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EUCHARIST

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1 – THE BREAD (Mt 4:4)

Luciano Frascinelli was a journalist who wanted to write a novel set in the circus. To gather material, he asked Liana Orfei's father, when she was still a child, if he could spend some time with them.

They welcomed him in, and he never left. He lost interest in the novel because he became fascinated by circus life. He did every kind of job there, from announcer to director, and eventually became a member of the Orfei family.

One day, as Liana Orfei recounts in her book *The Great House Called Circus*, he was showing her the stars:

“How many unknown worlds! How small the human being is, yet how great he can become if he enriches himself inwardly. Your life is a point in time. And yet your life, your point, can be as vast as the universe. It depends on what you have inside, on what you feel, on what you think.”

Luciano Frascinelli was a pure-hearted man who intuited the sublime truth of creation: man is greater than the visible infinite because he possesses a spiritual and immortal soul, and his greatness depends on the greatness of his soul, on what he “has inside.”

In a television program, one of Liana's brothers, an animal trainer, declared that for generations the Orfei family had been believers — that is, “rich within” — and that this was the source of their strength and the solidity of their unity.

When asked whether children born into the circus seek other paths as they grow up, he answered firmly: “None of them, because the world of the circus is a fantastic world that every child dreams of.” But certainly also because it is a world that engages them from childhood onward, a demanding world that allows no weakness and strengthens them, sustained by faith, without which one could not joyfully undertake such a hard and dangerous life.

Faith is not something acquired; it is something discovered. It is already within man, because God could not create an intelligent being without the gift of faith. This discovery comes to each person through a providential path: the most common is that of the family and the parish, which is the spiritual family, but God presents other paths to mankind as well. Throughout the centuries, many have arrived at faith even while fighting against it.

Once discovered, the faith of the Christian leads, after Baptism, to the Eucharist; it is God who creates, it is God who nourishes.

Man learns that he can no longer live by bread alone, meaning all that he may possess: wealth, power, success.

One day, when someone rejoiced with Giorgio La Pira because he was a mayor loved by the people of Florence, he replied with great realism and humility:

“In fifty years, who do you think will remember that little man who is now mayor?”

No bread of this earth can truly enrich man because it cannot nourish his soul.

It is the Word of God, it is faith, it is the Eucharist that nourish the soul. Without the Eucharist — the Word of God made food — man remains malnourished.

And a people among whom those deprived of the Bread of God prevail remains a malnourished people, even if it were the richest nation on earth.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was able to say that India is not the poorest people on earth; rather, the peoples of the West are the poorest, because they are poor in God.

That is why, despite all our efforts to feed hungry peoples, we do not succeed; and indeed, the gap between rich peoples and poor peoples is not decreasing, but growing

2 – WISDOM

At a local union meeting, there was talk about the “verticality of the enterprise.” None of those present understood what it meant, because the “learned” union representative had to explain that he simply meant the category-based trade unions.

Women cannot resist the fashion of low heels, and periodically fashion wins them back to high heels. Men too imagine they rise higher by putting “high heels” on their words; nowadays simple, clear, and beautiful words are left to ordinary people, who are called “simple” precisely because they have preserved this gift.

The Eucharist is God descending from heaven to place Himself, in a morsel of bread and a sip of wine, into the hands of man: I cannot cease contemplating this miracle of love and simplicity. It fills me with joy, and whenever I catch myself wanting to appear greater than I am, I feel ashamed and fall to my knees before the Eucharist — yet never in discouragement, so great is the Eucharist’s power to lift up and encourage.

The Christian must always fear acting a part, seeking applause. The world in which we are called to live is becoming less and less simple because it has moved away from God, and far from God it is cold. Then comes the need to cover our nakedness, like Adam and Eve; we try to conceal it by clothing ourselves in wisdom we do not possess and in importance we do not deserve.

God is simple, and to help us understand this He stripped Himself bare in the Eucharist; and the closer one is to Him, the more one understands it.

Simple does not mean ignorant; it means sincere, transparent, truthful, spontaneous. It is strange how much we appreciate simplicity in others, because it makes them seem closer to God, and yet how difficult it is for us ourselves because of the trap of applause — but applause from whom? From those who have drifted away from God and expect recognition in return: a performance directed by the most skilled and subtle of directors, whom there is no need to name.

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Solomon asked God for wisdom as the highest good. We may not have peoples to govern, yet even for the least among us, wisdom is fittingly the highest good.

Wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” and therefore it becomes a gift of the Eucharist.

Wisdom leads to love for Supreme Wisdom and to love for man because he is loved by God — a universal love that inclines one toward sacrifice without expecting rewards, not even moral ones, and always a gentle love that helps, encourages, and consoles.

No wise person on earth who does not attain love is truly wise, because he does not arrive at true “knowledge,” that is, at understanding man; love is the effective and irreplaceable sign of wisdom.

And here enters the drama of intelligence, because it is man’s highest drama, due to the ease with which intelligence can be diverted from its purpose, which is the search for and conquest of truth,

beauty, and usefulness. Man is weak in all his manifestations, and his tragedy begins with the illusion of believing himself strong, and therefore capable of doing without God.

And without God he loses his direction. One could speak of this endlessly, but it is enough to mention the two most frequent dangers into which intelligence falls: negligence, which hinders and prevents its development, causing great personal and social harm; and false nourishment, causing even greater harm both to the individual and to the community.

Intelligence must come to unite with understanding — another gift of the Holy Spirit and therefore of the Eucharist — in order to reach its true purpose, even in its practical applications within science and human knowledge.

Understanding rests in an unshakable peace because it rests in God, and intelligence serves and delights in it in a blessed harmony, while never ceasing to grow through the pursuit and nourishment of human knowledge.

3 – HUMILITY

Jesus did not say to us, “Learn from me, for I know everything and can do everything,” which would have embarrassed us. He said instead, “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart,” an invitation within everyone’s reach.

The Eucharist attracts us also because it embodies the words “meek and humble of heart.” The Eucharist attracts us because, standing in line for Communion, I imagine and feel myself drawn into the strongest, most universal, and unceasing march for peace — the most peaceful, meekest, and humblest march in the universe, and for that very reason the most powerful.

The meek may appear the weakest and most defeated in a world growing ever more violent, but violence is never a sign of strength; it is always a sign of weakness. It is not a sign of intelligence but of brutality, not of wisdom but of savage instinct.

The meek person is not someone submissive by temperament or weakness; meekness belongs to one who has won the most difficult battle of all: the battle against aggressive instincts.

Saint Bernard defines humility as the virtue by which man, fully knowing what he is, considers himself lowly.

A young theologian, fresh from graduation, went to meet Padre Pio intending to outwit him. Padre Pio, who sensed people from afar, received him harshly:

“What do you want from me, evildoer?”

The theologian, offended, asked for an explanation.

“The good you do,” Padre Pio asked him, “do you do it yourself, or does God do it in you?”

The answer was inevitable: “God does it in me.”

“And the evil you do — does God do that in you?” “No, I do it myself.”

“Then why are you surprised that I called you an evildoer? With all your theology, did you still not know that?”

And they became friends.

Humility is indispensable for right relationships, the only relationships capable of preserving peace and harmony, but it is such a beautiful virtue that man cannot achieve it by his own strength alone.

Humility is born from man’s relationship with God, from the comparison between God’s perfection and our own limitations, from the knowledge of what we are, as Saint Bernard says — a knowledge that human science cannot give and that instead becomes a gift from God.

Man is inclined to recognize virtues within himself without acknowledging them as gifts from God; he appropriates them, becoming, so to speak, a thief of God’s gifts, using them for his own advantage instead of investing them, as the parable of the talents teaches, on behalf of the Master — that is, for the common good. Here lies another cause of imbalance and impoverishment among peoples.

As a thief of God’s gifts, man can no longer be humble. On the contrary, deceived by the vigilant Director of perdition, he is led to compare his own virtues, however few, with the defects and limitations of others, which the Director kindly places before him. The comparison swells him with pride, leading him to destroy the esteem and dignity of others in order to increase the distance between them.

And thus harmony, peace, and communion of souls depart.

The Eucharist helps us remove the beam from our eyes; it brings us onto the ground of our own limitations, defects, and miseries, yet always — and this is the perpetual miracle of the Eucharist — without humiliating us, but rather consoling us.

Once we understand that we will never be capable of digging deeply enough, it no longer becomes difficult not to judge our neighbor. Instead, we feel relieved of a great burden — the burden of passing judgment on another person. Simenon, in *Le cle....*, has a character named Tambif say a marvelous phrase: “...”

Thus we realize ourselves incapable of comparison, even with the poorest of persons, and we understand the wisdom of placing ourselves in the last place, of considering and feeling ourselves the least of all, with the certainty and relief of expecting no unpleasant surprises and of harming no one, and with the joy of considering everyone better than ourselves.

If I were capable of it, I would create a character — a racing cyclist — who gives everything he has to win, as is his duty, yet is happy to come in last because all the others have the joy of having beaten at least him, and inwardly he rejoices in their joy.

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Thank You, Lord, for placing my faults before me. If I were a saint, I would lie prostrate on the floor; instead, I feel a sense of joy because my faults help me escape the snares of pride, invite me to throw myself into Your arms, and make me more understanding toward the faults of others.

Now, when I hear someone raging against another's defect or mistake, I feel deep compassion for the one who rages, because only ignorance of oneself gives a person the courage to judge and condemn. Faced with defects and errors, it is enough to recognize ourselves capable of the same defects and the same errors in order to forgive, and when the error is acknowledged, to console.

It is enough to say: "The same could have happened to me," and indeed it is true.

To hear someone say, "That could never happen to me..." truly inspires pity. What do you know of what has not happened to you in fifty years but may happen today?

"I have never stolen, I have never killed." Go slowly there: one steals in many ways. One steals respect, dignity, affection, consolation. One can also kill morally — and how many such crimes are committed even by respectable people.

Better not to consider ourselves without sin in any respect; we are closer to the truth that way. And let us keep before us the shining goal of Saint Francis's "perfect joy": to rejoice in being mistreated because we deserve it, as Padre Pio reminded that theologian.

4 – PURITY

If I were capable of envy, I would envy the pure of heart, and perhaps in a certain sense I do envy them. Whoever seeks a sign of the existence of God should look into the face of someone pure of heart: you see a light, a light filled with sweetness and consolation. And where could this light come from, if not from God?

It is a light that spreads joy, bearing witness that the soul is light, splendor, joy; and it is impurities that encrust it and make it opaque.

And the pure soul purifies: a beautiful and radiant creature is not something you dare to touch; its purity protects it.

Truly blessed are the pure of heart, for they already see God in this life, and they transmit Him. And they enjoy life.

God makes the sun shine on the good and the wicked alike, and with the rain He quenches the thirst and hunger of both the good and the wicked. Moments of joy may be enjoyed by all, but life itself is enjoyed by the good — that is, by the pure of heart — and this is the supreme justice, because if life were enjoyed only by the healthy, the rich, the powerful, not everyone could enjoy it; whereas all of us can be good, or become so, and therefore all of us can enjoy life.

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But what if "only God is good"? If only God is good, then by entering into "Communion" with God in the Eucharist we too can become good.

We can, and we want to; therefore it does not depend on frequency, desirable though it may be, but on the will to change — little by little each day — our degraded and misguided heart into a new heart, the heart of the Lord.

“I came in the Eucharist for the sick,” and whoever rarely receives the Eucharist because he feels unworthy obeys the subtle Director of perdition. Does perhaps even the purest of heart feel worthy? Yet love urges us toward it, and one could no longer live without the Eucharist.

“I came for the sick,” and impurity of heart is the most fearsome illness, because it is the only illness that can become mortal and that makes us unhappy.

The sick person must desire healing and cooperate with the doctor, and the most effective cure is penance.

The innocent and the penitent. It is not easy for penance to be directed toward one’s own purification; if it were so, the world would once again be Eden, a garden of delights, considering that there is not a day without hardship for anyone.

And yet, penance is already in itself a medicine for the soul, provided it is accepted with love, even if only out of human love, out of affection for dear ones.

In a novel that enjoyed considerable success some years ago — *The Cardinal* by Henry Morton Robinson — there is a character, real and living, who is striking: an American woman who agrees to live in a house with the windows perpetually shut, even during torrid heat and suffocating air, because her husband, whose throat has been burned and whom she feeds with liquid foods through a funnel, could die from a cold.

But there is no need to go to America to encounter heroic acts of penance; we all have them around us. Our friend lived six years confined at home so as neither to abandon nor entrust to others his wife who had lost her mind. The only pause he allowed himself was one hour on Sundays to attend Mass.

But these are people who already possess God — “Where there is love, there is God” — and whom voluntary penance purifies: they are good people.

Normally we are not called to heroic penances. It is enough to love the small and not-so-small penances of everyday life, offering them to God with gratitude for our purification.

And here we should speak of voluntary penances — upon his death it was discovered that Pope Paul VI wore a cilice — but let us simply say that these are personal matters, secrets that chosen souls do not reveal, lest they disperse their value.

Let it suffice for us to adopt an attitude of openness toward penance, even toward those unforeseen and sudden trials that can alter the plans of the day and shake us from the torpor of habit: if we are not yet so, let us prepare ourselves to become volunteers of penance.

5 – JUSTICE

We are not capable of feeding starving peoples also because we do not practice justice. And giving away what is superfluous is not yet charity, because it belongs to justice: in fact, what is superfluous is not ours; it belongs to those who lack what is necessary — and not only in food, but in health, education, civil, moral, and spiritual values.

But is man capable of justice? By his own nature, no, because he is weak, and the weak cannot be just. No one can readily give to others the staff upon which he leans, and the staff is the image of his possessions, both as an individual and as a people.

Vain is the hope of those who place their trust in human institutions; and because these do not satisfy them, they are always waiting for new and different institutions.

Justice can only begin in God: no one can give man what belongs to man unless he first gives to God what belongs to God, and everything we possess belongs to God; we ourselves belong to God.

The Eucharist makes us enter into this splendid vision of justice: what we possess, within us and outside us, belongs to God, and we must use it in the name of God.

God does not withhold what is necessary from anyone, and every people or person lacking nourishment — of body or spirit — is an accusation against love, because a blockage has arisen, a theft committed by a people or by individuals.

In the smallest community, if there is even one person abandoned to loneliness and misery, that community should not pride itself on its achievements — even civil, human, or religious ones — nor even on participation in the Eucharist, so long as it allows Jesus to languish in the abandoned person. And no one should think himself just merely because he gives money, if he does not also give of himself in the works he is able to perform.

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The just man, in Christian language, is the man “of faith,” the holy man. Therefore, it is not enough to be honest, not to ask for more than what honestly belongs to us, and to give each person what is due, because these standards continuously vary according to laws and customs.

The honesty of the Christian is higher and includes within justice what is owed to man in respect, esteem, help, affection, and inward gifts; everything enters into communion because everything comes from God and must return to God.

We may fail in justice — not in the eyes of men but in the eyes of God — through laziness, convenience, cowardice, and even vanity, or also through excessive severity, especially toward the weakest. The just person appeals to Jesus in every action, seeks to conform himself to Jesus, seeks to act as he believes Jesus would have acted in that situation, and allows Jesus to exercise His justice within him.

Arturo Graf, a fine thinker though not exactly a Christian, said that it is much easier to be charitable than to be just — but this comes from a mistaken sense of charity, because charity perfects justice; it does not evade it.

The just person is esteemed, but in certain circles and situations he becomes a silent yet severe reproach to the injustices of others, and therefore he is troublesome and is opposed.

And so, “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice,” and those who “suffer persecution for my sake.”

Nevertheless, “honesty proceeds slowly but goes far,” that is, in the end it prevails, even if at the cost of hardships and tribulations.

6 – THE WILL

The beggar in a poem by Trilussa (and what a craftsman of the soul Trilussa is!) returns from begging and empties his sack onto the table. Among the pieces of bread he searches for some better morsel, and if he spots a little piece of cake he grabs it immediately and begins his meal with the sweet, as Trilussa notes.

This beggar is instinctive, incapable of giving order to things, of saving the sweet for the end, as would be in his own interest. He lacks willpower, and perhaps for this reason he is a beggar.

“Peace on earth to men of good will” — now the translation is different, though equivalent. Yet that beggar is at peace, despite lacking good will, indeed lacking will altogether; but he remains a beggar.

And anyone who lacks good will remains a beggar, in the sense of living not for the benefit but to the detriment of the community, even if he is rich and powerful.

The will stands at the summit of the soul’s power and of human actions; therefore it is through the will that the world judges us, and God will judge us.

The will can be good or bad, and bad in two senses: because it is weak, or because it is directed toward evil deeds, toward doing harm for personal advantage — which in the end is only an illusion of advantage.

The will is good when it is strong and directed toward doing good, when it seeks to know and conform itself to the will of God.

And here one must beware of the clever Director of perdition. There are precious people, capable of exhausting themselves in the works of God; but heaven forbid anyone contradict them, heaven forbid anyone point out an error — immediately they take offense and abandon the undertaking.

These people are dangerous to communities, and they are on the wrong path for their own salvation, because they are full of pride. Better for them to have less will and more humility.

“You are humble servants.” Do not tell them so; tear this page from their Gospel if you wish — they will not notice, because they have never truly read it.

Jesus, who knows man well, greatly feared pride, which can poison even the best souls; and Saint Francis of Assisi feared it as well, to the point of worrying that his friars might read too many books, even holy books, and draw from them reasons for self-satisfaction. The Gospel and the

letters should have been enough, without embroidering so much upon them: useless servants, that is enough. And with the joy of feeling oneself useless.

But useless without laziness — useless yet busy. This is the light of God, which only clear souls understand and enjoy.

The Director of Perdition also fears the will, but because he fears that it may become good and escape his power. Thus, to secure a greater conquest, he has invented the ideologies of the world: the exaltation of personal will, equality reduced to the lowest level, everyone promoted — in school and in careers — without personal merit, with the will extinguished, so that there may no longer be any danger of it placing itself at the service of God.

Enthusiasm alone is not good will, because it draws more from temperament — that is, from instinct — and emotion, and therefore it can burn itself out.

There are busy people in good works who never have a moment to breathe and seem endowed with tremendous willpower, while spiritually they may be lazy and distracted, so much so that they cannot find either the time or the mental freedom to direct even the recitation of a single *Our Father* properly toward God. These too are instinctive people, and they may do good, but with little personal benefit.

Others are disordered, and however hard they work, they cannot bring order to their days and accomplish very little.

Good will requires that what we have chosen to do, or are called to do, be done with order and well. Better to play the trombone well than to conduct an orchestra badly; and no one, not even the trombone player, should feel he has “arrived,” because there is always room for improvement and growth.

It can happen, in the works of God and also in one’s own work, to find oneself alone: no one lends a hand, while many are ready to criticize you, to suspect you, to accuse you. Or everything may seem to go wrong, everything mistaken.

That is the time not to lose heart, not to give in, but only humbly to reflect and to seek counsel from men of God of proven wisdom, then to correct oneself if necessary — but not to surrender.

The Eucharist invites us to perseverance. Ingratitude, indifference, betrayals, persecutions did not induce Jesus to deprive us of the Eucharist, nor to cease waiting for us with infinite patience, nor to cease giving us the example and strength of perseverance.

7 – FREEDOM

Thomas Merton, in one of his beautiful books — *Life and Holiness* (Italian edition: *Vita nel Silenzio*, Morcelliana Editions) — says that freedom does not consist in being able to choose between good and evil, but in being able not to choose evil.

A person is free when he can no longer choose evil, because he is free from evil — that is, from every form of slavery. An example of this splendid and true concept of freedom comes from this passage by Pyotr Krasnov:

“I never felt so happy as in the labor camp. I still remember fragments of the night prayers. I worked in the camp hospital as an orderly. I felt God close beside me, and in those moments the words came spontaneously to me: ‘Lord, grant that this period, the happiest of my life, may last as long as possible.’ Thus I found happiness in unhappiness and inner freedom in harsh imprisonment.”

Man needs freedom, even the freedom to move about, to choose where he lives and what he does, his personal and social condition. He fears every possible form of slavery. If he moves from the countryside to the city, he misses the open spaces of the countryside; if he is forced to live in a way he does not wish to live, he suffers. But true freedom is interior: “The truth shall make you free,” and no one can take away this inner freedom, not even prison.

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But we are not truly free until we take up the cross that the Lord offers us and feel it light because it is carried with Him and for Him; until we accept our condition as the best one for us, provided it is not the result of our own laziness or errors; until we can feel happy in whatever concentration camp life may open before anyone, anywhere, even suddenly; until we accept death not as liberation from suffering but as birth into life in its fullness.

We are free or unfree not according to circumstances, but according to the state of our soul. There are men and women on perpetual vacation, free to drift from one distraction to another, and they are devoured by boredom because their souls are empty — indeed, their souls are enslaved by their own nothingness. And there are people who do not allow themselves, or cannot allow themselves, even a moment’s rest, yet are profoundly happy because they are free within the sweet will of God.

One is struck by this thought of Anne Frank in her famous diary:

“In the evening, when she ends her prayers with the words: ‘I thank You, my God, for everything that is good, dear, and beautiful,’ I am filled with happiness.”

She was hidden with her family in the attic where the Nazis eventually discovered them and deported them toward death. Only her father, as we know, survived. They killed happiness around her, but not within Anne Frank herself.

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Is man capable of freedom? It is a question we ask ourselves, and sadly we must answer that by his own strength alone man is not capable of freedom, because he is a slave to his weaknesses and

selfishness, which he projects into social systems — whether in those that outlaw freedom by law, or in our own societies, which proclaim freedom yet do not know how to defend it, thereby giving space to the Director of Perdition, who calls dissolution “freedom.”

Within the soul of every convinced democrat there slumbers a dictator, who awakens at the slightest provocation, both in private and public life, railing against the freedom of others and causing conflicts and disorder, at least moral disorder.

No one can aspire to freedom who does not respect it in himself and in others. One respects freedom within oneself by honoring it and not seeking how far one may offend or degrade it; one respects it in others by not oppressing or imposing, by not seeking to conquer rather than convince, to dominate rather than serve.

At one time I felt a certain pity for people who spend hours talking about nothing, but later I understood that those simple people find in speech itself — whatever the subject — a sense of liberation: speech as a sign of freedom.

“Freedom, which is so dear, is what he seeks,” and only in God can we find it.

Again Arturo Graf, in his *Ecce Homo*:

“If you do not possess inner freedom, what other freedom can you hope to have?”

Freedom lies in obedience to God, in response to the invitation of Jesus: “Come and follow Me.” And from that moment man becomes free.

8 – PEACE

Augustine of Hippo considered peace such a great good that it is impossible to desire a better one. To Bernardino of Siena, the very word *peace* brought a sense of sweetness to the lips.

And they were right. In peace everything is resolved; without peace everything loses value, even health, which is considered another unsurpassable good. Indeed, without peace there is no true health, because a person without peace is not well.

But peace too is not in man’s power: “I give you peace, My peace, not as the world gives it.”

Peace, in fact, is the fruit of justice, which in turn is the fruit of inner freedom — that is, of purity of soul and heart.

Peace is a reward from God to transparent souls, to whom He also gives the power to bestow it; the mere presence of such souls, even before they speak, fills others and instills peace and security.

Whoever does not possess peace cannot hope to spread it. No one can give what he does not have, nor can one ask for peace except from God, because no one has the right to expect it from men.

It is better for such a person to examine himself in search of the causes of his lack of peace and try to remove them. These causes may be voluntary or involuntary.

Among the involuntary causes, neurosis stands out — perhaps the most widespread illness, with an enormous range from the mildest forms to the gravest. Here we enter a field not yet fully explored by science, and when necessary it is good to place oneself in the hands of a psychologist or psychiatrist, preferably Christian; but before all else it is best to place oneself in the hands of God, entrusting oneself in faith to the Divine Physician.

Faith alone can heal unrest, anxiety, fears, and phobias once they are no longer dreaded. Some even come to call an acceptable form of neurosis “Sister Neurosis” and remain at peace with it.

Other involuntary causes may lie in an anxious temperament, in nervous or physical exhaustion caused by labors and trials beyond one’s strength, when that balance which all of us need begins to fail. Yet we must never forget that God never tests us beyond our strength, provided trust and hope in His help do not fail within us.

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The voluntary causes of the lack of peace are as numerous as the imagination of the Director of Perdition (though always inferior to the imagination of God!). The most common are envy, jealousy, wounded self-love that makes one touchy, pride, greed, every form of selfishness, arrogance, passions of every kind and degree, lust, excessive ambition, impatience, refusal of suffering and of every annoyance, laziness, cowardice — and the list could go on, including all the impurities of heart and soul.

The pessimist, the one who sees darkness even in the sun, can never possess peace.

The insatiable person will be satisfied only by death. Whoever cannot rejoice simply in being alive — where will he ever find peace?

Do you want peace? It is not really so difficult. Do you feel that peace immediately after receiving the Eucharist? It is Jesus within us saying: “Peace be with you, I have given you My peace.”

The secret lies in not dispersing it: from that moment on, it is no longer I who live, but Jesus who lives in me with His peace, and I desire nothing else because I no longer need anything. I possess the universe — indeed, the Creator of the universe — and nothing more is lacking to me.

Peace too, this supreme good, is possible for everyone, but it is a conquest, and it is beautiful precisely because it is a conquest. It can easily be lost until it becomes our nature, until Jesus lives stably within us, until we have attained the freedom of the children of God.

And whoever loses it again easily should not lose heart. Even on the path toward peace there may be hard stretches, and what matters is not to stop.

9 – HEALTH

“When there is health, there is everything”: this is the refrain of the elderly, who fear losing it and sense that, once health is gone, very little remains — unless one possesses a good measure of inner richness.

The young do not think about health. One does not appreciate what one possesses; indeed, one often squanders it carelessly.

The Bible, in Sirach, agrees with the elderly:

“Better is a poor man healthy and strong
than a rich man afflicted in his body.
Health and a sound constitution
are worth more than all gold.”

But unfortunately Nicolas Léonard, physician and French poet, confirms this observation:

“Man spends the first half of his life ruining his health and the second half trying to restore it.”

And yet, when there is health, there is not everything: there is much, but not all. Once, when those who did not work truly did not eat, because there were no insurance systems or easy alternatives, people used to say: “When there is work and health, there is everything.” But even then, it was not everything.

Or rather, health may indeed be everything — if by health we mean the health of body and soul — because then whatever is necessary for life will certainly not be lacking.

Take an old man bursting with health, with work in abundance, yet without peace in his heart. Would it not be better to wish him a little less physical vigor in exchange for not bursting with anger or anxiety?

Take a family where everyone is healthy, but where there is no peace. Are they truly capable of enjoying their health?

The body and soul influence one another (there is a fine book by Pierre Biot entitled *The Body and the Soul*, also published by Morcelliana). When the body is unhealthy, sadness envelops the soul unless it is sustained by great inner strength. But even more strongly, it is the soul that influences the body and helps it remain healthy.

Observe the elderly, even those over eighty, who go to Mass every morning: how agile and lively they are. Science would do well to take note of this.

And it is understandable if we look at the Beatitudes: we see that Jesus spoke of Himself — poor, meek, merciful, peaceful, hungry and thirsty for justice, pure, persecuted — and He spoke of those who accept following Him.

Whoever follows Him is blessed, and blessedness protects, preserves, and strengthens health.

If we tried to make a list of the illnesses caused by wealth with all its excesses, by arrogance, selfishness, anger, injustices committed, impurities, and even cowardice, perhaps the Beatitudes — which free us from all these diseases of the soul — also immunize us against a good half of the diseases of the body.

And from those illnesses from which they cannot free the body, they free the soul: “Blessed are those who suffer, for they shall be comforted.” Indeed, they are already comforted, even during their suffering.

10 – EDUCATION

“Love God with all your strength; love your neighbor as yourself.” This appears — and certainly is — the foundation and summit of education. We see no other principle equal to it.

To love God with all our strength is a commitment to value and increase all our powers — physical, mental, moral, spiritual — and thus to become, in every respect, the most effective person possible in order to love and serve God better: to grow each day in grace and virtue, to be faithful servants, and also to enjoy God’s gifts at the highest level.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” Self-love is commonly understood negatively, as susceptibility and pride, but it is not a vice; it is a virtue. We must love ourselves, in harmony with and in dependence upon the love of God with all our strength, with the constant and vigilant duty of eliminating and expelling from ourselves all that may harm us — every evil and all evil — while seeking and increasing within ourselves every gift and virtue, every good and all goodness.

Thus, by loving our neighbor as ourselves, we place ourselves in the condition to love him at the highest possible level. For we ourselves, through our miseries, are often considerable obstacles to the love of God. We remain imperfect, limited, and never certain that we love and serve our neighbor to the degree God asks of us; but with humble conscience we truly serve once we commit ourselves tirelessly to loving our neighbor for love of God.

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An education that excludes God is only a partial education because it neither aims at nor reaches the whole person, who possesses an immortal soul.

An education not moved by love and not leading to love inevitably stops halfway.

“Education is the bread of the soul,” said Giuseppe Mazzini in *The Duties of Man*. He was on the right path, though he did not travel it to the end; he did not arrive at the true bread of the soul, which also contains education.

There is only one true Educator, who then made Himself food for the soul: the Eucharist is the first and irreplaceable school of education.

Every time we approach the Eucharist, each person feels himself awaited, desired, beloved — the one who brings joy.

This is the sublime principle that should govern human relationships: the person who approaches us, whoever he may be, in whatever moment or condition, and for whatever reason — even to ask something, even if he causes inconvenience and arrives at an unhappy moment — should feel himself awaited, beloved, the one who brings joy.

And if we are to have a preference, it should be for the humblest, the poorest, for those least appreciated and most readily rejected by the world, because they are more in need and more loved by God: they are His favorites.

Once, after thanking a clerk who delivered my tax documents, I saw his face light up.

“You thanked me — no one has ever thanked me before. People receive me badly!”

“Why?” I replied. “You are performing a service. You spare me from having to collect them myself.”

He went away comforted. And what had it cost me? Simply to thank him.

Always say thank you to anyone who performs a service, even if it is paid and owed, especially to humble people. To thank someone literally means “to give grace,” and indeed the person thanked feels consoled, as if receiving a moment of grace.

A superior who thanks a subordinate gives him the finest reward. So too the customer who thanks his supplier, the citizen who thanks the public employee: “thank you” possesses considerable personal and social value.

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“To become all things to all people.” It is not easy.

A holy priest once told me that it takes great sensitivity and intuition to understand how to treat those we do not know, especially young people: one expects to be embraced; another recoils if you place a hand on his shoulder, fearing to be seized.

The founder of a boys’ village once told a young thief that he was good. The boy rebelled:

“I know why you say I’m good — you say it to win me over. But I know I’m a thief.”

The priest, gentle and patient, replied:

“What does that matter? You are a thief because you were taught to steal. You were educated to steal, and you obeyed what you were taught. If you obeyed, it means you are good.”

And he convinced him.

But there is one rule for everyone: gentleness. With gentleness one can say anything, deal with anyone, even the most violent. A gentle face attracts and reassures; it is the face of Jesus with the poor and sinners, a face severe only toward hypocrites and the merchants in the Temple.

There is also the education of language. We are almost inclined to magnify words, to use harsh or vulgar language, and thus we wound others.

A shy child — and there are still such children — goes to speak with the principal of his school. He asks permission softly. The principal, bent over his desk, does not hear. The child steps forward to repeat his request just as the principal lifts his head, sees him already inside the office, and shouts:

“You ask permission first, you little scoundrel!”

The child freezes, says nothing more, and that moment remains in his soul.

A man comes home with a stain on his jacket. His wife notices it. Let us imagine two ways of speaking.

Wrong approach:

“You’re filthy.”

Correct approach, spoken gently:

“You have a stain on your jacket. If you give it to me, I’ll see whether I can remove it.”

The soup is bland.

Wrong approach from the husband:

“You always make tasteless soup.”

Correct approach: the husband remains silent, then later says the soup is good because it was made with love.

We should try to abolish from our language absolute terms such as *always*, *never*, *everything*, and the like — which are often lies besides — and every offensive expression, even when habit has worn down its harshness.

In Tuscan speech, “you great coward” may even mean “I care about you,” but here tone makes all the difference. Yet someone may not appreciate it. Better to be careful, and joke only with those we are certain will understand.

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All of us need to confide in someone, to open ourselves, to vent — even those in high positions. It is said that the loneliest man on earth is the Pope, because everyone who approaches him comes to ask, not to offer; people speak to him with deference, not friendship.

A delicate aspect of education is knowing how to listen with an open heart, respectfully but lovingly, with fraternal interest.

A man famous throughout Europe was speaking with an unknown friend and at a certain point said:

“One speaks well with you.”

The friend had hardly spoken at all; he had only listened. But the other man felt understood, felt able to confide without fear of losing prestige.

Blessed is he who knows how to speak with Jesus in the Eucharist, to tell Him everything. Yet Jesus also lives in the heart of the person who welcomes others in His name, who listens, and who

at the right moment speaks the right and measured words, managing to console even those who have not yet found full friendship with the Eucharist.

11 – MAN

Let us speak of man in his relationship with woman. Long before laws granted women the civil rights of men, man and woman were equal before God, and throughout the centuries they have been equal before the Eucharist.

Equal in the dignity of being “the image and likeness of God,” yet different and complementary in their roles. Beautiful are the reflections of Pope John Paul II on the opening chapters of Genesis, where he points out that God created man “in His image and likeness” and created him male and female, leading to the conclusion that only together do man and woman complete the image and likeness of God.

There would be nothing more beautiful, more marvelous, had not the tempter intervened to sow disorder — a disorder which, despite good human laws and various movements for women’s liberation, continues and will continue to trouble the relationship between man and woman.

Only the man who, in the light of God, rediscovers wisdom truly rediscovers woman in the fullness of her value, loves her, respects her, and protects her as an incomparable gift from God, as his completeness and consolation.

A man who does not love and respect woman will never become a fulfilled man. He will remain an incomplete and distorted image of God, tormented by inward sufferings. He may achieve success, boast of conquests, appear to have “made it” in life, but it is all illusion: inwardly he remains defeated, incapable of fully expressing the image of man that reflects the image of God.

A husband who does not love his wife can no longer love anyone with clear and wise love, not even his children, however deeply he believes he loves them, because he does not love God’s gift — the one with whom, in marriage, he has become “one flesh,” the completion of himself, the bond between himself and his neighbor.

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Young people in love inspire tenderness, but also concern. The false idea of freedom in which they live does not help them. Any love not flowing from and anchored in the love of God remains at the mercy of instinct and selfishness.

If man, made in the image of God, is love — and if he does not love, he remains in death — woman experiences this even more deeply. She desires to love and to be loved almost from birth.

And here the Prince of this world finds easy prey: the young woman wants to believe in the young man’s love and entrusts herself to him, even when what exists in him is only selfishness.

Some years ago, a girl from Milan trustingly followed her fiancé and some friends, not realizing it was in fact a kidnapping that ended with her death. In her diary she had written to him:

“When I am with you I am happy, and when you leave I immediately begin waiting for you again.”

A young woman should feel happy and secure when, together with her fiancé, she nourishes their love through the Eucharist and lives it in that nourishment and light.

12 – WOMAN

Woman should not set herself against man in any direction. The moment she places herself against him, she is already defeated: she has rejected love, detached herself from God, and suffers.

Nor should she dislike being instead a help to man, “a helper like unto him,” and therefore not subordinate but equal in dignity: always helping man, in every condition — mother, sister, wife, daughter, coworker, secretary, professional, teacher, artisan, merchant, in union and political life. Her ultimate aim should not be herself, but man — even when she becomes a cloistered nun and no longer sees a man face to face, but sees and contemplates him in the Eucharist.

A woman who says she wants to “realize herself” while thinking only of herself is mistaken, because in every condition she fulfills herself only in love, in helping man, who is born from her and needs her all his life.

And for love of man she should not compromise herself, because by degrading herself she degrades man as well, even the one she loves.

By becoming merely an instrument for man’s interests and selfishness, she is no longer his help but his slave, and she in turn encourages him in slavery, because people either rise together or fall together.

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Woman should recognize her value and not diminish it by trying to become identical to man. That would be only a disguise, something pitiable.

Woman has aptitudes different from man: man is and must always be father, in every aspect, and woman is and must always be mother. Can one do without father or mother? Does life perhaps flow from two fathers?

Let us take art, which mirrors life: music, theater, cinema. Man — father — creates; woman — mother — interprets and gives form. Who is greater or lesser, if the representational arts require both?