those which Jesus Christ himself first offered for all his faithful. We must never grow tired of begging God, the Almighty Father, and his divine Son to pour charity into our souls. Just as charity alone can comprehend itself and know what is above knowledge, so charity alone can activate itself. Charity is the principle, the means and the end of deiform action; it is eternal glory. Trusting in this light, which we can receive only from God, but which we do indeed receive with all the saints when God posits charity within us, we can take a close, reverent and courageous look at each of the four infinite attributes assigned to charity by St. Paul. So far we have considered these four sublime characteristics as a whole in the divine essence, in the interior spirit of Christ and in his exterior operations. We now consider them separately, one after another. They should characterise the actions of all who wish to consecrate themselves to imitating Christ’s charity, which is superior to all human knowledge. All our activity should be resplendent with these characteristics. Our aim is to have them impressed with greater clarity, and forever, on our hearts.

The first characteristic is the breadth of charity: *quae* *sit latitudo.*There is no limit to the breadth of charity which reaches out to enfold all who dwell in heaven, all who still suffer in purgatory, and all, present and to come, who journey here on earth. No one escapes the immense embrace of charity except those who separate themselves from it forever, and willingly become trophies of conquering justice.

If some natural reason could be found for excluding persons from our charity, it would apply to our enemies. But charity is not nature, and what we hear instead are these consoling words: *But I say to you: Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you. That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who makes his sun shine on the good and bad, and rains upon the just and unjust... Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect* (*Matt* 5: 44–45, 48). Christ gives us his Father as teacher of charity; he gives us Almighty God, who is charity, as the example for all our actions.

Already, before the coming of Christ, the spirit of Christ had spoken and suggested to the inspired writer the following prayer: *But you have mercy upon all, because you can do all things, and you overlook the sins of men for the sake of repentance. For you love all things that are, and hate none of the things which you have made: for you did not appoint or make anything, hating it. And how could anything endure if you will it not, or be preserved if not called by you. But you spare all: because they are yours, 0 Lord, you who love souls. 0 how good and sweet is your spirit, 0 Lord, in all things*(*Wisd* 11: 24–27; 12: 1). This is what we are told about the breadth of charity in the Book of Wisdom. Christ wants us to imitate it. Our charity, therefore, must be as universal as that of God because it must be God’s charity in us. As such, it must be and is professed by those who associate under the standard of Christ’s charity. Their life must benefit all, continually. There is no limit, no exception. The desire to do good must never be lacking even when that desire cannot be activated. Above all, love for our enemies should shine out. May Almighty God grant that this generous love may always build up our neighbour in our Institute.

This will certainly be the case if Almighty God fulfils his own project in our regard. There need be no doubt about the characteristic proper to this Institute if its intention is to bring together and bind in one the hearts of those who want to live for charity and from charity. It will be marked by generosity devoid of jealousy; it will praise good wherever it is found and whoever does it. It will go to meet hatred with love, and conquer its enemies through good.
Its only revenge will be to consign injury to oblivion, and do good. In saying this, brothers, I am not condemning prudent defence. This, too, is charity if it prevents further sin in our enemy.

24. ***The breadth of charity***

There is more. Through its breadth, by which it expands without limit, charity becomes universal and rules over all human powers. Charity, governing all mankind’s natural, inferior affections, destroys what is evil in them, and protects what is good by completing, ordering and sanctifying it.

All human affections are, by their very limitation, defective and the cause of discord between human beings. Self-love, left to itself, is everyone’s enemy; love of one’s family, if exclusive, brings one family into opposition with another, and families into opposition with the whole people; even love of one’s country and nation, when it becomes an end in itself, is rendered unjust and harmful as it unleashes violence on other countries and nations. But all disciples of Christ and true Christians here on earth, who profess universal charity, are seeds of concord and peace scattered throughout mankind. First, they subdue self-love to love of all their fellows. Then, through meekness, hard work, sacrifice and the word, they teach others to do the same. Through their labour, family love flourishes without detriment to any other family or group of families. Finally, love of country, devoid of violence and pride, becomes meek and humble, and more sublime than ever through charity which tempers it and makes it true virtue, the law of justice, peace and wisdom.

This is the sublime way through which the work of the gospel in society is brought to the fruition proclaimed by the ancient prophets: *Come and behold the works of the Lord, what wonders he has done on earth: making wars to cease even to the end of the earth. He shall destroy the bow, and break the weapons; and the shield he shall burn in the fire*(*Ps* 45: 9–10).
This is the divine fire of charity used to burn the shields, melt bronze and reduce all weapons of war to ashes.

Universal charity is indeed the ruler and curb of all other affections which, unless dominated and held back by charity, puff themselves up and, like a stormy sea, roar and bellow in the heart of human beings. Charity alone commands and reproves affections where necessary. It says to each of them: *Hitherto you shall come, and shall go no further*(*Job* 38: 11). And suddenly, when affection begins to offend charity, it loses all its power.

25. ***The length of charity***

So, Lord, your commandment is measurelessly broad. It calms the depth of the human heart and draws in all that the heart is capable of containing. Those who associate for the sake of the perfection of charity can say: The Lord has brought me forth, into a broad plane (*Ps* 17: 20).

But charity is also long and unbounded. We recognise the length of charity’s perseverance and unconquerable strength. Scripture says about it: *Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it*(*Cant* 8:7*).*The length of charity is indeed prolonged infinitely. As an end to itself, charity merits on earth, cleanses souls in purgatory and reigns in heaven: *Charity never falls away, whether prophecies shall be, made void or knowledge shall be destroyed ... But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall fade away*(1 *Cor* 13: 9, 10).

Think for a moment, brothers, of the happiness, of the charity you have chosen to profess with your sacred vows. You promise never to cease loving, never to tire of doing good, never to abandon the good works you have begun, never to permit the sacred fire to be extinguished in your heart, or become lukewarm, or cold ashes. This perseverance of charity can only be obtained by one who knows, in the first place, that the charity we choose as life of our life, *is patient, is kind: charity envies not, deals not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeks not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinks no evil: rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices with the truth: bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (*ibid*. 4–8). These are the beautiful customs, brothers, proper to the charity you wish to profess; they are the signs enabling you to distinguish it from every other affection which under false colours untruthfully simulates charity. You see, charity is not a simple mental concept, nor a sterile affection of the heart, nor any natural inclination. It is not found in words or in a flood of rhetoric but is, as we said, all action, all life, all deed. Let us love, therefore, *in charity unfeigned* (2 *Cor* 6: 6) or, as John says: *Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. In this we know that we are of the truth*(that is, of God)*and in his sight shall persuade our hearts*(1 *Jn* 3: 18–19). Even before this, the Master himself had taught us that charity consists in what is done: *He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me* (*Jn* 14: 21). This is the true foundation of charity’s endurance and long-suffering perseverance. It is not an empty cry, nor an emotion which dies in the heart, nor the vanity and hypocrisy detested by the Lord. It is most real, loving activity, born from God, which watches and governs everything within us. It judges, rules and sums up everything in itself.

26. ***The length of charity in Christ***

Brothers, this is the constancy with which God-charity loves. He has loved all his works *ab aeterno*, he loves them now, and he will love them forever. He never repents of his gifts. He says to Israel through Jeremiah: *Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore have I drawn you, taking pity on you. And I will build you again, and you shall be built, 0 virgin of Israel. You shall again be adorned with your timbrels and shall go forth in the dances that make merry* (31: 3–4). His words are addressed even more truly to the Church, of which Israel was only a figure; and to us, too, and to all mankind, provided we do not close our ears to such touching protestations of his most faithful love.

This love has never allowed itself to be conquered by human waywardness of any kind. Indeed, Christ appeared on earth, like Jacob, covered with goatskin, that is, dressed in the ignominious cloak of the world’s sin, clothing that was not his own. He paid our infamous debt with his own blood, which allowed the love of God to conquer death itself. As Scripture says: *Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it* (*Cant*8: 7). The length, that is, the duration and longanimity of charity which must dwell and operate in all faithful imitators of Christ, is infinite because charity of its nature is infinite.

27. ***The height of charity***

But the grandeur of charity does not end here. There is a third dimension, the height of charity, which is also revealed in its activity. This height is the sublimity of its end. Just as charity embraces all human beings and all things through its breadth, and extends to eternity through its length, so through its end it rises to a height which has no limit.

This follows from what we have said. We have seen the kind of end and the kind of object which are proper to charity: God and God-charity. Charity prior to the creature; revealed charity; charity transfused and glorified in the creature; charity which loves only charity because it finds nothing else proportionate to itself; charity that rests in itself alone; charity that rejoices only in itself. This is the extremely simple but most sublime, happy aim to which all the untiring activities of our charity should he directed.

We would not love ourselves, brothers, with the love which is charity if this love did not lead our souls to resplendent charity in heaven, where charity is itself our term and blessedness.
We would not love our fellows with the love which is charity if our affections and our endeavours in their regard did not have their eternal salvation as our ultimate aim for them. All the rays of charity are concentrated, in *the one thing necessary* about which Christ spoke to Martha. The *one thing necessary* consists in acting, as far as we are concerned, in such a way that intelligent creatures attain charity. All the activities of God’s charity towards his creatures are summed up and rest upon that *one thing necessary*. Almighty God created the universe to draw from it the glory of charity by building up the heavenly city. Hell itself serves this glory.

God preserves the whole of creation, and orders great and small happenings with his superlatively wise providence, for the sake of the eternal project in which he realises the predestination of his lovers for whose good everything and every event, in the world, work together (cf. *Rom* 8: 28).

He came down personally to earth and became flesh; he taught, suffered, died, rose again, ascended into heaven and sent the Spirit of Love to save mankind by gathering us around his Father to love and praise him for all eternity.
*When all things shall be subdued unto him, then the Son also himself* (as man) *shall be subject to him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all*. *Then the Son shall deliver up the kingdom* (redeemed human beings, sanctified and rendered immortal by him, and formed into a kingdom) *to God and the Father* (I *Cor*15: 28, 24). The aim is that the God of Christ-man, the natural Father of Christ-eternal-Word, the source-principle of the most glorious Trinity (itself the principle or cause of all contingent existence) should render us blissful as we gaze on the ineffable sight of God, unveiled and manifest.

This is our end without end, and the consummation of charity, when *God will be all in all*. Union is indeed the work of charity, and there is no more ineffable union than that through which God renders himself *omnia in omnibus*. When we reach this union, we shall find every single part of ourselves — every fibre, every movement, every faculty, every act — alive and subject to Almighty God, that is, to charity, subsistent of itself, which divinises us. How can our minds conceive a greater, more intimate and stronger union than this, which itself is inconceivable!

Such is the infinite height of charity. And this immeasurable height of the end and aim at which charity of its very own nature launches itself is the life-giving principle which explains the order and project of providence. This principle, unfolding its secrets, eliminates irregularities and apparent contradictions in the government of the world. In fact, evil is encountered in this world created by God, evil which shows frightening power over all beings of every kind. Bodies crash together and break up; vegetation, fighting for ground and nourishment, impedes life and reproduction; animals kill and eat one another; humanity itself, bent under the servitude of sin, returns puffed up or humiliated to its original dust after unspeakable sufferings. Wherever we turn, we see disorder confused with order, vice mingled with virtue, disharmony and oppression and the bloody ruins of cities and empires; sorrow and crime abound. Everything seems to cry out, and a single word of anguish pervades the whole of nature: *sunt lacrymae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt* [All is choked with tears; no mind is free from mortal fears]. (*Aeneid*, 1: 462). Nevertheless, it remains true (and here we find the apex of divine Wisdom) that eternal love, the first cause of everything, *did not appoint or make anything, hating it*. Everything which exists or happens through Wisdom’s decree, and with its permission or activity or motion, is the effect of infinite goodness because it is the effect of infinite love.

We could never understand this if we were dealing with ordinary love. No human love is sufficient to explain this great mystery. Only divine charity holds the key to the enigma. Charity is supremely wise and as such has the highest end of all, beyond which nothing exists. Consequently, it is right and powerful enough to make all things serve itself and draw immense good from evil. From sins it draws the magnificent triumph of grace; from tears, sufferings and death, the joys of the resurrection and eternal bliss.

*The immense weight of glory*, which Almighty God prepared from all eternity as the outcome of charity transfused in creation, could not have been available unless the highest mind of all had subordinated all evil as well as all good to the increase, perfection and glory of charity. Love is proved above all in the crucible of evil, like gold in fire. It is both true and necessary, as the Apostle says, that *every creature groans and travails in pain, even until now* (*Rom*8: 22). What rejoicing this painful birth must bring! *And not only it, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit; even we, ourselves groan within ourselves*, but not without hope. *We are waiting for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body* (*ibid.* 23). This is indeed the end of the universe and of its sorrows and hurts. This is what creation expects as it groans in pain: *For the expectation of the creature waits for the revelation of the sons of God* (*ibid*. 19). Christ had already spoken in this way to his disciples: *A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she has brought forth the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. So you also now indeed have sorrow: but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice.And your joy no man shall take from you* (*Jn* 16: 21–22).

God’s charity rises above all present things. We have to see with the eyes of faith the same charity in all God’s powerful, just and wise works. God is equally good in all that he disposes because he is always charity. He is such through his essence; with which he works and foresees all things. And we shall indeed see this splendour of divine charity in everything if we consider the sublime end to which all things are ordered and necessarily linked.

Only those without the gift of faith, or those who limit their attention to particular things and events, without looking at them as a whole and in their final, lasting outcome, will be scandalised by what occurs in this world. In many of the things which take place, people without faith will simply be unable to discern the impulse and guiding hand of infinite charity. Charity in all its sublimity will be outside their range of vision.

28. ***The height of charity in our works of charity***

And here too we discover with great joy a new, wonderful reality. Here we find the exemplar of charity whom we have to imitate in this chosen life of ours. On the one hand, the sublime end of charity, considered in the works of God, is the principle guiding God’s government of his creation; on the other, the same sublime end, applied to the works which we propose to carry out, is the principle proper to the *order of charity*. Charity, you see, reaches its height only when it is well-ordered and leads our actions, as we said, to the eternal salvation of souls.

But the uniqueness and extreme simplicity of the end does not constrict the activity of those who love; it does not exclude multiple kinds of good, beneficial actions. Precisely because charity, although unique and extremely simple, aims as high as possible, no good work is excluded. Beneath its final end lies all the space in the world for every intermediate end and good proper to human actions. But the supreme end exercises its dominion from on high over all other ends. Every non-final end, every non-final good, is tempered, ordered, sublimated and employed as a means for the action of charity. As Christ said, we are called to imitate God who does everything and permits everything in creation for love.

All that comes forth from him has to bear the mark of his essence, which is charity, and has as its end the eternal bliss of intelligent creatures. So, too, all our multiple, varied activities must be charity whether they are concerned with our temporal or intellectual life, or with the life which is above all other life — I mean moral virtue and holiness which finds its own fullness as it floods directly into charity.

We should not grow weary of helping others even in their material needs or in the field of education. These responsibilities, however, have to be taken as a means for obtaining true superior and eternal good for others. Only when benefits bestowed upon mankind have charity as their mother — who raises them up to heaven — can they be considered true benefits. Yes, temporal and intellectual charity exist, but they would not be charity if they were not directed to moral and supernatural charity.

***29. The depth of charity***

It seems impossible to take the praise of charity and the description of its wonders any further. But you remember the fourth essential attribute of charity, its depth, of which we still have to speak. Charity is indeed immeasurably broad, and capable of embracing all things; it is long through its immortality and perpetuity; it is high enough to rise to the infinite Being. But beyond all that, it is deep enough to penetrate the abyss, as the Apostle, who was borne to the third heaven, emphatically reminds us.

When we speak about penetrating the depths of the abyss, we are dealing with limitless humility. Anyone who is not humble without limit is unsuitable for the grandeur of charity. Pride is ignorant of charity, which has no part with the proud and does not enter any heart swollen with pride. The humiliation of the Son of God brought charity to the humble. Listen! *Being in the form of God*, [he] *thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (*Phil*2: 6–8). And St. Paul adds: *For which cause God has also exalted him and has given him a name which is above all names* (*ibid*.); this is the end and final term of charity.

The limitless height of this end requires as its indispensable condition, an unlimited depth of humiliation, and of sacrifice, which follows on humility. It was precisely to indicate this that victims in the Old Testament were burned. They were the holocaust of charity.

If, then, we come to comprehend *the charity of Christ which is above all knowledge*, as St. Paul prays, we shall also understand John’s words: *In this we have known the charity of God, because he has laid down his life for us*. And he adds: *and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren* (1 *Jn* 3: 16). Charity thus becomes the friend of death, and of death encountered through charity in martyrdom, the greatest, witness to our faith. Hence love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell. *The lamps thereof are fire and flames* (*Cant* 8: 6). When I say ‘death’, I include all the sufferings of this life. They must not weaken our courage because they cannot weaken the courage of charity. The life of a lover — the life we choose, brothers — must be a life of struggle and suffering, of care for others and forgetfulness of self. Enrolling under the banner of charity, and trusting our Master’s teaching, we enlist in the Lord’s army. And we know that our Lord and Leader makes heroes of his weakest soldiers. This is not presumption. We do not hope in ourselves but in the Lord, as we said. Our hope comes from him and is strengthened by his valour. Each of us can say: *If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how has he not also, with him, given us all things? Who shall accuse against the elect of God? God is he that justifies. Who is he who shall condemn? Christ Jesus that died, yea that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us? Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulations Or distress? Or famine? Or nakedness? Or danger? Or persecution? Or the sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we are put to death all the day long. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter*.’ *But in all these things we overcome, because of him that has loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature. shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (*Rom*8: 31–39). This is the depth of charity; it is simply the depth of suffering in the midst of which charity’s most perfect and powerful act lives and shines.

30. ***The height of charity produces the depth of charity***

Of its nature, charity draws strength to live in the midst of fire, and to shine more beautifully in the depth of sorrow as its activity in the creature receives through suffering its final form of perfection. But this comes only from its immeasurable height of which I spoke some moments ago. The height of charity produces the depth of charity because the end on which charity fixes its sights is superior to all things. Everything is subject to it, including pain; everything is made to serve it. As the Apostle says again: *I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us* (*Rom*8: 18).

At present, this glory lies hidden within us, veiled by faith. One day, the veil will be removed and glory will burst forth within us in all its splendour. Then we shall see openly the quality and immensity of the end proper to charity.

What an end it is, which explains even the mystery of our Saviour’s death! As Paul says: *Having joy set before him*, [he] *endured the cross, despising the shame, and now is on the right hand of the throne of God* (*Heb* 12: 2). Surely everyone must desire this end, the source not only of the breadth and length of charity but of its depth which ‘penetrates the hidden sufferings of death and the darkness of the tomb’? This eternal end, which we can never desire with sufficient intensity, is God himself, essential charity, made of God’s substance; it has no term, but must rest eternally in itself.

Because all things are subject to it, charity has to extend over all of them. Its triumphant rays, reflected back from all created things and re-focused in charity form part of the fire of charity. Love for all means exactly this: to act so that everything may be directed towards final charity.

31. ***The dimensions of charity***

If the charity of the God-Man had not winged its way to God the Father from whom it set out and whose glory it sought, it could never have penetrated so deeply into such unutterable, inconceivable sufferings. Christ would have tired of us and not withheld his just indignation against the filth, iniquity and fault of us all. But what he says to Israel through Jeremiah is very different: *If the heavens above can be measured and the foundation of the earth searched out beneath, I also will cast away all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord* (*Jer* 3 1: 37). In other words, the Lord’s charity is higher than the space between us and the heavens, and deeper than the earth’s centre which no one has ever seen.

This is why Almighty God *will never cast away the seed of Israel*, as he says through the mouth of his prophet.
The heights of human pride are indeed great, but they are measurable; only the height of God is immeasurable. The depths of human abjection found in corrupt flesh are great, but the abyss of the penitent, long-suffering, dying humanity of our Redeemer is very much deeper.
Charity, which far out-distances every created thing, can triumph over all because everything is less than itself. And it does indeed triumph. Only charity can say: *I have overcome the world*(*Jn* 16: 33), and again: *Fear not, little flock*(*Lk* 12: 32).

Dear brothers, these are consoling words of immense comfort in our noble undertaking! They echo from everything we see around us, and supremely from the bloody yet glorious Cross which sums up in itself all I have said. In the cross, the saints have recognised the symbol of the four infinite dimensions of the charity of God and of Christ and of his disciples.

Let St. Thomas speak for them all:

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|   | Christ had the power to choose for himself whatever kind of death he wished. Under the impulse of charity, he chose the death of the Cross in which we find the four dimensions we have mentioned. For the breadth, look at the crossbeam to which his hands were nailed; our works, too, must stretch out even to our enemies. For the length, look at the upright from which hangs his body; charity must persevere and save mankind. For the height, look at the wood higher up where his head rests; our hope must rise to eternal, divine matters. For the depth, look at that section of the wood buried in the earth and invisibly upholding the cross; the depth of divine love incomprehensible to us because the reason for predestination exceeds our understanding upholds us (In*Ep. ad* *Eph.,*3: 5). |

Excessive love, let me add, is veiled under excessive sorrow, and the triumphant strength of charity is wrapped in the shroud of weakness and ultimate abjection while the rays of divine immortality grow dim in the deathly appearance of this last amongst men. Dear, dear brothers, may this great sign remain impressed in all our minds as a summary of all the sublime teaching about charity. May it be deeply inserted in our heart and in all the powers of our soul; by its strength may our hearts be made chaste and faithful for him who has espoused us with his blood, and may our powers be untiring imitators of his charity. Finally, may the glorious sign of the Cross of Jesus Christ, the instrument and symbol of such charity, be the seal of this prayer, this wedding-song of mine which today celebrates your happy marriage. Today, in the Institute of Charity, your virgin souls are joined unstained to the divine Spouse through a new, perpetual, indissoluble, happy and fertile bond.

**Notes**

[(1)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Csanca%5CDownloads%5CSL_Homily_4.htm#r_1) The section numbers, but not the subheadings, are Rosmini’s own.

[(2)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Csanca%5CDownloads%5CSL_Homily_4.htm#r_2) ‘Sometimes we use the word "apprehend" for "comprehend". In this case, it eliminates distance and implies nearness’ (St. Thomas Aquinas, *In* *Eph* 3; lect. 5) .

**Fifth Homily**

This homily was preached on 14th August 1852 when Rosmini received the vows of several scholastics of the Institute in the oratory at Stresa. In the talk, Rosmini continues to unfold the theme of his magnificent vision. He descends from the heights of his homily on charity to practice and describes, or rather indicates the sweet, deep torment agitating and inebriating the soul consecrated to charity. He moves swiftly from the struggle between feeling and spirit to the anguish of the person who loves and fears to offend God, to the heart-rending sighs of penitent love, to the distress of compassionate love, to the exercise of love in external activities, and in doing so underlines the value of sacrifice in the life of charity. Theology plays less part here than in the previous talk; heartfelt affection is more in evidence. Rosmini’s own spiritual condition was the same as in the preceding year, and the two talks on *Charity* and *Sacrifice*, while completing one another, reflect his position in a wonderful way. He is the singer and martyr of charity.

The homily is incomplete, but brief notes left by Rosmini at the end of the manuscript help us to form some idea of its breadth.

**Sacrifice**

**Charity is a continual sacrifice, and requires magnanimity**

Brothers, you have come here today before this holy altar to be enrolled amongst the members of the Institute of Charity. Your aim is to dedicate yourselves to the love of Almighty God and to do good to your neighbour, and you want some help to do this better in a Society of brethren all intent on the same project. May the Lord be praised! Charity draws you to unite your heart with the hearts of many others and live in greater love.

Yours is a wise choice. There is nothing more attractive or happy than a life of true love, which is the charity of Jesus, our Lord. This is immortal life, and it enfolds in joy every thought and breath of ours. Even so, I cannot say without hesitation: *Enter into the joy of your Lord*, although Jesus Christ himself will one day say these words to you, as you know. The thought of that day gives rise to our strength.

For the moment I have to speak about another matter before you bind yourselves to God, to his Church and to this Society through a new pact by which you consecrate yourselves to the limitless charity of our Saviour, and I receive your irrevocable word. Let me remind you how arduous the undertaking is, and at the same time bring you some consolation. I am indeed filled with joy at your choice, but I cannot hide another feeling which, in some indescribable way, resembles the compassion felt for victims who immolate themselves before my eyes and by my hand.

Compassion may seem out of place at such a joyful moment. Do you need consolation as you reach out for everything delightful? Compassion and consolation are for those who have to face things repugnant to nature against which the heart protests, or things which can only be fulfilled through extraordinary strength and great self-dominion. But here we are dealing only with love and of uniting ourselves with others who love in order to love more. Nothing is more natural, nothing more desirable than love. God made us for this. There is no difficulty here.

You know, however, that this is not the case. You have penetrated the secrets of divine charity and have already understood its implications. So I will try to show those who do not yet know, and remind those who do, that the profession of a life of charity is a continual sacrifice requiring magnanimity. So, brothers, as you generously entrust yourselves to the Lord who calls you to such a life, I shall try to indicate to you — and to all of us who are eagerly waiting to embrace you as companions in this holocaust — the pure, perennial sources from which we can draw the strength and the confidence we need.

***It is difficult to know the order of love***

‘Love is natural to us, and so easy and attractive.’ This is true, but the order of love is not equally easy and attractive. This order requires that all things be loved according to the measure and proportion of love of which they are worthy.
This is difficult for many reasons. First, because even to know and judge rightly about the degree of worth in things which merit love is not easy. Wisdom makes this judgement, and wisdom is very hard for our limited, ignorant minds.
Second, the worth of things is often presented to us under false appearances of good which deceive and seduce us. This too makes it hard to impose order on our affections.
Third, although false, illusory good may have been distinguished from true good, it still reaches out to seduce our senses and heart. Often we have a bitter struggle to rule and control our instincts wisely even when danger appears to have passed.

***The struggle between sense and understanding***

This is true of every virtuous love, even of love which conforms with the order proper to human nature. We are, you see, twofold beings: animal on the one side, intelligent on the other. As animal, we have faculties and instincts which restrict us within the ambit of a temporal, sense-world; as intelligent, we live in an eternal, infinite world, not dominated by the senses. We aspire with our better nature to a kind of good that has an infinitely greater value and dignity than the good to which we tend with our animal life which, however, often presses upon us more urgently and effectively.

The truly great good for which we are destined appears further away, out of our reach. Its tenuous beauty is difficult for our thought to grasp vividly; it slips away. Our free will has to use all the power and effort of which it is capable to draw near to this good, to reach and conquer it. Our continual effort brings fatigue and trouble. The flesh, in its desire to have for itself all our strength and power, weighs us down and continually draws us away from our generous resolve. If we consent to its deceitful call, the order of love is already broken, and the greater and better part of love itself has perished with this order.

But even more than this can be said. To the extent that the order is broken, aversion and hatred is felt for the sublime, immortal things we aimed at. As St. Augustine says: ‘If you have loved badly, you have hated; if you hate well, you have loved’ (*Si male amaveris, tunc odisti; si bene oderis, tunc amasti*. *In Jo*, chap. 12, tract. 51).

Yet this is only the first struggle aroused in us because of our twofold animal and intelligent nature. Already, it makes ordered love, which alone is true and complete, extremely difficult. Our lower, blind instinct would absorb everything if it could, precisely because it is blind. Intelligence, on the other hand, by presenting us with incorruptible objects of inestimable worth, draws us sweetly to itself and requires of us, with authority, that we subordinate the love of corruptible to incorruptible good and, if necessary, sacrifice corruptible good altogether. Often, this is necessary. Very often there is a collision between what is wrong and justice. At this point a second battle begins, much harder and more bitter than the first.

***Not knowing how to die means not knowing how to love***

In fact, requiring us to hold in check the wayward talent of our animal appetite in its longing to enslave us does not seem a great thing to ask. But in those moments when our entire temporal good and pleasure comes into collision in ourselves with duty and virtue, we can only preserve ordered love in ourselves by heroic fortitude capable of putting this love before life itself.

True love, dear brothers, has as its inevitable condition that we be prepared to die for it. If we do not know how to die, we do not know how to love. The school of love is the school of death; the profession of those who consecrate themselves to love is equivalent to the consecration of a victim of immolation.

This is true even of love which remains at a human level. Many die in defence of their wives and children, or sacrifice themselves for their country, or prefer death rather than betray their oath of allegiance. Many gladly shed their blood for their friend. Profane love has its own many martyrs. But this is much more true of the association between love and death, between the joys of love and the agonies of death, when we are dealing not only with ordered, virtuous love, but with supernatural love — the love taught us by one teacher and inspirer alone, Jesus Christ crucified.

Brothers, I will not describe the torrents of blood that have drenched and fertilised all the regions of the earth as a result of this most generous love, nor speak about the thousands of Christian martyrs who make our hearts beat, nor mention all those foundations, red with blood shed from love alone, of the Catholic Church which rises to heaven and extends to the ends of the earth as it increases through the ages in greatness and glory. Instead, let me tell you of other sufferings, other battles, other agonies sustained by true lovers of Jesus Christ after the example and with the strength of their divine Master, even when they suffer a violent death which, although a great sacrifice, is nevertheless momentary. The anguish of which I want to speak is continual.

***The anguish and torments of the fire of love***

It is impossible to describe the unspeakable sufferings of those who, while loving the supreme Good totally, with superhuman affection that conquers and thus oppresses the natural power of the human heart, see themselves continually deprived of the presence and full possession of the beloved. You see, the extraordinary nature of this love is equal to the nature of the extraordinary knowledge that produces it. The person who loves the supreme Good knows this cherished object with an intimate knowledge superior to all cognitive powers. He knows the object of love through immediate knowledge poured into him by infinite Good. But to do this, infinite Good must enlarge and immeasurably extend the natural faculties in the lover.

The heart, feeling itself incapable of this superhuman knowledge, has to expand beyond its natural limits. Human nature, so poor and tiny before this huge mountain of knowledge and love, feels itself overcome and conquered, and almost annihilated.

O holy souls, sweetly tormented by the fire of the love you now enjoy in the long-desired, whom you contemplate face to face in heaven, enlighten my ignorance. Tell me about the loving, tormented anguish of the suffering in which you spent your life on earth. How did you live while you were absent from the ardently desired whom you felt and knew, but who was still distant, still hidden, still not fully possessed? Holy bride of the Canticle, living image of these souls, you tell me what such a life is like. I see you languish, I hear your wailing, your tears, I contemplate your search for the beloved, and I understand you as you speak to those you encounter in your search for him and his abode: *I will seek him whom my heart loves. I sought him and I found him not…Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Show me, you whom my heart loves, where you feed, where you lie at midday, lest I begin to wander after the flocks of your companions* (*Cant* 3: 2; 1: 6). You faint because you do not find him: *Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples; because I languish with love* (*Cant* 2: 6). Yes, I understand. As long as your beloved is absent, you have no rest except in the blossom of virtue, in the fruit of holy works.

***To be dissolved and to be with Christ***

Dear brothers, God’s lovers could not live long on this earth unless they were comforted at least by practising those virtuous, holy actions which please their beloved, and render them dearer to him. This love, you see, loves to love as much as it loves to be loved. This explains the contrast lying at the heart of such love; it explains what I may call the tremendous battle between two extremely powerful forces. On the one hand, the lover searches for the beloved with unlimited vehemence in order to possess and love him; on the other, he desires with equal vehemence to be loved by him. This second love holds back the impetus of the first because the lover knows that he will be loved in so far as he remains distant from his beloved during the earthly pilgrimage, and works for greater good. The desire to merit conquers and restrains the desire to savour: *For I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ, for my brethren* (*Rom* 9: 3).

It is true, of course, that even in the present life the infinite object of supernatural love, although still enfolded in the veil of faith, is not completely hidden. But this itself increases the pain and anguish of the loving soul. It sees and tastes enough to know that its beloved is infinitely beautiful and attractive, but not enough to possess him fully. It sees and tastes enough to be able to measure the enormity of its deprivation. Hence the soul’s unheard-of efforts to tear through those veils and blindfolds which prevent the consummation of its union with the supreme Good.

***The exercise of joyful and tormented love in prayer***

Think for a moment of the efforts required of the loving soul even to enter into that intimate conversation with its beloved, called prayer, which is possible in this mortal life. Why is prayer practically unknown to worldly people? Why do so few Christians reach the heights of prayer? If the lover finds in raising his soul to God the most exquisite joy, the most perfect satisfaction, the most brilliant light, and the greatest possible closeness to his only Good, why is prayer so rare? Because the person who wants to reach the height of prayer has to abandon nature totally, abandon himself and take flight in intimacy with another, in intimacy with God.

Prayer is, in fact, a kind of alienation of the mind. Nothing created is sought there, nothing created is found. All help from sensible images, the normal means of human thought, ceases. The Good we seek, totally different from what is good in nature, cannot be mirrored by any image or likeness in the whole universe. The union of the loving soul with God is indeed at its sweetest when prayer is raised to the highest level, but this requires total, universal detachment from everything that human nature finds most pleasing and necessary, together with forgetfulness and interior abandonment of all that gives pleasure, of everything sought by our human faculties, of earth and heaven, and in the end of oneself. We cannot even imagine what strength of wing is needed for such a flight. Yet this is the effort and sacrifice required by the generous soul simply to enjoy whatever its beloved grants and manifests of himself in this life — that beloved who is the divine Being, and of whom it is said: *Man shall not see me and live* (*Exod* 33: 20). That state, in which the praying, contemplating soul is separated from every bodily sense, from time and space and every creature, to be left fixed and unmoved in God alone, is in truth very similar to death.

All the life of the saints, that is, of great lovers, is interwoven with these acts of prayer and contemplation which maintain them continually or at least habitually above the level of creation. At the same time, all the powers of nature weigh these lovers down and tend to draw them away from the sublime height. The saints on earth are like people torn apart willy-nilly by two powers stronger than themselves: on the one hand, the power of supreme love which lifts them up and, on the other, the power of all those attractions, sufferings and even necessities of nature which throws them down to earth.

Heroic resolve is needed if these devout servants are to consecrate themselves to the sublime activity of this joyful, but struggling, tormented love.

***The anguish and suffering found in the fear of offending God***

If only the man of God were certain that charity always prevailed in him over the deceit and assaults from his enemies! But he does not know this, or at least not with absolute certainty. He can never be assured that he is dear to his beloved Lord and has his approval. He can never be certain that his actions in difficult moments of life, in sharp, dangerous temptations and at times when he is taken off guard do not cause disgust to his beloved. The anxiety, the agitation, the heartfelt pain produced by this uncertainty in God’s true lover is intense.

Do I truly love? Do I truly merit love? Isn’t all this ardent affection of mine self-deception perhaps and an attempt to deceive God? Is this soul of mine sincere? Perhaps self-love and betrayal have, deep down, taken the place of the love of God. Perhaps self-love is deluding me. Perhaps it is a tool for the enemy as he turns himself into an angel of light. The human heart is very deep. Who can descend into the dark abyss, devoid of every ray of light? It is a place of darkness, unseen to all except God *who scrutinises the reins and the heart, and in his angels finds wickedness*.

A mother’s heart is in her mouth as she tries desperately to prevent the wilful slaughter of her child. In the same way, God’s lovers are terrified even by the thought of giving way to temptation and losing their beloved Good. Often they prefer to die rather than run the risk of any occasion or danger of offending their Lord. The very possibility of falling is a cruel torment. ‘If I truly loved’, they say to themselves, ‘I would be stronger, I would not be subject to such temptations, the enemies of my soul would not have such leverage over me.’ Then their doubts grow and disturb the tranquillity of their mind as they consider and perhaps exaggerate their daily unfaithfulness and imperfections. All the time, they hear the inward rebuke: ‘How far you are from loving your beloved as he deserves!’ This interior anguish, the rebukes, the dangers they fear and the inward self-doubt give rise to the continual struggle which consumes and perfects true lovers. God is certainly at hand to console them and continually increase their strength, but without withdrawing them altogether from salvific struggle and suffering.

***The profound distress of the converted, penitent soul***

Brothers, let me say a word about the horrendous distress which divine love infuses when it takes possession of a once sinful, but now penitent soul. It produces an extraordinary affection which of its nature seems contrary to its own cause. This new love generates in the sinner an unspeakable hatred of self, proportioned in its ferocity to the love which causes it. The sinner becomes his own enemy, the target, as it were, of abhorrence and torment; he never tires of inflicting punishment on self. The war waged in the heart of a sinner become lover of God truly reflects the words of Christ who has come *not to bring peace, but the sword* which is *living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword and reaching into the division of the soul and the spirit* of each person: *pertingens usque ad divisionem animae et spiritus* (*Heb* 4: 12). The tears of penance, the sighs and sobs of the contrite heart, are bitter and blessed […] [(1)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Csanca%5CDownloads%5CSL_Homily_5.htm#n_01)

Thousands and thousands of souls have magnanimously suffered and desired the rigours of divine, penitent love which is always glad to come to grips with suffering of any kind, and works wonders as it conquers pain and uses it for nourishment. The special nature of the act of love is its increasing perfection and delight as it suffers more deeply for the sake of the sole object that entrances it.

***Penitent love in Jesus Christ***

Divine love does not impose this kind of suffering only on those who have sinned and, through their conversion, have returned to themselves. First of all, no one is without sin, and no suffering on earth can be found to equal sin’s deserts in the enlightened eyes of the person who knows and loves the supreme Good whom he has offended through sin. Still, let us grant the existence of an innocent human being who is also a perfect lover. We are speaking, brothers, of the burdens imposed by the exquisite perfection of divine love upon human beings when they consecrate themselves entirely to charity with the intention of tending ceaselessly to such love. What does the sinless person do? The person, I mean, who loves Almighty God perfectly? Does the special nature and extraordinary power of this love produce only unalloyed happiness, joy and overwhelming exultation in him?

Well, there is only one amongst the sons of Abraham who is *per se* just and innocent. But look at the effects of penitent love in him! Look at the tears brought to his eyes by the spirit of penitence, listen to his sighs, see the burdens he suffered from cradle to grave because of his desire to placate divine justice. I see this Man, the only just Man amongst all the children of men: *He shall grow up as a tender plant before him, and as a root out of thirsty ground. There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness; and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him*. We see in him only the most *despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity; and his look was as it were hidden and despised*. His face is hidden by a veil of suffering which covers him and makes him an object of horror.

Dear brothers, *surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows*? And we, blind before him, *have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our iniquities; he was bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we*(true sinners) *are healed*.

*All we like sheep have gone astray, everyone has turned aside into his own way,*and God, who was the object of the immeasurable love of this innocent Man, was indeed the one*who laid on him the iniquity of us all*.

But *he was offered because it was his own will*; his great love drove him to will it. *And he opened not his mouth. He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be as dumb as a lamb before its shearer, and he shall not open his mouth* (*Is* 53: 2–7).

What a marvel of divine love this was! Through his unswerving virtue, the innocent Man puts on, like mourning garments, all the sins of the world. He forgets and hides the rights due to his innocence and holiness. Like a sinner, he says to his eternal Father, who is the object of his love: ‘Look at the Son of man who has sinned! Let your justice be satisfied; punish him. Let sinful human nature, which I offer you entire in myself, be handed over to death. Then, beloved Father, you will be fully vindicated.’

***Penitent love in our Lady and in the saints***

That, dear brothers, is how the love of God, so surprising in its operations and profound in its counsels, transforms in an instant the Just One *par excellence* into the greatest penitent. The same transformation is found continually in all the saints, who are justified by him who alone is holy. The nature of divine love, which unites and changes contraries, is always the same.

So those who draw nearest to Jesus Christ and share his innocence have the greatest share in his penitence; those who are furthest from sin take more of its burden on themselves. Humility and charity makes them take on the sins of others and offer themselves as substitutes to bitter punishment.

No one drank more of the Lord’s bitter chalice than the immaculate Virgin who bore him. The sword of her Son’s suffering passed through her blessed soul, as by the power of love she made her own offering one with his, and two victims became one.

The love of God, which teaches the converted sinner how to undertake the austerity of penitence and renders him implacable with himself, arouses in just, innocent souls a tremendous desire to suffer for the sins of others. This springs from their love of justice, which requires a balance for sin, and from compassion for their sinful brethren, for whose sins they wish to bear merited punishment and implore pardon.

***Compassionate love in Jesus Christ***

One of the principal characteristics of true love is compassion. Indeed, the meaning of the words ‘compassionate love’ is so profound that we can scarcely imagine how many sufferings this love produces.
Compassion is the sweet, but painful affection through which we feel in ourselves the sufferings and evils of all our brethren as though they were our own. Through compassion, one person alone suffers all that the others suffer as he amasses in his own heart all the distress of others. And the more perfect the love, the greater the intensity of this kind of suffering: *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalised, and I am not on fire?* (2 *Cor* 11: 29).

To form a correct idea of the enormity of the suffering which great, perfect love imposes on a loving soul, we have to mentally imagine all the misery of human life to which men and women, our brothers and sisters, are subject: want, which leads so many to suffer hunger and nakedness; illness, with all its torments and pains; sadness and passion, which can go so far as to obliterate the use of reason; violent death and, worse than death, the ignorance, error, bloody quarrelling, injustice, tyranny and wickedness of every kind which covers mankind with ignominy and leads so much of it to eternal perdition.

The compassionate heart of the person who truly loves his fellows considers this immense mass of horrible calamities, and sinks endlessly under the burden of all that it implies. The One who loved more than anyone else, and possessed so much supernatural love in himself that he was able to give it to others, is well aware of this. In the garden of Gethsemane, compassion for his brethren and for himself moved him to undergo such a tightening of the heart that blood, rushing through his whole person, was forced out in drops upon his face, soaked his garments and penetrated the ground.

All human misery, like an overwhelming flood, bore down at that moment upon his divine soul. Compassion and love made that misery his very own. Jesus, our sublime exemplar and true lover, could no longer live without prodigious intervention on the part of the Almighty who sent an angel to strengthen the Lord’s natural powers, which were unable to withstand the enormous weight of compassionate charity.

This mysterious fact opens our eyes to a great and marvellous truth: human nature, even when perfect, has not sufficient strength in itself to bear up when placed in the grip of compassion where true, perfect and effective love acts upon it as a press on olives. I think that only Christ experienced this totally.

***Compassionate love in the saints***

Brothers, I can say nothing more about this excess of loving, compassionate suffering. I can show you, though, how it spreads and produces further sorrow. It multiples itself like a ray of light striking several mirrors, and reflecting from one to the other. The very pain arising from compassion at another’s sufferings is itself the object of compassion. Indeed, who could love Jesus Christ without wanting to suffer with him? No devout soul could choose him as her spouse without finding her nourishment in the bitter food of his Passion and its full complement of innumerable sufferings. And, as far as I can see, the greatest suffering springs from compassion for him and the world. This compassion is more constant and more intimate, and distils into a single pain all that is most bitter and cutting in other sufferings. It is like a lens focusing all the scattered rays of heat and light into a single flame.

It would take too long, and is beyond me anyway, to unfold to you the incredible, marvellous effects produced by compassion in the souls and even in the bodies of Christ’s holy lovers. Their loving, compassionate contemplation of his Passion goes so far as to reproduce in them his bloody wounds. You remember St. Francis’ stigmata, repeated in many others after him, and the crown of thorns which brought blood to the head of Veronica Giuliani and other tender lovers of Christ.

Love first wounded the immaculate Lamb; the same arrow penetrated the followers of the Lamb. It pierced them so sharply that they suffered mortal agonies. And there never was a saint who could not say: *A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; he shall abide between my breasts* (*Cant* 1: 12).

Let me say this, brothers. It is true that human beings are made to love, and that the nature of love is inevitably accompanied by delight, and is essential delight. But it would be wrong for those who understand this, to conclude that the practice of love is easy, and that a life consecrated to charity, which is the most perfect love of all, can only be a rosy path without thorns. To say this would show complete inexperience of the totally different effects and actions of true love. In fact, there are very few who are prepared for such a generous experience of love. Why so few if indeed love is simply a bed of roses? Christ, who brought love on earth, has the answer: *How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leads to life*, and he adds: *and few there are that find it!* (*Matt* 7: 14).

***Love considered in its external actions***

I have spoken only of the different effects produced by the charity of Christ in the interior of the soul and, amongst these, of the effects of compassion. This alone, as we saw, can rule and torment the soul. Great spiritual strength is needed to withstand such a cruel struggle. But love is no less difficult when considered in its external activity. Compassionate charity for the evils afflicting our fellows inspires and moves us to acts which require trouble and effort. In other words, the effect of compassion is not in any way opposed to its interior quality.

You know this, brothers. You know that we love our neighbours to the extent that we discipline ourselves in order not to harm them in any way. This watchfulness alone, when perfect and continuous, is an immense burden to the disconnected, disordered powers of the children of Adam. The watchful care we need to avoid causing harm, scandal or trouble to others imposes a great deal of privation and abnegation on us. Over and over again we have to conform ourselves to the condition of others, a need which the Apostle expresses in that marvellous phrase: *I became all things to all* (1 *Cor* 9: 22).

But love is not content with this. It also lightens others’ burdens, and does as much good as possible to our brothers and sisters. Those who love forget themselves and their own inclinations, and willingly undertake noble, unending servitude. But this cannot be done without acceptance of an obligation to exercise all the highest virtues, the only means lovers have of obtaining the aim of their love. In other words, they are committed to unlimited assistance and benevolence towards all.

As St. Paul says: *Charity is patient, is kind; charity envies not, deals not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeks not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinks no evil, rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices with the truth. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (1 *Cor* 13: 4–7). In a word, perfect charity cannot be present without being accompanied by all the virtues.

Pagan sages already knew how hard it was to reach the height of any perfect virtue. Undertaking them all is a much more arduous and heroic matter. In fact, I have to say that it exceeds our natural powers. God himself must unite himself to us and work this marvel in us.
The charity of Christ entails all this, and perhaps even more because it not only includes all the precepts of the law, but is their *end* (1 *Tim* 1: 5), and from it alone *depend the whole law and the prophets* (*Matt* 22: 40).

***Preparation for the practice of universal charity***

We need not be surprised, brothers, if we feel our hearts fail when we think of what is entailed by consecration to the charity of Christ. All the powers of our soul and body, and our entire life, have to be dedicated to acquiring and practising every kind of virtue. This is a vast and heroic enterprise, and it is reasonable in the extreme that we should look for help and comfort in our weakness and infirmity.

God alone can help in a work such as this which overcomes nature. Help comes from God who gives you your vocation to the Institute. Yes, we do indeed comfort one another in some way; my very words are intended to comfort, not frighten you. But there would be no comfort from them if they veiled or hid the greatness of the undertaking put before you. How could I comfort or encourage you if I placed or formed in your minds a false, imperfect concept of the work for which I claim to comfort you? You need to know from the beginning the difficulties and greatness it contains.

We read that the eagle tests the ability of its offspring by carrying them high against the sun to see if they look at it with a steady eye. So God wants us to fix the steady eye of our faith on the light of his law of perfection and, from what we know of it, begin our flight towards it. This is the proof of the calling you have received, brothers. The faith you have in God enables me to go on glorifying your undertaking, and to invite you to gaze on the works which spring from the burning affection and sublime virtue of the charity of Jesus Christ. If the Lord calls you to charity, you have to help and assist your neighbour, that is, all human beings, in every way and with all the effort commanded.

***Examples of saintly heroism in the exercise of charity***

Take John of God for example. He was a poor man, mad according to his fellows, who had him put in prison. But he became the comforter, the father and mother of hundreds of unhappy people suffering from all kinds of terrible disease as they lay in a vast hospital which he himself built, although he had nothing at all he could call his own. He passed his life with the sick and used all his strength in relieving their pain. When they died he buried them with his own hands, praying for them. You have to imitate him.

Take Jerome Emiliani. He was rich but, through love of Christ, became a beggar and went through the streets collecting the most abandoned children and orphans whom he washed from their filth with great love and housed in huge buildings that arose from what I would call ‘the spell of his charity’. You have to imitate him.

Take Joseph Calasanctius, a venerable priest who abandoned all hope of ecclesiastical preferment and his intense studies, to teach little children to read and write, and to open innumerable schools for them. You have to imitate him.

Ignatius is another of these heroic lovers of God who opened schools and academies everywhere.

Camillus de Lellis spent endless nights at the bedside of the sick and dying, oblivious of infection and plague, and taught and formed his disciples to do the same.

John of Matha, Felix of Valois, Peter Nolasco were others inwardly touched by compassion towards Christian slaves who suffered in body and soul at the hands of the infidel. They paid ransom for these slaves and even sold themselves as slaves if they had no money to buy freedom for these wretches.

Peter Claver lived amidst the black slaves of America and shared with them their labours and sufferings.

Others left home and country in their eagerness to win souls for Christ. They faced the risks inevitable in long journeys to evangelise the most barbarous nations and savages. The most inhospitable land and remotest shores became red with their blood.

Charity attains its extreme trials in the apostolic life where the flame of divine love burns most brightly. There are innumerable examples of persons who have fulfilled the commandment and followed the example of Christ, who said: *The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep* (*Jo* 10: 11).

Look at St. Paul’s incredible work: *For whereas I was free as to all, I made myself the servant of all, that I might gain them all. And I became a Jew to the Jews, that I might gain the Jews. To them that are under the law, as if I were under the law (whereas myself was not under the law), that I might gain them that were under the law. To them that were without the law, as if I were without the law (whereas I was not without the law of God, but was in the law of Christ), that I might gain them that were without the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. I became all things to all men, that I might save all* (1 *Cor* 9: 19–22). *In many more labours, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often. Of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods; once I was stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I was in the depths of the sea. In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren. In labour and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness* (2 *Cor* 23–27)…

**Rosmini’s notes for the completion of the homily**

*You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the chalice which I am to drink*?
Of its nature, charity implies the spirit of mortification and penitence because this was seen in the charity of Christ.

I) The requirements of the love of God — complete sacrifice — Holy Spirit — meriting — Jesus Christ shows that joy is merit — joy.
II) What God does — Providence — *He treats us with great reverence*III) What we add of ourselves — the spirit of penitence — speak in this homily about the opposition between the *spirit of independence* and the *apostolic life* — Fear brings rejoicing — St. John the Baptist — *If I walk in the shadow of death, I will fear no ill because you are with me* (*Ps*. 22. The Lord guides me).

Jesus Christ conquered the pleasurable world:

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| 1. By rejecting everything visible: *I will give you all things if*…2. By submitting to all sorrow |
|   | A. in the garden;B. dying on Calvary… |

*Charity covers a multitude of sins* (1 *Pet* 4: 8).
*The great commandment* (*Matt* 22: 38).
*Now the end of the commandment is charity, etc*. (1 *Tim* 5).
*If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him* (1 *Jo* 2: 15).
*And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren* (1 *Jo* 3: 15).
*Let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth* (1 *Jo* 3: 18).
*If any man says: ‘I love God’*…(1 *Jo* 4: 20).
*Blessed are they that suffer persecution* (*Matt* 5: 11).
*We are persecuted* (1 *Cor* 4: 12; 2 *Cor* 4: 9; 12: 10).
[They] *shall suffer persecution* (2 *Tim* 3: 12).
*If they have persecuted me . . .* (*Jo* 15: 20; *Lk* 11; 49; 21: 12).
*Whether we be in tribulation, it is for your exhortation* (1 *Cor* 1: 6).
*In my trouble, I cried to the Lord* (*Ps* 119: 1).
*And in every place there is sacrifice* (*Mal* 1: 11)

SACRIFICE

Complete correspondence to the vocation of the Institute is a *holocaust*

(Teaching about holocaust)

**Notes**

[(1)](file:///C%3A%5C%5CUsers%5C%5Csanca%5C%5CDownloads%5C%5CSL_Homily_5.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22r_01) A page of text, in which Rosmini offers what we would consider an unduly florid description of the penance undergone by St. Margaret of Cortona, has been omitted here.

**Sixth Homily**

Rosmini should have received the profession of other religious of his Society on 29 September 1854, but was held up by illness at his native town of Rovereto on the eve of his return to Stresa. The agony of the prolonged examination of his published works by the Holy See had ended with the decree *Dimittantur*, which declared them free of error, but was replaced with long drawn-out and intense physical suffering. The final and last link in the *golden chain*would be forged not in a sermonor learned words, but through pain and death. He passed to the possession of God on 1 July 1855, the feast, at the time, of the Precious Blood of Jesus

**The Vision of God**

Rosmini’s notes for the sixth homily on the

Vision of God
or
Glory

At your right hand stands the queen…*With her virgin companions, her escort, in her train*(these are Christians in the ordinary state; the *queen* represents Christians, religious, whose lives are given over to the study of perfection).

The example of Christ who had both the beatific vision and the greatest suffering; the two extremes were joined: something similar happens in his followers.

*Let a good man strike or rebuke me in kindness, but let the oil of the wicked never anoint my head…Ps* 140

**Some general notes**

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|  | Only the first of the homilies (*The Golden Chain*) was printed during Rosmini's lifetime.The entire collection was first published in Italian under the title *La Dottrina della Carità* (*Teaching on Charity*), then as *Il Maestro d'Amore* (*The Teacher of Love*). |
|  | In the homilies, Rosmini refers to three of his works which can be found in English:*Maxims of Christian Perfection* (London, 1962);*Theodicy* (London, 1893);*Constitutions of the Institute of Charity* (Durham,1989).Several other works of Rosmini are used in the Appendix:*The Philosophy of Right*, volumes 1 (*Essence of Right*) & 4 (*Rights in God's Church*) (Durham, 1993-4)*The Philosophy of Politics*, volume 2 (*Society and its Purpose*) (Durham 1994)*Catechism according to the Order of Ideas*(London, 1874)*Conscience*(Durham, 1989) |
|  | The subheadings in the homilies are the work of the Italian and English editors. |
|  | A variety of translations of holy Scripture has been used. Rosmini's own translation,which normally adhered to the Vulgate, cannot always be accurately matched by any single one of our English-language translations. |
|  | Rosmini's highly refined use of language is often integral to the understanding of his teaching.A [glossary](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Csanca%5CDownloads%5CSL_Appendix.htm) has been appended, therefore, to assist comprehension of words which are in normal use in English, but have a more basic significance for Rosmini than their present everyday meaning, |
|  | One highly rhetorical passage has been omitted [...] from the fifth homily |