

THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE

June 1949 Editorial

Often, when I am speaking to one or other of you, I hear these words: *“I lack courage and generosity in the service of God. I must make greater efforts, acquire a stronger will, be more persevering, more self-denying”*. Listening to you, I wonder if you are not putting the cart before the horse.

Let me make myself clear. There is a very simple law of psychology that you must have observed many times in your relationships with friends: to devote yourself easily to someone, you must love that person; to love that person spontaneously, you must admire him or her. Admiration gives rise to love and love gives rise to devotion. Otherwise, how difficult it is to be devoted if one does not love! And how difficult it is to love if one does not admire!

There is a close relationship between love and admiration. *“I will never love someone that I do not admire”*, a young man or young girl may have said to you. Indeed, when he or she returns to you accompanied by their soul mate, there is a light shining in their eyes that is both wonder and love.

But how fragile is this young love! Fragile like the admiration that gave it birth. This is why this admiration must be protected and looked after; this why one must remain sensitive to the beauty of the loved one. I am not referring so much to physical charm as to this glittering beauty that reflects the beauty of God at the heart of any human being: a reflection that moves us so deeply when our gaze is sufficiently penetrating to discover it.

It happens – but how rarely – that this same admiring and tender light shines in the face of elderly spouses. It is not that the trials of life have spared them: struggle and pain are etched in their features. Yet, facing each other, they marvel as they did on the first day – indeed, far more than on the first day. In their company one is struck by a miracle of life.

The French writer, G. Duhamel (1884-1966), used exquisite words to express the need to pay very special attention to human beings: *“I am looking down into an abyss (his little boy), into a hidden world. With my eyes, I try to penetrate the shadows and, sometimes, I let drop a tiny pebble to awake an echo from the depths”*. This advice is valid, not only for parents, not only for spouses, but also for a Christian looking at Christ.

Because we do not admire Christ, our love is defective. If we do not marvel it is because we never let drop a tiny pebble and so the depths of mystery finds no echo in us. Because our love is defective, our service lacks enthusiasm and courage.

Saints go far in love because, first of all, they go far in knowledge. They have that passionate interest in Christ that lovers have for each other. They are curious about him. Through his words – I was almost going to say through the inflections in his voice – through his actions, as Scripture relates them to us, they discern his soul. They seek him also in prayer, at length, patiently, and in the whole of their life. No doubt they only became saints because they were constantly listening.

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