

## **The New Commandment**

At the Last Supper Jesus gave us the New Commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you” (*Jn* 15:12). And to engrave it on his disciples’ memories, and on our own, he washed the feet of the apostles.

In his first Epistle, Saint John writes: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (*I Jn* 3:16).

There are many ways of laying down one’s life. Parents do so by caring constantly for each of their children. Workers, by doing their job with a spirit of service and trying to improve their surroundings while not allowing themselves to be carried away by greed. Priests, by serving self-sacrificingly all the men and women who come to them seeking Christ.

Today especially we can see so many people laying down their lives for others, starting with the health workers who are risking their lives to care for the sick. They take on the burden of the suffering of each patient and that of their families, who often cannot even come to be with them. They do not limit themselves to fulfilling their duty, since they realize that so many people are relying on their generous work. The same is true of many others who are helping to keep everything functioning now with their essential but possibly unnoticed work: transport workers, supermarket staff, pharmacists, police...

Those who are more directly in contact with suffering – doctors, nurses, health personnel of every kind, and, naturally, priests – make Christ present in different ways to those who are suffering from sickness, fear, or loneliness. Let us pray for them all, so that when they are tired or feel overwhelmed they remember that Jesus is there to encourage and strengthen them.

We can all contribute in one way or another. Sometimes it will be in little ways like writing messages to sick people, friends or acquaintances who may be more alone now. We can all put initiative and creativity into helping the elderly and more vulnerable, in ways that respect the guidelines given by civil authorities.

At home we put our Lord’s New Commandment into practice every day in many little acts of love that give peace and joy to our families and the people around us. Saint Josemaria advises us: “More than giving, charity consists of understanding” (*The Way*, no. 463).

Other ways of truly making this commandment part of our daily life now include: forgiving and excusing people; taking a sincere interest in others; the little details of service in daily life; patience in family life, which now, for many people, means trying to remain serene while confined together at home...

It is very easy to realize now that our work is above all service, and that charity can give this work its fullest meaning. A society continues to function if people employ their talents and efforts for the benefit of others, even though it demands sacrifice.

During the Last Supper, Jesus also prayed to the Father for the unity of all those who would be his disciples down through the centuries: “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (*Jn 17:21*).

“*Ut omnes unum sint*,” that they may all be one. This is not just the unity of a humanly well-structured organization, but the unity given by Love with a capital letter: “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you.” The first Christians are a clear example of this. We read in the Acts of the Apostles: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (*Acts 4:32*).

Since it is the result of love, the unity Jesus asks of us is not uniformity but communion. It is unity in diversity, shown in living together joyfully with all our differences, learning to be enriched by the others, nurturing an atmosphere of unconditional affection around us, and loving the others as they are.

Jesus stressed this unity as a condition for being fruitful in passing on the Gospel, that is, in our apostolate: “so that the world may believe.” It is a unity that does not produce a closed group, but one that opens us up to offer our friendship to everyone in this marvellous evangelizing mission. The Christian vocation, when lived out to the full, will bring our friends and colleagues closer to Jesus, whether they are already close to Him or not.

“As you, Father, are in me and I in you” (*Jn 17:21*). May our Lord grant us the gift of unity and help us to make it visible in deeds of service to one another.