

Section 20

The Healing of a Wounded Society

Pope Francis and Fr. Chevalier are both aware of the fact that the central message of the Gospel concerning God's unconditional love is received not only for our private consolation, but for the healing of a wounded society. In "Evangelii Gaudium", the Pope shows himself to be deeply conscious of the ills of modern society. He speaks extensively about the suffering of people and the big challenges faced by today's world: poverty, inequality, violence and war. He criticizes modern economies that disadvantage the poor. However, the Pope sees the root-causes of the appalling social inequality in today's society not only in failing economic systems, but also in maladies of the human heart. Above all, he points to two illnesses: indifference and selfishness. He goes even so far as to speak of "*a globalization of indifference*" and declares: "*Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were not our responsibility*" (Evangelii Gaudium n. 54). Regarding egoism, he urges all of us to say a firm "*no to selfishness*" (Evangelii Gaudium n. 81).

In his day, Fr. Chevalier felt himself upset by exactly the same social evils, rooted in the human heart. Two evils, he said, are "*destroying our unhappy world: indifference and egoism*" (Personal Notes, Appendix p. 107). He found "*an effective remedy*" (Daily Readings January 4), for these evils of the heart in the devotion to "*the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is all love and charity.*" Why? Because this devotion, he said, will "*kindle in all hearts the fire of God's love found in the Heart of Jesus.*"

Pope Francis does not specifically mention the devotion to the Sacred Heart, but he also considers love and charity to be the remedies of today's social evils. Here he sees a role both for politicians and every private person. Politicians, he says, should get involved in "*sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots of the evils in our world,*" while all of us should be convinced that, "*charity not only should shape our personal relationships with family, friends, and small groups, but also our social, economic and political relationships*" (Evangelii Gaudium n. 205). Several

times, the Pope refers to *“the inescapable social dimension of the Gospel message”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 258), which *“before all else, invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, ... and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 39).

A Reflective moment

What sort of society do we want?

*“A society that encourages us to break open
the shell of selfishness and self-centeredness
contains the seeds of a society where people are honest, truthful, and loving.
A society can function well only if those within are concerned,
not only with their own needs
or the needs of those who immediately surround them,
but by the needs of all,
that is to say, by the common good and the family of nations.”*

Jean Vanier - Daily Thought

Pope Francis writes:

*“The joy of the Gospel is such
that it cannot be taken away from us
by anyone or anything (cf. Jn 16:22).
The evils of our world – and those of the Church –
must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervor.
Let us look upon them as challenges
which can help us to grow.
With the eyes of faith, we can see the light which the Holy Spirit always
radiates in the midst of darkness...
Our faith is challenged to discern
how wine can come from water
and how wheat can grow in the midst of weeds.”*
(Evangelii Gaudium n. 84).

