

LETTER OF MOTHER ADELA, SCTJM FOR LENT 2015

“I shall show you a still more excellent way: love!”

(1 Cor 12:31)



Dear Family:

The Gospel of the Cross: the Gospel of love

The liturgical season of Lent has begun. It is a time in which our Mother the Church invites us to fix our gaze on the love of God-made-Man, who did not spare anything to save us, even unto the greatest proof of his love which is the Cross. Love in its true essence is self-donation, a generous surrender of oneself for the other...love, if it is true, is given, is donated even until the last consequences. Jesus, as St. John tells us, loved us to the extreme (*cf. Jn 13*)...without ever turning back from his free choice to love us and save us, even when that love would take him to the cross. The cross becomes for us who believe in Christ, the most eloquent sign of the love of God: the most perfect model of the authenticity of love. It is by contemplating the Cross of Christ that our eyes are illumined with the truth of love; it is in the School of the Gospel of the Cross - that gospel which speaks to us of a love without conditions, without reservations, without selfish interests, without indifferences, without coldness, or hardness or retaliations - that we learn the true meaning, the true sense of love, its essence, its dignity, its beauty, splendor and its path. We could say that the Cross of Christ is the luminous school of love and when the human heart does not let itself be formed in love, does not let itself be touched by love, does not let itself be healed by the beauty of love and does not go out with courage and joy to love, it renounces, in a certain sense the truth about itself; it denies its greatness, it dilutes, imprisons, and strips it of its deepest meaning...it encloses itself in its own world and sails the ocean of its life without a compass, without a horizon and without port. Only he who contemplates Christ on the Cross with their hearts understands himself, knows himself to be loved, and knows that he is called to love in the same way. Only in that contemplation does he find the greatest meaning and most perfect path of life...in a few words, he learns who he is, what his call is, and learns the meaning of life and the way to live... He understands himself from love...he knows that he is called to love! He is understood, he is valued, is elevated, is totally given...rejoices in the truth and the good...and so is disposed to value the other, to understand him, elevate him and serve him, journeying the path of life doing good...giving love, filling the world with gestures of love.

To love as Christ has loved us is not an easy task, nevertheless, it is the call of every Christian, of every disciple of Christ. To love as He has loved us is our identity and our purpose of life, it is our path and our way of living, of relating with others and with everything. To learn to love like He has loved us is the great task of the Christian: a task that requires arduous work in our hearts, a deep conversion. This conversion, announced by the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 36, is to take out the stones from our hearts, the hardness of our sentiments and thoughts that are obstacles to the freedom of love, which create barriers that separate us from God and from others...that fill us with coldness and that creates in us an interior world of indifference to God and others. This conversion also, as the prophet tells us, requires the purification of our hearts, cleansing of our impurities, dirtiness and ugliness, whatever contamination resides in them and in a certain way obscures the beauty, the purity, the simplicity and transparency of love. Conversion of heart is the path of restoration of love and for love. It is to permit the power of the love of Christ, who let His Heart be pierced to give us a new heart, to transform us, to redeem us, purify us and free us from every lack of love. Conversion is to open wide our closed and self-centered hearts so that the grace and power of the love of Christ may open a new horizon, a pure, bright, luminous and generous horizon...**the horizon of true love....**

Conversion of heart is to discover and contemplate a new path before our eyes, the most excellent path, the most perfect, as St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians chapter 12:31.... That path that this great apostle to the Gentiles wants to show us is the only one on which we can fully realize ourselves, the only one by which we can with certainty reach human and Christian maturity, the only path which Our Lord has marked for us from His Incarnation until the Cross... This perfect path is love: and this love is demanding, or rather, requires that we walk the steep and narrow way of conversion of heart to break the selfish narrowness of self-reference, indifference, and utilitarian selfishness, to widen the tent and donate ourselves with joy, always seeking the good of others.

The Magna Carta of Love: the most perfect path...

In the address that Pope Francis gave this past February 14 when he created 20 new Cardinals for the Church, he called them and in them all of us, to let ourselves be guided and to live coherently the "hymn of Charity" that St. Paul presents to us in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

"All of us, myself first and each of you with me, would do well to let ourselves be guided by the inspired words of the apostle Paul, especially in the passage where he lists the marks of charity. May our Mother Mary help us to listen. She gave the world Jesus, charity incarnate, who is "the more excellent Way" (cf. 1 Cor 12:31); may she help us to receive this Word and always to advance on this Way...may we learn to expand our hearts according to the measure of the heart of Christ", that is revealed to us in this luminous letter from Saint Paul, chapter 13 and that challenges us to look for the more perfect path for every Christian. This hymn of love is, as Saint John Paul II tells us, the Magna Carta of Love:

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails; But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love".

The apostle Paul dedicates a hymn in the first letter to the Corinthians about this love, the most perfect path - love is patient, attentive to serve, and endures all things (1 Co 13, 4.7)-, it is truly demanding, for it calls us to a profound change of heart, a serious conversion. This hymn reflects the great beauty, the potent kindness and the splendor of the truth about love. It is precisely this beauty, this kindness and this truth which are the reasons that it is demanding. We Christians contemplate Christ on the Cross, the truth about love, and we cannot be conformed with living "just any kind of love", or of "minimizing the demands of love", or "letting the authentic meaning of love be stolen from us"... we cannot simply live the wide path of selfishness and not allow ourselves to be questioned by the luminous truth of the love of Christ revealed completely in the mystery of the Incarnation and that obtained the highest splendor on the Cross. For this reason, we Christians should have in our homes, in our rooms, a crucifix, the luminous sign of the love of God for humanity. The crucifix reminds us that love is true if it is capable of reaching the extreme of total and sincere donation of self.

Love is true if it is unconditional... love is true if it is pure, if it is transparent, free from desires and passions that



contaminate it, dilute or make it dirty. Love is true if it seeks to serve, if it is attentive to the needs of others, if it is creative in its response to these needs, if it is searching, always searching to do good...Love is true if it is satisfied with the truth, without looking for its own interests, if it does not take account of the bad, if it does not get irritated and hurt with words, gestures or indifferences... if it does not offend or insult the other... love is true if it is delicate, patient, if it knows how to wait and lend a helping hand while waiting... love is true if it responds to evil with the strength of the good... love is true if it forgives everything, if it does not exaggerate the evil done, if it does not look for retaliations, if it does not preserve oneself being self-centered...love is true if it recognizes one's personal gift and the gift of the other, if it

guards it and edifies it... Love is true if it does not produce a vile deed, with dishonesty or manipulations, if it is not envious, if it is not boastful, if it does not show off, if it is not prideful or arrogant... Love is true if it is faithful, permanent, and endures with the passing of time... if it understands that permanency allows for security and trust, if it knows how to remain unconditional without fluctuating according to its sentiments or emotions. Love is true if it is courageous, if it does not run from difficulties, but knows how to assimilate them, bear them, confront them and elevate them. Love is true if in tiredness it seeks strength, if in weakness it seeks fortitude... Love is true if it seeks its strength in the love of God and therefore is capable of "bearing all things"... love is true if it is diffusive, if it radiates the true good and only seeks to fulfill it. Love is true if it is not whimsical, willful, if it knows how to yield, accept and postpone itself, to allow others to go first...so as to not impose or be an

obstacle on the path of the other. Love is true if it is wise, if it knows how to distinguish what is most important and knows how to establish fundamental priorities with permanent and solid values. Love is true if it finds joy in loving, in giving more than receiving. Love is true if it is responsible, if it knows how to protect, guard and cultivate the gift entrusted into its hands and know how to value it without possessing it for its own satisfaction, projects or selfish interests. Love is true if it does not look for vengeance, to hurt those that hurt us, to reveal the faults of those who offend us or expose and make one look badly before others... Love is true if it is just, if it does not demand what it is not capable of giving, if it demands of others what it has first given, if it expects of others what it has first done, if it knows how to include in its gaze the realities of events and not just an aspect or defect or a fact, but see the truth, including the totality of the person and their acts. Love is true if it is always attentive to the needs of others, of the common good...if it knows how to place its life, its personal gift for the building up of the body that it should edify... True love is serene, tranquil, like a fountain of water that is always open, and therefore does not need to gush out, for it is always open, nor does it have to close before the difficulties of those who receive it, for its donation does not depend of the recipient... *True love is something different than what the world tells us, a world that does not have fundamental values based on the logic of the Gospel... True love has its own science, its own measure, its own values, its own reasons and its own happiness....* True love is a different logic, lived and taught by Christ, which closes its last chapter in a donation without limits in His Passion and death on the Cross... in His constant donation in the Eucharist, in His definitive triumph over the forces of evil with the force of the Resurrection... True love is something different...it is something else...something that we can understand only from the science and logic of the Incarnation...something that we can understand only from the School of the Gospel of the Cross: *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15, 13)...*

The Threats to Love in our own hearts.

In the Gospel of Saint Mark chapter 7 verse 18, we hear Jesus speak to us about threats, the dangers and battles that take liberty in our heart against love. *"Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him?"* Then He added, *"But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."*

The dangers, the threats towards love constitute also a threat to the civilization of love because they favor what is capable of efficaciously opposing it. Think first of selfishness, not only on an individual level, but also of a couple or on a larger sphere, on social selfishness, for example, of a class or nation. Selfishness, the disordered search for the good of oneself, in any of its forms, directly and radically opposes the civilization of love. These threats arise, yes, arise in the human heart and harden, chill and contaminate the heart...enclosing it in selfishness, indifference, hardness and disordered appetites, competition, pride, vanity, rivalry, vengeance and hate... and when these dark attitudes are assumed as a normal way of life, it influences culture, making it a culture of selfishness, of indifference, rejection, violence and irresponsibility, of seduction, manipulation and lies... a culture that is permissive, superficial, materialistic, exclusively functional and utilitarian...ultimately creating a civilization of immediate satisfaction of the individual, of utilitarian selfishness and manipulation above or against the objective demands of the true good. That is how the culture of death is built, of self-referential selfishness, of indifference, of impurity and of disregard for the human person. A culture that is the antithesis of the civilization of love that is the Kingdom that Christ came to establish with His life, His words, His gestures, His works, His passion, death and resurrection.



To overcome these sinful tendencies, these threats to love, one has to rend one's heart, to uproot those sins...that is why during Lent, as a singular time of grace, penance and prayer, of sincere charity, we are called to conversion of heart... "return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments" (Joel 2, 12-13). It is a call precisely not to settle for exterior changes, but rather the serious interior examination of our hearts, recognizing that our sins, those threats to true love, kindness and the beauty of love in all its dimensions, come from our hearts and not from the outside; they are not produced by others or exterior situations, but the areas in our hearts that are contaminated, impure, hardened...enclosed in the sickness of self-reference: in the fatal withdrawal into oneself, as Pope Francis told us this year in his Lenten Letter.

The hymn of love is a canticle of liberation and examination of conscience

"I shall show you a still more perfect way", Saint Paul in his letter to the Corinthians tells us in that hymn of love.... which becomes a canticle of liberation from all that opposes love in our hearts. As we contemplate "that perfect way of love", a path so clearly described by the countenance, heart and life of Christ, particularly during His Way of the Cross, we have before our eyes a concrete examination of conscience, that questions us before Jesus in His Passion of love, asking a fundamental question: Where is my heart? What civilization does my heart build, that of love, of good, of forgiveness, generosity, patience, of solidarity and tenderness? or of selfishness, envy, rivalry, lies, manipulation, rejection or indifference? I invite you to pray the Way of the Cross, contemplating the perfect path of love and opening our hearts allowing Jesus to show us how to love as He has loved.

The hymn of love that Saint Paul describes for us, sings the truth of the countenance and heart of Christ who is before each one of us on the way of the Cross, just as He was before the Cyrene. If we were before the suffering Christ, Christ who has loved us to the extreme...if we looked into His eyes and heard His Heart...if we could ask Him with our questioning gaze the reason for his free choice to love us that way...we would hear the potent and



eloquent silence of His Passion say to us: *"because love is patient, love seeks to serve. Love does not get irritated, it is not jealous, it does not show off, it is not pampered. Love is pure, it does not proceed with baseness, it does not seek its own interest, it does not take into account the bad it received...but rather assumes it and bears it on a cross...Love rejoices in always going about doing good. Love forgives everything, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love will never pass away. And that is, dear son, dear daughter, the triumph of the Cross, that is the definitive triumph of love, of My love...Only ask yourself if in this kind of love has triumphed in your heart...if you let love triumph before the threats that arise in your own heart.*

Ask yourself, if you build a civilization of love in your own heart, if you build it with your neighbor, if you build it in the world that surrounds you...Simply look at me and ask me, if you want to love freely, with the power of My love. Let me question your heart with the luminous and demanding splendor of love, for in the end the only thing that triumphs, the only thing that remains, the only thing that is fecund,

the only thing that gives life, the only thing that is true and eternal, is the Love like the one I have shown you with my own life."

During this Lent, dear Family, I present to you the Magna Carta of Christian love, the most eloquent Hymn of Christian love, as our [examination of conscience](#), so that the fruit of this Lent may be to grow in light of the Gospel of love, in a profound conversion of heart. May we be so moved this Lent, listening to Jesus declare the Magna Carta to us at the cost of his life, that we tear our hearts, rip out the hardness and clean out the impurities and contaminations. The countenance of Christ, beaten, torn, wounded, dirty, crown with thorns reveals to us our own hearts, reveals the serious threats to love in our hearts and in our families, in our surroundings and in the whole world.

I exhort you to take the Magna Carta of Christian love, that is the most perfect path of love, and have the courage to walk this path confronting our own hearts with this truth, that we allow ourselves to be questioned by the patience of Christ, by His magnanimity, by His mercy, by His generosity, by His fidelity, by His silence, by His kindness... and that each description of love described to us by Saint Paul, be a concrete guideline for our own reflection, to become aware of the threats, offenses, lacks of love in our hearts. I suggest placing each description of love from the letter to the Corinthians, one by one, looking at Jesus, ask yourselves fundamental questions that will lead you to examine yourselves in light of each characteristic of true love.

May our examination of conscience, based on Christian Love, lead us to the fountain of inexhaustible mercy, the Pierced Heart of Christ, that we will always find open in the Sacrament of Confession. At the end of our lives, as Saint John of the Cross says to us, will be judged by love... That is why learning in the School of Love to look at ourselves and honestly judge our sentiments and actions in light of Christian love is an indispensable task for the freedom of our hearts, to overcome in ourselves all types of selfishness and to truly grow in personal holiness that builds in our families and in the spiritual family, a civilization of love. This examination will only yield permanent and real fruits if it ends in concrete acts of love, of good, sincere and generous donation. Therefore, I invite you to use this examination of conscience based on the truth of Christian love, to lead us to a sincere conversion of heart and to the immense grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, that it may exercise its fecundity with concrete acts of love and solidarity towards our brothers and sisters, particularly with those whom our lack of love has offended, forgotten or wounded... and towards those that the culture of selfishness, of rejection, and of indifference has forgotten: the poor, sick, those persecuted and displaced for their faith, the immigrants, the abandoned, our brothers and sisters who arise before our eyes on the path of this examination of love and whom we find cast on the streets of our contemporary world. May we be converted into good Samaritans so as to daily build a more humane world, with more solidarity and which is more worthy of the human person.

The civilization of love, a culture of solidarity:

By meditating on chapter 13 of the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, we place ourselves on the path which helps us to understand in a more immediate and incisive way, the full truth about the civilization of love. No other biblical text expresses that truth in a simpler or deeper way than the hymn of charity. It reminds us that Love is the commandment par excellence: *"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."* (Jn 13:34)



In his Lenten Letter for this year, the Holy Father Pope Francis tells us: *"The love of God breaks through that fatal withdrawal into ourselves which is indifference. The Church offers us this love of God by her teaching and especially by her witness. But we can only bear witness to what we ourselves have experienced. Christians are those who let God clothe them with goodness and mercy, with Christ, so as to become, like Christ, servants of God and others."*

Contemplating the truth about love not only free us from what is not true love in our hearts, or even from what offends and oppresses love, but it strongly impels us to go out on the paths of our own lives and attend to our brother who needs our care, our aid and our presence. Only the one who has known the love of God revealed in the face and Heart of Christ, only the one who has

known true Love, lets himself be asked by God, "where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9) and does not respond like Cain, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?", or like the priest and Levite did in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37), who seeing the man beaten and wounded, left half-dead on the road to Jerusalem, saw him, and passed by continuing on their way. Only a Samaritan who travelled that way stopped and was moved with pity for him. This Samaritan not only saw him, but stopped, dressed his wounds, covering them with oil and wine, but he also placed him on his own mount, and took him to an inn and took charge of his care...giving of his riches to the innkeeper to cover the costs of more than what could come up in caring for the wound. The one who had compassion on the beaten and wounded man, who became the keeper of this man and cared for him, who made himself responsible for the pain of the other, Jesus said, knows how to be a brother, knows who his neighbor is.

During this Lent, dear Family, this question that God has presented to us through the Holy Father should resonate in our hearts: "where is your brother?" It is a question that, through love, takes us out of every personal or familial, ecclesial or social indifference, because *"As individuals too, we have are tempted by indifference. Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. What can we do to avoid being caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness?"*

Where is my suffering brother? And what can I do for this brother? These are questions that must find answers in our hearts and responses that are worthy of love. The response worthy of the human heart, worthy of love, must be given, according to what the Holy Father Francis showed us in his Lenten Letter, with three simple and concrete steps that I cite here:

1. we can pray in communion with the Church on earth and in heaven. Let us not underestimate the power of so many voices united in prayer! The 24 Hours for the Lord initiative, which I hope will be observed on 13-14 March throughout the Church, also at the diocesan level, is meant to be a sign of this need for prayer before the many sufferings of humanity today.
2. we can help by acts of charity, reaching out to both those near and far through the Church's many charitable organizations. Lent is a favourable time for showing this concern for others by small yet concrete signs of our belonging to the one human family.
3. the suffering of others is a call to conversion, since their need reminds me of the uncertainty of my own life and my dependence on God and my brothers and sisters. As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called a formation of the heart (cf. Deus Caritas Est, 31). *A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realizes its own poverty and gives itself freely for others.*

A Lent filled with daily and many good gestures

Dear Family, during this Lent, I also ask you to be good Samaritans, not hearing about the sufferings of our brothers and sisters on the news and then not give it a second thought, that we stop and pray, fast, constantly interceding, praying the Holy Rosary, to pour the oil and wine of God's Mercy over the great ulcers, scourges and wounds of our brothers and sisters. May we perform concrete acts of charity, especially for those who are most abandoned, those who need us to carry them on our shoulders to shelter. May you know how to wisely and generously place your goods at the service of those who suffer or of those whose suffering we can alleviate. I would like to invite you to personally and/or as a family, to make a [Lenten collection box](#) and each day place in that box the fruits of your sufferings and fastings for Lent, and that those sacrifices alleviate the poverty of our neighbor. May the fruits of your offerings for Lent give life to many spiritually but also materially. How many brothers and sisters, displaced from their homes and Churches in Iraq and Syria, persecuted, hungry, suffering martyrdom in different ways including giving their lives for Christ and the Gospel, need our help? How many brothers and sisters in Nigeria have lost their lives and have watched their Churches burn, receiving this Ash Wednesday, the Cross on their foreheads with the ashes from their burned churches? How many children, victims of human trafficking, this new form of slavery, are sold for the economic and malicious interests of many. How many suffer from thirst, hunger, incurable diseases, or of epidemics spread from the lack of hygiene, medicine and hospitals? How many have lost everything and so many loved ones from the consequences of natural disasters? How many close to us are sick, alone, desperate or overwhelmed with pain or fear, simply needing to know themselves accompanied, valued, loved by someone? How many children or elderly, disabled, with physical or mental difficulties, are threatened by euthanasia? How many live in war or the threat thereof; how much could we dedicate ourselves to building peace? Yes, there is so much pain in and around us... What can we do to keep from simply passing by without heeding? *Let us pray, fast and help with gestures of love in solidarity!*

May this Lent be about what it truly means: **Love to the extreme!** May Jesus reveal His Heart to us; may Our Lady, who walked the path of love to the extreme with Jesus, teach us that love is the greatest dignity of the human heart and is always a free choice. May she who sang the hymn of Maternal Charity, who made of her life a gift of love for Christ and humanity, guide us on the path of love and unconditional solidarity... May she, messenger and apostle of the love of Christ to humanity, teach us to see, hear and respond with the promptitude proper to love, to those who suffer... may she teach us to alleviate the wounds of the Mystical Body of Her Son. She who embraced Christ crucified, so held Him with Her maternal gaze and embraced Him in her maternal arms, teach us to sustain the Church and humanity amidst today's sufferings. May we fill this Lent with concrete gestures of fraternal charity and be good Samaritans in the history of today's world.



May this Lent be filled with daily gestures of love, may we be creative to love, may we be quick to fill the world with gestures of love...may we overcome evil with many gestures of good. May the Lord give us a heart similar to His!... so that we may see the reality of Christian love from the gaze of Christ. May we have a heart that is more pure, loving and tender, more vigilant and generous, more merciful, stronger and more courageous to be totally free to love. **May we conquer the "culture of indifference and selfishness" and actively build: The Civilization of Love, the culture of the Gospel".**

I conclude this small reflection with a petition from Pope Francis: *"I would invite everyone to live this Lent as a path of formation of the heart."*

Mother Adela, SCTJM

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