

19th National Cursillo Encounter
California State University San Bernardino
July 30 – August 2, 2009
“Action”

Action – Choosing to Exercise the Power of Love

Yesterday, Victor encouraged each of us to really take the time to reflect upon how much God loves us. For God so loved the world, He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.¹ Jesus, always in complete obedience to the Father’s will, became man and freely offered His life in sacrifice for our sins. On our behalf, He paid a price we were unable to pay. For our benefit, He was betrayed, ridiculed, beaten, crucified, and buried, but He is risen! Victor encouraged each of us to take the time to develop an even more personal and intimate relationship with Jesus and allow the love and grace of God to touch every part of our being. As we come to know and experience His love, our hearts will be transformed. As our love for Him grows, so will our desire to follow Him and imitate Him.

True authentic piety is attained when a person’s love for Jesus is such that he or she decides to dedicate his or her entire life to Him. There is a surrendering of self and a willingness to become an instrument in the Master’s hands. It is the knowledge of His love that gives us the courage and conviction to be one of His disciples.

Cef then talked about the importance of continuing to discover the love of Jesus through our study. We come to know Jesus better by using our intellects and forming our mind to the mind of Christ. He talked about the many ways God reveals Himself to us. He especially emphasized the importance of studying scripture, the lives of the Saints, and the teachings of the Church. As God reveals Himself to us, both our mind and heart respond. Henri Nouwen stated it this way: *“Spiritual reading is food for our souls. As we slowly let the words of the Bible or a good spiritual book enter into our minds and descend into our hearts, we become different people. The Word gradually becomes flesh in us and transforms our whole beings. Thus spiritual reading is a continuing incarnation of the divine Word within us.”*

In this talk, I am going to talk about the third leg of our tripod, Action. It has been said that Action is the perfection of piety, dedicating our very lives to God by aligning our will to His will, and then doing what we have been asked to do. Action is responding to the command of Jesus written in John 13:34-35. *“I give you a new commandment – to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are to love one another. Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.”* Simply stated, Action is exercising the power to love just as Jesus has loved us.

Typically, after a Cursillo weekend, the candidates’ hearts are burning with fire because they have experienced the deep penetrating love of Jesus. In addition to experiencing this love, the Cursillista develops a better understanding of the role of the laity and understands that they are a unique creation of God with a special purpose. There is an urge to act. The weekend can create such an interior restlessness that many are inclined to leave the Weekend and immediately get involved in as many church activities as possible and tell everybody about Jesus and the Cursillo.

This burning and impulsive desire to act often occurs before we have even begun to more fully develop our relationship with Jesus or taken the time to understand His will for us. In many

¹ John 3:16



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ways, it is like soldiers running into battle without training, weapons, or orders. Similarly, it is like someone engaging in an Olympic event without proper training. In either case, we may have some early successes, but we are very vulnerable to failure. Undoubtedly, many good things have come from these actions, but this is not the type of action we are talking about when we discuss living the third leg of our tripod.

Anyone can perform acts of kindness such as working in a soup kitchen, visiting the sick, helping a neighbor, etc., including Christians, non Christians and even atheists. Additionally, any Catholic can participate in parish activities with little or no relationship with Jesus. This is action, but it is not apostolic action. Apostolic Action is action that is taken because of a genuine love for God and neighbor, and it occurs when one dies to self and allows the Grace and love of God to penetrate his or her entire being. Then, one can share this love with others by actually living the Gospel just as Jesus did. It is more about “being” than doing or telling.

Action that is not rooted in the love of Christ is fragile and can quickly fade in times of trials and temptation. We can often generate sufficient enthusiasm and energy and steel or gird ourselves to persevere in certain Christian acts. However, this is a forced behavior and it is not part of our natural being. If our action does not stem from our love of God and neighbor, we will always be vulnerable to a failure to act. This type of action lacks the power of love, which is the greatest force in all of creation. I would like to share a personal example to make my point:

In my community, there is a home and school for the blind. On every third Sunday, I take a small number of the blind to church and then to breakfast. On some Sundays, I wake up and begin thinking about the day. I recall that it is the third Sunday, and sometimes my initial reaction has been to think: “Oh no, it is my turn to take the blind to church.” You’ll probably agree; this hardly seems to be the response of a loving heart. It is the response of someone performing a duty, not the response of a loving friend. The blind have always gotten to church, but not always by someone with a loving heart.

I recognized the internal hypocrisy. I was driving the blind with a smile on my face, but there was a grumbling. It wasn’t the grumbling of my stomach for breakfast; it was a grumbling heart. I knew this involuntary reaction of my heart was something I needed to think about and include in my service sheet plans for piety and study. In prayer, I tried to examine myself and discover why I did not see the blind with the compassion of Jesus. I wondered why I was not more grateful for the gift of eyesight and willing to freely share my gift of sight with others. I wondered why I was so preoccupied with what I wanted to do rather than thinking about the many difficulties of living in the world without sight. How do the blind read their bills, do their banking, keep track of dirty dishes, organize their money? Why was I not better prepared to give them my full attention and to leisurely spend time with them with a joyful heart?

This examination of self helped me better know myself and why I do the things I do. It helped me see my misdirection. This wasn’t an opportunity to perform duties for the blind. This was an opportunity to share my life in friendship with them. Jesus wanted me to know my blind friends better, understand their needs, and to love them as He loves them.



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It was also an opportunity to look at how Jesus lived. We find in Scripture that Jesus had great compassion for the blind. On three different occasions, Matthew describes Jesus' healing of the blind. Mark refers to two instances, including the healing of Bartimaeus. Jesus took the necessary time out of His day to be with the blind and help them. Wouldn't you expect one of His followers to have this same compassion?

I also recall the words of St. Paul in Corinthians 13:3 *“If I gave everything I have to the poor people, and if I were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever.” Love is patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way.....”*

There is nothing timid or ambiguous about these words from scripture. Think how incredibly hard it would be to actually give away everything you owned to the poor. Sometimes, it is difficult to even let go of some of our excess. To give away everything would be a tremendous effort. To be burned alive for preaching the Gospel is almost too much to think about. Nevertheless, the divine Word of God says: without love, these actions would have no value whatsoever. This is a very sobering thought, and it helps us to see the need for a change of heart and mind. Performing all the duties in the world would mean nothing if I did not love.

Jesus wants to fill my heart with His love so I can in turn love others. To do this, I need to rely upon His Grace, nurture my relationship with Him, and study His ways. Then I will be better prepared to make the decision to love. Choosing to love is an act of the will, and it involves making decisions about how I choose to live my life. Jesus said: *No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends.*² The giving of life isn't necessarily death but rather the willingness to share my life in friendship with others.

I changed my orientation from helping the blind to developing a friendship with them. My wife and I do more things together with our blind friends, and we share many aspects of our lives, including our relationship with Jesus. We are more aware of their needs, and they rely upon us in more matters. In exchange, we have been given their friendship and trust, which is something of great value.

Identifying the true feelings of my heart helps me perfect my piety in a very small space of my life, every third Sunday. Not a big part of my life, but at least a piece.

The Piety and Study legs of the tripod are what prepare the heart and mind and enable us to exercise the power of love in our actions. Eduardo Bonnin said: “Man finds Himself more in the reaction than in the action.” As I mentioned previously, we can steel or force ourselves to do almost anything, feed the poor, care for the sick, etc. However, it will be in something like a chance encounter with the poor or finding a relative in need where we will discover our true feelings and the condition of our hearts. Discovering the reaction of the heart and mind helps to see the things that may need to change. If we spend the time to come to know and experience the deep love of Jesus, and if we use our minds to better understand the mind of Christ, we are then well prepared for the encounters with the many people God has put into our lives. We are in a

² John 15:13



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position to love them as He has loved us. God the Father told St. Catherine of Siena, that the more the soul grows in love for God, the more the soul will grow in love for its neighbor.

In his paper *Evangelization Through Conversion* Eduardo Bonin stated: *“When we speak of “EVANGELIZATION” in the context of the Cursillo, we do not only mean it, or even mostly mean it, in the sense of simply passing on or spreading the Gospel’s Good News, but rather to succeed in making the person “BECOME” the GOOD NEWS, that joyful good news that Christ is alive in and amongst His people today just as surely as He was 2000 years ago. This in essence was the vision and mission of the Cursillo from the beginning. To find the best possible method of bringing about this conversion — of moving a person from where they are to where they could be; from human to fully human; from alive to fully alive in recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of their true identity and dignity as beloved children of God.”*

All of the Cursillo is designed to help each person understand that Jesus has called them “to be” disciples and to actually “be the Good News” in the place He has put them to live. The goal is to know Him, love Him, and imitate His way to such an extent that the world is bathed in His love. Imagine how the world would be different if each of us used all of our unique talents and gifts, found our definitive position within the Church, drew upon the Grace of God, and then lived the Gospel of Jesus each day.

How different would life be for your family members if you loved as Jesus loves? How different would life be for your spouse and children if every day you demonstrated the justice, mercy, compassion, and self-giving of Jesus? Wouldn’t it be a terrific family? How different would life be for your neighbors, co-workers, and fellow parishioners if they encountered a disciple similar to Peter, Paul, or John? Wouldn’t the neighborhood be more peaceful and loving? How different would the world be if you were able to love others as Jesus loves you? We have been called “to be the Good News,” to live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ right where we live.

I would like to share with you another opportunity in my life. I have become very good friends with a neighbor. He is the head football coach of our local public high school. Over the last 20 years, he has coached hundreds of children and has come to know his players’ families very well. He is a former Division I football player, and he played offensive and defensive tackle. He is a very big man, and his sheer size commands a lot of respect. However, he is also a gentleman with strong leadership abilities, and he treats both children and adults with kindness and respect. He has a great sense of humor, and he is fun to be around. He is well liked by many people.

Over the last several years, we have begun to share more about our faith and our relationships with Jesus. However, he is still quite private about his faith, and there are boundaries I have been unable to cross. On many occasions, I have encouraged him to attend a Cursillo weekend, and I have shared with him aspects of my own journey and how the Cursillo method has helped. However, he isn’t quite ready to make this type of commitment, and he has not accepted my invitations.



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I believe the Cursillo would further ignite my friend’s faith, and if he became on fire for Christ, he would be a mighty force for Christ. In fact, he can reach hundreds and hundreds of people that I could probably never reach in my lifetime, even if I dedicated the rest of my life to the effort.

If I am able to help my friend develop a closer relationship with Jesus, I know he will experience the great joy of God’s love and so will the many people he knows. Despite the many talents of my friend, he will only reach his full potential if he allows the Grace of God to permeate his life. Then all of his natural talents can transcend from the natural to the supernatural because he will be allowing God to use his talents. He moves from human to fully human. If I don’t choose to help my friend, he may never reach his full potential.

I think many of us encounter this type of situation with both close friends and family. It can be very easy to simply enjoy friendship for its many social benefits and not make any effort to bring Christ into the relationship. For some unknown reason, we sometimes feel awkward or uncomfortable discussing spiritual matters with a good friend, son, daughter, mom, dad, or other family member. However, when we don’t help bring our friend or family member draw closer to Jesus, we miss a great opportunity to exercise true apostolic action.

If we lack a desire or the courage to bring a friend or family member closer to Christ, it is again time for us to examine our own heart and honestly assess our own relationship with God. We can’t give away what we don’t have ourselves. To share the love of Christ, we have to know the love of Christ. Then, as we surrender our will to His will, the love of Jesus works in us and through us and touches everyone we encounter..

At the center of the Cursillo’s method for evangelization is friendship. We share the love of Christ by offering ourselves in true friendship to others. As we all know, this takes time, effort, and sacrifice, but the rewards are tremendous. In the book of Sirach we read: *A faithful friend is a strong defense and he who has found one has found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend and no weight of gold and silver is able to unbalance the goodness of his fidelity. A faithful friend is the substance of life and immortality, and those who fear the Lord will find one.*

It is this type of friendship that allows us to discuss with others the most important matters in our lives. A true friendship presents many opportunities for us to share what we have found in Christ. Also, there are many opportunities to lift our friend up in prayer and offer palanca on their behalf. Finally, we can use our intellects to study the situation, be open to the Grace of God, and develop a plan of action to bring our friend closer to Christ. Then with courage, conviction, and the love of God in our hearts, we exercise our will by choosing to actually follow through on our planned action.

I hope someday soon I can announce to you that my friend is living the Cursillo.

Recently, I was listening to a presentation by Father Corapi. He was talking to a group of men, and he had modified the soldier’s pledge. In reading the modified pledge, he said: I am a holy warrior for God, and I pledge not to leave my comrades behind in battle. He explained how our U.S. soldiers pledge not to leave a fellow soldier behind on the battlefield, whether healthy, wounded, or even dead.



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He indicated that we should all make the same pledge on the spiritual battlefield. He reminded everyone that we are all involved in a spiritual battle, and it is sin that wounds and destroys our comrades. When we see a person that is selfish or unkind, gossiping, etc., we shouldn't judge them and then avoid them. Rather, we should see each person as a precious child of God and recognize that their faults, in reality, are the wounds of sin. It is the devil that inflicts these wounds.

Father Corapi's modified pledge helped me to think differently about people and to see the faults of others in a different light. It once again gave me pause to examine my own heart. Do I shun those who are not like me? Do I take the time to be with and nurture the wounded, or do I step on or around them. Do I try to bring them along or do I leave them behind? How did Jesus interact with sinners? Will I love as He loves? Will I care for my enemies in the same manner as I care for my friends?

When the Lord said: “Love you enemies,” he commanded us to be people of love and action; “Do good to those who hate you” (Lk.6:27). Scripture also says: If your enemy is hungry feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink (Rom 12:20).³⁴

Following Jesus isn't easy. All disciples face difficult work when we willingly pick up our cross in an action of love. St Teresa said: “...*forget your own good for their sakes no matter how much resistance your nature puts up.....Don't think it won't cost you anything or that you will find everything done for you. Look at what our Spouse's love cost Him, in order to free us from death; He died that most painful death on the cross.*”⁵

In wrapping this up, I want to remind us all that spiritual warfare is being waged in the world. It is a battle of good versus evil. This battle rages on day after day. The devil is working in our homes and neighborhoods to turn people away from imitating and following Jesus. Let me be very clear, the devil wants the very soul of your wife, your husband, your sons, your daughters, other family members, friends, and neighbors. His goal is to destroy us and have us reject the salvation freely given to us by Jesus Christ.

The battle is often very subtle, and the devil is content with a slow but unrelenting advance to turn people away from the truth. Sometimes to see how much ground the devil has gained, we need to look behind us. Take a hard look at our current society and see how man continues to struggle and be bogged down in the same sins as his ancestors who lived thousands of years ago.

In Ephesians 6:12, we read: “*For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies – the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world.*” I repeat, mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world.

³ The Fulfillment of All desire by Ralph Martin (Page 260)

⁴ The Fulfillment of all desires by Ralph Martin (Page 260)

⁵ The Fulfillment of All Desires by Ralph Martin (Page 301)



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The Cursillo envisions that all Cursillistas living the Cursillo would desire to be at the vanguard for Christ in this battle. Vanguard is a military term that means at the forefront, the point of the spear, the front lines, at the place of the battle. For us, the front line is the environment in which we live and the many encounters God places before us. We can choose to engage in the battle, surrender, or simply do nothing. However, a desire to be at the vanguard and to share the love of Christ is the only response that makes any sense from a true disciple. How would any other response sound? Lord, put me in the back. Put me someplace I am not needed or noticed. Put me some place where I don't have to take a stand or love in the way You love.

Being at the vanguard doesn't involve going to a far away place. The battle front is in your home, neighborhood and workplace. If we are at the vanguard, it means we have chosen to follow Christ and decided to love despite the circumstances. Each and every place we choose to love is a victory for Christ.

God the Father revealed the following to St. Catherine: *“...I want to make you dependent on one another so that each of you would be my minister, dispensing the graces and gifts you have received from me....I have made you my ministers, setting you in different positions and in different ranks to exercise the virtue of charity... All I want is love.... If you are bound by this love you will do everything you can to be of service wherever you are.”*⁶ And later God said to her: *“This is why I have put you among your neighbors; so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me-that is love them without any concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whatever you do for them I will consider done for me.”*

If we want to be at the vanguard, we need to properly prepare ourselves. It requires a commitment to live a life of piety, study, and action. To live courageously for Christ, we must know Him, love Him, and then choose to serve Him. When the heart and mind of a person is well prepared and when they have come to know and experience the deep love of Jesus, the only thing left to happen is the encounter with others. It is in these encounters that we will have a choice of whether or not to exercise our wills, engage in the battle for Christ, and choose to love as Jesus loves. This is how many of the people in our lives will encounter the risen Christ.

Not everyone we encounter will choose to follow Christ. However, the love of Christ is the most attractive, powerful, and fulfilling force in the universe. If we choose to live the Gospel at home, our spouses, sons, and daughters will be changed by the love of Christ. If we choose to be the leaven at work, our neighborhoods, and parishes, these areas will become more loving places. Gradually all of society can be won for Christ. However, it all begins with our personal encounter with Christ, and this will be followed by a series of personal decisions of whether to get to know Him better and follow Him. When we surrender to Him, our hearts are filled with His love and grace. With Christ, all things are possible. When we allow Christ to dwell in our hearts and to use our talents, we reach our fullest potential and live our lives as God intended when He gave us the gift of life.

Each day there is an opportunity to know Jesus Christ better and better and to grow in His love. This is what we mean by a continuous and progressive conversion, and only we can choose

⁶ The Fulfillment of all desires by Ralph Martin (Page 260)



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whether or not to pursue a life of growing piety, study, and action. To love as Jesus loves is not easy. This is why we journey together, encouraging and supporting one another. This is why we share our relationship with Christ with friends in Group Reunion, Ultreya, and other gatherings. We need this support and encouragement to persevere as disciples of Jesus in a very challenging world.

In closing I offer this prayer from St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians for you and your families:

“May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love, and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God’s children should, how long, how wide, how deep, how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully understand it. And so at last you will be filled up with God himself.”

De Colores!

