

“SUPER OMNIA CARITAS”

The year of Charity.

Dear Christians,

This year, we want to talk to you paternally about the greatest and most necessary of all the virtues: charity. If we have chosen the exhortation of Saint Paul to the Colossians: "**above all charity**", as the motto of our episcopate, it is because we are convinced, as was the great Apostle, that it is through the generalised and generous widespread practice of this virtue that perfection, truth and happiness of our dear Ruanda, of each of its families and of each of its inhabitants will be realised.

God is charity. The sign of God is charity: what is not done according to charity is not done according to God. Without charity one is not really a Christian, even if one is baptized. There cannot be order, tranquility, justice and true peace for families, societies nor for peoples, apart from charity.

I.

The teachings of our Master and Lord Jesus and his Apostles on charity are innumerable, very clear and extremely urgent. We strongly urge you to reread and meditate on them, especially in this year which we would like to be able to call "the year of charity".

We strongly ask all of you, but more urgently members of Catholic Action to engage in great charitable efforts during this year, both within families and in relationships between people and between social groups.

The example of Our Lord.

The first teaching of Jesus is his example. In the Creed we sing that it is "*for us that he came down from heaven, that he incarnated and became man*". And we see from the gospel that his whole life has been a life of charity and dedication. Most of his miracles, if not all, are miracles of kindness and charity. It is said in the Gospel that the crowds "rushed upon him", to see him, to listen to his word. It was because he was good. By his charity and his delicacy, he drew everyone to him, including sinners.

"*There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends.*" (John 15-13). This is what Jesus did to save us. He suffered incomprehensible humiliations and atrocious torments for us. He was scourged, crowned with thorns, smitten ignominiously like a malefactor, called a fool, and finally raised on the cross

under the eyes swollen of tears of his Blessed Mother. "What more should I have done for you that I did not do?", we read in the liturgical texts of Good Friday. Really, he could not have done more.

And yet, he gave us one more of those marks of love that only him could give us : The Most Holy Eucharist. Through this admirable Sacrament, Jesus puts himself at the disposal of men of all times and from all places. Everyone can approach him, receive him in their heart, feed on him and it will be so until the end of the world. God alone can know and measure the vastness and depth of the benefits accomplished by Christ Jesus present and immolated in the Holy Eucharist.

The teaching of Christ

Having left us such an example of charity, Jesus had the right to give us, with all the strength of his authority sealed in blood, which He called "his command": "This is my command: love one another as I have loved you" (John 15,12). Dear Christians, we could stop here our letter because in this commandment everything is said: "Love yourselves as I have loved you", up to the most complete dedication and sacrifice.

Think carefully, Dear Christians, on this command of our Lord and seriously examine your life to see if it is true that you love your neighbor as Jesus loved you. How beautiful would be our Ruanda if everyone had understood and put into practice this commandment of charity. There's no possible escape route: either we practice charity and we are a Christian, or we do not practice it and we are not a Christian. Jesus told us very clearly: "By this all will know you as my disciples, this love that you will have for each other". Charity is the great sign by which we will recognize the chosen ones, those who will have been truly Christians.

Listen to this passage from the Gospel where Jesus tells us about the Last Judgment. After separating the good from wicked, he will say to the good: *"Come, those blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom which was prepared for you since the foundation of the world. 'Because I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, prisoner and you came to see me' ". Then the righteous will answer, "Lord, when have we come to see you hungry and feed you, thirst and quench your thirst, stranger and welcome you, naked and clothe you, sick or prisoner and come and see you? "And the King will answer them: 'Truly I say to you, inasmuch you did it to one of those smallest of my brothers, you did it to me. "Then he will say again to those on the left, (to the wicked) - " Go away from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me". They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? " Then He will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these,*

you did not do for me” And they will go, these to eternal punishment, and the righteous to everlasting life”. (Mt. 25,34-46).

This long page of the Gospel shows us well, dear Christians, that we will be judged according to charity that we will have had towards one other especially towards those who are poor and in need. It also shows us what is the foundation of charity. This foundation is that we are all creatures and children of the Good Lord. We are all called to be part of his family by participating in the life of Jesus our big brother. To do good to a brother of Jesus is to do good to Jesus himself, to do harm to a brother of Jesus is hurting Jesus himself. The Apostle Saint Paul, to explain the union of Christians in Christ Jesus and with Him, compare them to members united among themselves and with the head in one body. The members of the same body must get along with each other and help each other and not argue and tear each other apart. Saint Paul also means that when we hurt a member of Christ, a Christian, we hurt Christ himself. This is what Jesus told Him on the road to Damascus. Saint Paul persecuted Christians. Jesus said to him, "*Why are you persecuting me?*" From that day he understood that Christians and Christ were the same thing, and that is why He loved them with the same love and dedication.

We could still cite many other passages of Sacred Scripture on charity. It's not possible in a single pastoral letter. You will seek them yourselves and your priests will help you. especially during this year. Here, however, to end one of the many words of the beloved apostle, Saint John the Evangelist, on charity: "*As for us, let's love like him, since he first loved us. If someone says, "I love God" and he hates his brother, he is a liar: he who does not love his brother whom he sees, cannot love the God whom he does not see. Yes, this is the command we received from Him: may he who loves God also love his brother"*. (1John 1,19-21).

Dear Christians, all that We have just said, citing the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, his teachings and those of his Apostles, amply proves that charity is the fundamental virtue and the most imperative requirement of Christianity. But knowing it and believing it is not enough. It must be put into practice. We would like to help you with this in the second part of this letter, drawing your attention to certain practical points of daily, individual, family, and social life.

II

We do not believe we are exaggerating in saying that there is not enough charity in our dear Ruanda, even between Christians. When We say this, we do not mean to diminish in any way the results obtained from dedication and charity which are already magnificent, but We are convinced that our dear country is capable of much more and We want to show it as clearly as possible and support it in its efforts, by our fatherly exhortations and our fervent prayers.

Charity must be interior and supernatural.

What we want to tell you first is that charity must begin in the heart, in thoughts, in the will: it must be interior. There is no virtue without it. She must also be supernatural. To be charitable, therefore, to think well of others, to have esteem for others and this especially because others like ourselves are the creatures and children of the Good Lord. The Good Lord loves them and does everything to help and save them. Those who in their hearts hate or despise the neighbor, even if he is an enemy, sin already against charity. Those who in their hearts judge or recklessly suspect the neighbor, also commit a sin against charity, so do those who misinterpret the intentions of the neighbor, or who maintain in their hearts the desire for revenge, feelings of jealousy and envy. Be charitable in your heart, Dear Christians, because the heart is the source of everything else. Our Lord has told us so: *"From the heart indeed proceed evil designs, murders, adultery, debauchery, thefts, false testimony, defamations. These are the things which make a man unclean; but eating without having washed hands, that does not make a man unclean"* (Mt. 15, 19). Take a serious look, dear Christians, to see what the thoughts of your heart towards your neighbor are.

Charity in words.

Also watch your words very carefully. We can do a lot of good with good words, by words of good advice, encouragement, consolation, sympathy, respect and affection, but one can also unfortunately by his words seriously harm the neighbor, by saying bad things about him, peddling everywhere the true or only supposed faults he has committed, by sowing division and discord, by viciously denigrating good deeds of others, destroying their reputation. The apostle Saint James warns us against sins of the tongue: *"With the tongue," he said, "we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men made in the image of God. From the same mouth come the blessing and the curse. It is not necessary, my brethren, that it be so"* (James 3, 10).

Dear Christians, you like to talk to each other very much when you meet, and there is no harm in that, but be careful not to offend God in these conversations by hurting your neighbor.

Charity in action.

It is not enough to love the neighbor in his heart and in his words; you still must devote oneself to him really: *"If anyone," says the apostle Saint John, is enjoying the riches of the world, and sees his brother in need and shut his heart, how could the love of God remain in him? Little children let us love neither words nor language, but in deeds and truth"* (1John. 3, 17- 18).

Dear Christians, we know you are not rich but we urge you from the bottom of our heart to do all you can to help those who are poorer than you, especially the sick, the infirm, those who suffer and are in pain, the little orphans, the abandoned.

Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan, who is praised by Our Lord because he truly dedicated himself, giving of his time and his money, to help the poor man who was wounded by robbers (Luke 10,29 sq.) There are Christians who pass by the poor without paying attention to them or care about them; there

are even those who make fun of the poor and infirm or of those who fall into misfortune. These are not true disciples of Jesus whose Saint Peter said that *"He went about passed by doing good"* (Acts 10, 38), healing the sick and consoling the afflicted.

We also urge you, Dear Christians, to practice the purest charity in your families; we ask the separated spouses to live together again in mutual support and love; we ask families where there is enmity to be sincerely reconciled before the Lord. Those who do not forgive cannot be forgiven they condemn themselves by reciting the Pater and saying to God: *"Forgive us our trespasses as we do. Let us forgive those who have offended us"*. We ask parents and children to always love each other and never give the spectacle of disunity when there are difficulties that arise. There is nothing more beautiful on earth than a family where Charity reigns.

Charity is universal.

We would like now, Dear Christians, to emphasize to you a very important aspect of charity, namely that Christian charity must be universal. The Christian has not the right to gossip about another man, even if he is his enemy: *"That one I do not love him, that one I hate him"*. This does not mean that we must love everyone the same: he is quite normal and in God's eye, to love those of his family more than strangers or those unknown to us. But we cannot exclude anyone from his charity. The heart of the Christian must be like the one of Christ who loves all men and gave his life to save them all. We you ask, dear Christians, to examine yourself seriously to see if things are so in our dear Ruanda. It seems to us that there are currently many divisions not only between individuals and families, but even between the different social groups that constitute the country.

There is hatred between individuals sometimes in the same family, there is hatred between families and instead of trying to appease them we sometimes cultivate them like a weed which ends up killing the rest; we sue each other, we seek revenge others. When a misfortune happens, we almost always suspect a culprit and to find out, we consult the sorcerer, this great criminal of the community; then we go to the point of committing crimes for revenge. Where is Christianity in all of this, dear Christians? We beg you, abandon these practices which are directly opposed to the Christian law of charity and which come straight from the devil, the great sower of enmities and crimes. *"We know, says the Apostle Saint John (1 Jn. 3, 14) that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. He who does not love remains in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. "*

Applications to the Country situation.

There are also in our dear Ruanda, as in many other countries of the world, various social groups. The distinction of these groups is largely based on race but also other factors like fortune and political role or religion. There are Africans, Europeans, and Asians. Among the Africans there are the Batutsi, the Bahutu and the Batwa; there is rich and poor; there are pastors and cultivators; there are traders and craftsmen; there are Catholics and Protestants, Hindus and Muslims and there are still many pagans; there are the governors and the governed. Now the problem about the differences of races between Ruandais is exacerbated.

This diversity of social groups and especially of races risks degenerating into disastrous divisions for everyone. Dear Christians of Ruanda, we appeal to your common sense and to your charity so that God may spare us this misfortune.

We are sure that our call, inspired only by the love we have for all and for each of our children, to whatever group they belong, will find a faithful and generous echo in your Christian hearts. However, we would like to guide you on this subject because all kinds of ideas, many of which are not consistent with the teaching of the Church are starting to spread in the country.

* Let us note first that there are really in Ruanda several races quite clearly distinct although alliances between them have taken place and do not allow us to say always to which race such individual belongs. This diversity of races in the same country is a normal fact against which we can do nothing. We inherit a past that does not depend on us. So, let's accept to be several races together and try to understand and love each other as brothers from the same country.

* All races are equally respectable and lovable before God. Each race has its qualities and faults. No one, moreover, can choose to be born into a group rather than in another. It is therefore unfair and contrary to charity to belittle someone to belong to this or that race, and above all to despise him because of his race. The solution, purely natural, is that people of different races get along and harmonise especially if, through the play of history, they live side by side in the same territory.

* From a Christian point of view, however, racial differences must merge into a higher unity of the communion of Saints. Christians, whatever race they belong to, are more like brothers among themselves: they participate in the same life in Christ Jesus and have the same father who is in the heavens. Whoever, while reciting Our Father but excludes from his affection a man of another race than his own would not really be invoking the father who is in heaven and he would not be heard. There is no church by race, there is only the Catholic Church in which, as the Apostle Saint Paul says, "*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man ... because all you are one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3, 28). The Church is therefore not for this race or that one, the Church is for all the races which she embraces with equal love and equal dedication.

* In our Ruanda, social differences and inequalities are largely linked to differences of race, insofar as wealth on the one hand and political power and even the judiciary on the other hand, are in reality in considerable proportion in the hands of people of same race. This situation is the legacy of a past that we do not have to judge. But it is certain that this de facto situation no longer meets the standards of a healthy organization of Rwandan society and poses delicate and inevitable problems to those in charge of public affairs.

As a bishop, representing the Church whose role is supernatural, we do not have to give nor even to offer technical solutions to these problems, but it is up to us to remind all those, authorities in charge or promoters of political movements who will have to find them, the divine law of social justice and charity.

* This law requires that the institutions of a country be such that they really guarantee to all its inhabitants and all legitimate social groups, the same fundamental rights and same possibilities of human ascension and participation in public affairs. Institutions that would establish a regime of privileges, favoritism, protectionism, either for individuals or for social groups, would not conform to Christian morality.

* Christian morality also requires that public functions be entrusted to capable and honest men who above have the concern for the good of the community as whole and not just for one group. It would be contrary to social justice and charity to entrust someone with a public responsibility in consideration of his race or his fortune, or friendship, without considering above all his capacities and virtues.

* Christian morality requires authority to be at the service of the whole community and not just one group, and that it adheres with dedication and by using all possible means to the advancement and cultural, social, and economic development of the mass of the population.

* The Church is against the struggle between classes, whether the origin of these classes is wealth or race or some other factor but recognizes the right of a social class to struggle for its legitimate interests by honest means, for example by forming associations. The hatred, contempt, the spirit of division and disunity, lies and slander are means of dishonest struggles and severely condemned by God. Do not listen, dear Christians, to those who, under the pretext of love for one group, preach hatred and contempt for another group.

* For them to be legitimate, social groups or others must not only, by honest means, pursue their own good and that of their members, but also foster unity with the other classes and subordinate the pursuit of their particular good to the Good Common of the whole country. This Common Good cannot ultimately just consist of a sustained struggle but will be achieved solely in a real and fraternal collaboration, made of a more just and charitable distribution of goods, charges and functions. Catholics, mainly those

responsible for public affairs and those who are at the head social groups should meet and think together about the problems that arise in the country in order to find valid solutions for all and inspired by the social doctrine of the Church.

* We want to quote again this sentence of a wise man: "Quid leges sine moribus? What's the point of laws without mores?" Laws, institutions, social or political reforms will only obtain the results hoped for if they are supported by reformed minded men of generous virtue.

* No solid social order, no true human civilization can be built without frank and cordial submission to the law of God specified in the Gospel and ceaselessly preached by the Church and her living Magisterium.

* Finally, we appeal to all men of good will and in particular to our Christians and to our catechumens, regardless to whatever group they belong to, to not only listen to these teachings and reflect on them, but also still put them into practice courageously in their own life and work to bring them into the community they belong to.

Conclusion.

Dear Christians, we end this long letter by repeating to you the precept of the Lord "*Love one another*", for it is the summary of Christian law as it so says. Admirable the Apostle Saint Paul in the Epistle to the Romans says: "*Do not owe anybody, if not that of mutual love, for he who loves another has thereby fulfilled the law. Indeed, the precept: You shall not commit adultery, you will not kill, you will not steal, you will not covet not, and all the others can be summed up in this formula: You will love your neighbor as yourself. Charity does not do harm to neighbor. Charity is therefore the law in its fullness*" (Rom.13.8-10).

Let us all pray together, Dear Christians, and with perseverance, throughout this year so charity may spread throughout the country and penetrate to the bottom of hearts. It's a great grace that we ask, but it is so pleasing to God our Father that He will grant it to us with eagerness.

May the Virgin Mary who has been called the "Mother of beautiful love" intercede for all of us so that we are docile to the great and most beautiful of the commandments that his divine Son left us Jesus.

Dear Christians, we give you our fatherly blessing.

+ A. Perraudin
Vic. Ap. From Kabgayi
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Cette version est une traduction privée. Seule la version française fait foi.