



The Holy See

**RADIO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS PIUS XII
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE CONGRESS OF THE
«NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC CHARITIES» OF THE UNITED STATES***

Sunday, 12 October 1947

Venerable Brethren, Dearly Beloved Children

Under the kindly, paternal guidance of Our Venerable Brother the Archbishop of New Orleans your National Congress has been enjoying the gracious hospitality of the South, and now before closing its sessions you have wished to hear a word from the common Father of all. Though far removed in body We feel Ourselves in your midst in spirit, and gladly send you a word of greeting.

On the order of your Congress' day was one subject : Charity. Charity is a word sometimes loosely used to signify any sort of benevolent or philanthropic activity. But for you charity has a sacred and consecrated meaning. Charity is different from any other human love, because it is a replica of Christ's love for man. « A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; that you love one another as I have loved you ». That is charity. St. Paul writes to the Romans (15, 7) « Befriend one another as Christ has befriended you for God's honour ». That is charity.

You will love one another, Christ said, as I have loved you. Not as they love who corrupt innocence or faith >>, comments the immortal Augustine (*In Joannis Evang. tract. 65 c. 13 - Migne PL t. 35 col. 1808-1809*); « not as men love each other, simply because they are fellows of the same human race; but as they love, who know and profess that all men are kin to God, sons of the Most High, in whom must be formed and perfected a brother's likeness to the only begotten Son ».

«You will love one another as I have loved you ». And what did Christ love in man except God? Not in the sense that He found God already in every man, but in the sense that he hoped through love to restore God to every man. A doctor is said to love the sick; yet what is it in the sick that he loves? Surely not the disease. No, he loves the health that he hopes to restore to the patient. Charity means that you love each other thus with a view to bringing God more and more into the

lives of each other, so that linked together as so many members by the Spirit of divine Love you may cooperate in forming a body not unworthy of a Head divine (*ibid.*).

Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul and all apostles of Catholic Charities, yours is a sublime vocation. When that great exemplar of Christian charity, Frederick Ozanam, first launched his Conferences, his purpose was to demonstrate that the teachings of Christ are still workable in the present. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was a challenge of Catholic youth to a race of men that had grown sceptical of men being able any longer to live out their lives according to the principles of the Gospel. Of the six young men who formed the first Conference not one had passed his twentieth year. The race of men they challenged is still with you, beloved children, as experience has taught you. Like the traveller of whom the Gospel speaks, it has fallen among thieves who steal away its treasure of faith and love and leave it to languish in helpless want. Though you be only laymen of the world, accost this great invalid; and while you bring it bread to nourish the body and strive personally to provide for its varied needs, like good Samaritans bend low and try gently to probe its wounds and pour into them the oil of Christ's alleviating message. Whisper into ears, long since perhaps deaf to priestly counsel, words of encouragement and hope and peace, and the example of your Christ-like love will hasten the day when an embittered victim of sorrow or failure or injustice will return to those whom God has constituted the guardians and physicians of souls.

Oh, We know the immense good the Conferences and other Catholic Charities are doing in so many parishes of your country and We bless it with all heart. But charity should never look behind, but always ahead. The number of her past deeds is always small, whereas the present and future miseries which she must solace are without end.

With Ozanam We too would wish to see all young men of head and heart united for some work of Christian charity. It is not a question of giving money; it is a question of giving self. Such an apostolate would revitalize their faith, give direction and stability to a correct attitude towards the frivolous things of life, awaken powers of leadership, the while it would help powerfully to remedy the evils of social and racial inequalities.

Oh, compassionate Heart of Jesus, pour Thy love and comfort into the lives of the poor, the suffering, those distressed in body or soul: all very dear members of Thy Body; and lest Thy own sweet spirit of pity and charity continue to fill the hearts of Our American youth so that they may be in very fact Thy « fellow-workers for the truth » (3 lo. 8).

**Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII, IX,*

Nono anno di Pontificato, 2 marzo 1947- 1° marzo 1948, pp. 279-281

Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana