

A MONTH WITH FATHER TRIEST



Bro. René Stockman, f.c.

Peter Joseph Triest, an icon of charity

“Love gives us strength that nature cannot provide.” These are the words of Canon Peter Joseph Triest who started a true revolution of charity in Belgium in the early 19th century, in a society that suffered in the aftermath of the French revolution, during which all ecclesiastical goods were confiscated and the Church’s network of charity was completely destroyed.

However, Triest did not resign himself to the situation and, as a priest, he set up care for the poor, the sick, elderly people, and people with mental illness. He founded no less than four religious congregations of brothers and sisters who helped him develop a new style of charity. He broke new ground in the care for people with mental illness when he broke the chains that held them in Ghent in 1815. It was the start of a humane care, based on charity, and translated in a professional approach.

His zeal was inspired by a deep spiritual life that was deepened during the years when he was an unsworn priest and spent five years in hiding. These were the most fruitful years when it came to his spiritual development. The love of God became the great reality of Triest’s life. He was overwhelmed by the love of God, as it were. It was if God wanted him to prepare him in this seemingly lost time to show this love specifically to the poor and the sick. Despite the political authorities not being keen on encouraging initiatives taken by Catholics, he succeeded in building an entire network of care and education, which earned him the title of ‘Belgium’s Vincent de Paul’ at the moment of his death in 1836.

The texts that he left us reveal that we can only speak of charity when we are inspired by the love of God. Charity is its reflection. A loving fundamental attitude and an encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ in the sick person and in the poor person form the core of charity. This is what sets it apart from philanthropy. For Triest, charity starts from a loving fundamental attitude. It follows the way of service, it cares for the person as a whole, and it always brings hope, even in life's most dire circumstances. This is what he calls the joy of the resurrection, which must be present as a perspective in our care for the neighbour. "Giving life to such people; providing them with clothes with which they cover their limbs; giving and making their beds on which they can rest their wounded and sick body; granting them another, more agreeable existence by cleaning and nursing their dirty, smelly and putrefying wounds: is this not resurrecting them and lifting them out of the depth of death, making the sun shine for them, creating for them a new heaven and new earth?"

Bro. René Stockman

Brief biography

Peter Joseph Triest (1760-1836) was born in Brussels in Belgium. He was ordained a priest, and in the aftermath of the French Revolution he was forced to live as a priest in hiding. In 1802, deeply moved by the prevailing poverty, he started organizing care for the sick, the poor, the elderly, people with disabilities, and people with mental illness. From 1806 until 1836, the year of his death, he played a leading role in the development of the care for the poor in Ghent as a member of various commissions. He founded four congregations: the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, the Brothers of Charity, the Brothers of Saint John of God, and the Sisters of the Childhood of Jesus. These sisters and brothers would work together with Triest to shape to the care for the poor in a charitable way. According to Triest, charity was love, which translated into compassion and which expressed itself in actual, professional care. Triest was a priest who was deeply religiously moved and, with his great organizational skill, he put the care for the poor and the sick back on the map in Belgium in the first half of the 19th century.

The first reason why we should be grateful to God and we should love Him is that He created us and gave us life. God did not only create us and give us life, but also he keeps us alive continually. Another reason why we should love God is that He became man for us and saved us. We must love God because He has adopted us as his children. But what should move us to love God most of all is that he instituted for us the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar by which He gives himself totally to us as food and drink so that He might pour out his whole Spirit in our soul and grant immortality to our body.

(Undated sermon)

The love of God became the great reality of Father Triest's life. He was overwhelmed by this love, as it were. And so, he saw the hand of God in everything. It is good that we thoroughly reflect on the place of God in our lives, just as he did. Can we be joyfully amazed at the life that we have received from his hand? Can we still be grateful when we awake in the morning and receive life again as a present for a new day? And do we experience his living presence in the Eucharist and in every Communion a true encounter with God for us? There are so many moments and events in life in which we may experience God's presence, but it is up to us to be open to them.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the life that you grant us every day. Thank you for the many signs of your love that we perceive in our lives. Thank you for the environment in which we live, for the clean water that quenches our thirst, for the daily bread that feeds us. Thank you for the love of neighbour around us. Thank you for allowing us to call you our Father, for creating us, and for allowing us to come home to You one day. Amen.

The love that the Lord Jesus Christ has shown us by instituting the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is the greatest proof thereof He ever gave or could have given. Through the Incarnation and Salvation we were already children of the Father, co-heirs of the Son, temples of the Holy Spirit. The love of Jesus Christ goes to extremes. His love seems to excel more in this Blessed Sacrament than in the mystery of his Incarnation. It is as if He seemed to give up even his humanity. In his Incarnation He took the form of a servant, but in this Sacrament He hides himself under the species of bread.

(Undated sermon)

Every Eucharist has a threefold dimension. It is going back to an event from the past, a pious remembrance of the moment when Jesus broke the bread with his disciples and spoke the words: "This is my body." At the same time, it is looking forward to the future, to the second coming when Jesus will return in all his glory to make everything complete. That is why we pray: "Until He Comes." But it is also a moment in the present, in which we celebrate Jesus' sacrifice in the now and share in his Body and Blood. That is why we pray at Consecration: "My Lord and my God." And we repeat these words when we truly become one with our Lord and God in the Communion.

Lord Jesus, in the Eucharist you become present in us. Thank you for this great gift, sign of your unspeakable love for us. Faithfully, we pray with the words you spoke at the Last Supper: "This is my body." In hope, we repeat always how we long for your return. And in love, we worship you, our true Lord and God. Amen.

If he bequeathed you such a precious treasure, what gratitude, what tenderness, what reverence you owe him? How you should burn with love, dearly Beloved, when you are so fortunate to receive, indeed, your God. But when you eat the bread of life, which is broken for you, there are often no flames, no sparks, no sparkles of love to be found in you. We feel ashamed when we consider that till now we have thought so little on this immense love shown to us by the institution of this venerable sacrament. My heart, strengthened by your grace, will burn with sparks of love for You.

(Undated sermon)

“Burn with sparks of love for You” are the mystical words that Triest spoke. This is the way in which he looked at the presence of Jesus in the sacrament of the altar. He saw in it the love of God, offered to us completely free, to which we have to open our hearts. It is the basis for every spiritual life, of a life oriented towards God’s love. Also, we are invited today to be shined upon by God’s love, and in this way be fulfilled by God’s love, and make this love shine in the world, where God’s love is so often obscured. We have the responsibility, starting from the full fulfilment of God’s love, to bring God’s love into the world and make it tangible again. We have to create a world where God and his love can have a home.

Lord Jesus, we come to you with a humble heart. Purify our hearts and dispel what keeps us from fully belonging to you. Fill us with the love that we receive in the Eucharistic bread that you offer. Then, we will shine your love in the world and all of our thoughts and actions will be marked by your love. Make us instruments of your love, so that there can be more love in the world. Amen.

When God loves you, then try to answer His love with your own and try to love Him veritably. The greater our desire to love God, the more our heart will be enabled to do so. Indeed, when a heart is filled with this fervent love it cannot remain unmoved any longer, it has not enough feet to go ahead; it will look for wings to fly. We must go on seeking God although we have found him; always seeking him because we must love him continuously. Saint Bernard says: “The measure in which we must love God is to love him without measure.”

(Undated sermon)

“The measure in which we must love God is to love him without measure.” With these words of Saint Bernard, Father Triest tried to describe the overwhelming force of God’s love. When our thoughts and actions are guided by the love of God, we can never go far enough when it comes to having this love shine in the world. So often, we put a stop to our love and commitment for the neighbour, because we are guided by reason and only by that which seems reasonable to us. Love calls us to take a step further, beyond reason. Mother Teresa said it in her own way: “We have to love the poor, till it hurts.” How far do we go in our love for the concrete neighbour who calls upon our love, our care, our sharing of our abundance? No, love is never free of obligations and can never be locked in constraint.

Heavenly Father, your love overwhelms us. Your love intoxicates us, and nothing or no one can match your love. Make our hearts wide open to your love and let our lives only be love: love for you, Father; love for ourselves as we are your children; love for the neighbour without distinction; love for the whole of creation, which arose from your love. Amen.

Love must always burn in the heart of the Christian like on a spiritual altar. In order that it should burn there always, it should be maintained and fuelled with daily meditation. Then, as a fire, especially one that is exposed to the wind on all sides, cannot remain burning unless it is fed and kept burning with wood or some other fuel from time to time, so the divine fire, as a spiritual fire, and one that is exposed to so many winds as there are evil temptations in the world, cannot be kept burning without fresh fuel being continuously added through meditation on things divine. Pray and remember that a religious without the spirit of prayer is like a soldier without weapons, a bird without wings, a city without ramparts, a body without spirit or soul. Take the firm resolution not to waste a single moment of prayer time.

(Undated conference)

Love needs to be nurtured. If it wants to be rooted in divine love, which is its true and only source, we must make time to have this divine love shine upon us in prayer. Every day, we have to make time to be alone with God and be warmed by his love. We can do so by hearing and meditating his Word, in the celebration of the Eucharist, where we can meet God fully and become one with Him, in the sacraments where God is so close to us. It means making the firm decision to set aside time for Him every day, in the bustle of our existence, and being faithful to it. It is life's breath, our spiritual life's breath. Without this daily breath, we die spiritually.

Lord Jesus, in the bustle of our existence we come to You. Be our resting point on our life's journey. Kindle in us the burning desire to abide with you as we will only find rest and inner peace with you, which we require on our path to holiness. Let us live in your presence so that our life becomes a prayer, a song of praise to you, heavenly Father. Amen.

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Those who are called to the active life must commit themselves to it with great fidelity! To act otherwise would upset the order established by Providence but they must be careful to avoid illusion. They will deceive themselves if they do not have fixed times for the spiritual exercises of the contemplative life. The more one is exposed to the distractions inherent in one's work, the more one should approach God through recollection so that one is constantly united with him in charity.

(Writings from 1799)

Generally, we reason and act the other way around: if we have a lot of work, we have no time for prayer. And the remaining time is absorbed by Facebook, Twitter, etc. Let us be honest and check how many times we spend on these new media, despite our seemingly busy schedule, time we could also use for prayer. How many times do we spend waiting, go from one place to another, do routine activities, which leave us space to pray? Francis de Sales called his contemporaries to pray more when they had a lot of work. Because then there would be a need for more prayer so as not to get lost in a busy schedule.

Lord Jesus, how often do we complain that we have no time for prayer. Grant that this complaining may be fruitful and may encourage us never to forget you in the bustle of our existence. Let us look for you as we pray, and find you in the conversations that we have, as we study, as we perform manual labour, and as we take care of our neighbour. For it is in our daily lives that we must seek, find, and worship you. Amen.

Prayer, mortification and purity are united by the closest and most indissoluble links. Without prayer, mortification is intolerable, without mortification, prayer is insipid; without prayer and mortification, chastity is fragile and unsustainable.

(Undated writings)

Prayer, mortification, and purity are concepts that are suffering a lot these days. We have no time for prayer, mortification is something from a distant past, and we all know how difficult it is to uphold the virtue of purity in this day and age. It is indeed about an ascetic life to which we are called in order to come to a virtuous life. Purity extends beyond sexual chastity; it is that open fundamental attitude through which we try to look at reality as a whole with divine eyes and approach it with respect. Respect for God, for the man that I am, and for the whole of creation. However, we can only reach this level of purity through prayer and when we know how to control ourselves.

Lord Jesus, how many times is our heart gripped with passions, fears, pride, envy. Enter into our heart and fill it with your love, so that you become the sole passion that beats in our heart. Then we will go to the people as we pray and let your love and peace shine. May the place where we live and work be a place where we receive your love and let your love shine towards others. Amen.

Most Loving Heart of Jesus, since you ask for my heart, here it is, I give it to you. You are the only one worthy of it and you alone can make it happy. I give it to you so that you might heal it of all the wounds of pride, selfishness, attachment to earthly things and still greater attachment to myself, lack of love for my neighbour, in one word, of all its wounds. Do not leave a single one except the wound that your love has caused. Jesus Christ, my God, I desire one thing only: a place in your heart.

(Sermon in Lovendegem, 1809)

Father Triest saw the devotion to the Sacred Heart as an expression of God's love for us and of our love for Him. The most beautiful prayer he formulated is the one dedicated to the Sacred Heart. When we open ourselves to God's love, we are healed, the wounds that are caused by pride are cured. It is the healing power of God's love, the power that became so tangible at the moment when Jesus' heart was pierced and accomplished our salvation. But Jesus' heart is also the place where we may enter God's love in a mystical way. So many mystical writers spoke about the exchange of their hearts with the loving heart of Jesus. May God's love lead us there and truly give us a place in the heart of Jesus.

Lord Jesus, you showed us your heart, a heart filled with love and fatally wounded for our salvation. Thank you for this boundless and measureless love that led us to salvation. Grant us some of your boundlessness and measurelessness in our human love, so that we can continue your redeeming work in our time, as well. Come abide in our heart and fill it with your love. For it is only with your love that we can achieve real life. Amen.

Mary has for us a mother's heart, a heart full of love, a heart full of tenderness, always ready to help us. Therefore, I do not doubt but that you have all a great devotion to the Queen of Heaven and Earth and that, as a result, you pray each day in her honour and to her memory. But among all the prayers the rosary is the prayer she loves best. The one who prays the rosary with devotion is like a spiritual bee alighting on the most beautiful flowers, in others words, on the principal mysteries of the life of Jesus in order to draw from them the honey of piety.

(Sermon, 1789)

Mary should have a place of honour in our prayers. She is the one who brings us to her Son Jesus and she brings Jesus to us. She remains faithful to her task as Mother of God. In our prayer, we should thank Mary for her great role in the salvation. Without her yes and her faithfulness, salvation would have never been possible. We can also go to her with our needs and sorrows, because she will bring them to Jesus, as she did at the wedding of Cana, and repeat: "Do what He will tell you." She calls us to let God's Will shine on everyday life with all its sorrows. Mary lived in this way, too, it was her 'ecce', 'fiat', and 'magnificat': her openness for the Word of God in her life, her positive answer to the calling she received from God, and the joy by which she lived all this.

Mary, we may call you mother because Jesus presented you to us as a mother. Thank you for being our mother. Be near to us as a caring mother and hear our prayer. Bring our needs before Jesus, as you did at the wedding of Cana, and give us the answer he gives you. And grant us the strength to repeat as you did: "May it be done to me according to your word." Amen.

Persevere, Lovers of Mary, what we cannot achieve through admonitions we shall obtain through the rosary; the more our devotion to her will increase, the more our sins will diminish, abuses disappear. She is particularly the Mother of Mercy, particularly in the hour of our death. She will come to our aid as a true and kind Mother, she will gladly tell us: "You have greeted me so often during your lifetime so I have come now to comfort you in your agony; you have called me so often full of grace so I have come now to pour out in your soul from my abundance; you have told me so often the Lord is with you, so now I tell you that you will be with the Lord for eternity."

(Undated sermon)

Following the Council, all popes have called us to give Mary a special place in our prayer life and pay special attention to praying the rosary faithfully. Pope John Paul II added five mysteries in order to make the rosary prayer into a full meditation on the great moments in the life of Jesus through Mary. It is as though we are taking a stroll through Mary's diary as we pray. It is a truly contemplative prayer. With the Hail Mary, we repeat the words that the Angel and Elisabeth spoke to Mary, and we pray that, with the grace she received so abundantly, she may keep us from sin and lead us to life everlasting.

Mary, your life was marked by joy and pain but ended in glorification and the eternal union with your Son. Be near to us as a caring mother in every moment of our life: moments of joy, moments of suffering, moments of hopelessness. Grant that we always keep hope alive by showing us the view of eternal glorification. And we pray: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death. Amen.

To attract the attention and compassion of someone to a poor unfortunate there is nothing more powerful than love, which is at the origin of everything. Love has a particular capacity to drive someone and to control the mind; love speaks so eloquently that it penetrates the most secret recesses of the heart. Those who rely on their own strength fool only themselves. God withdraws his mighty hand from the proud; they are left to their own insufficiency and powerlessness. In order to love with all our might, we must rely on grace, beseeching merciful God continually.

(Sermon in Asse, 1802)

True charity manifests itself through a loving attitude that is at the basis of our close care and service. Philanthropy is about helping, charity is about loving, and from there, we go out and help others. This adds a special zeal to our commitment to the poor and those who are ill, the zeal of love. But it is not about a mere human love, but about a love that finds its origin and source in the love of God. It is the love of God that gives us the power to take that extra step, to go further than what reason tells us or imposes as a restriction. However, the condition is that we must drink regularly from the source that is God's love. It is a source that never dries up, and a source from which flows only the purest water, that of divine love.

Lord Jesus, your life was marked by love. It was one great reflection of God's love. Strengthened by one and the same divine love, let us follow you and always take that next step, to help, to heal, and to console the neighbour in need without reservation. Like Father Triest, how we would want to repeat with Saint Vincent: "davantage", ever more. Amen.

Jesus Christ, whose love is for all people, invites us to love one another for love of Him, to carry one another's burdens, to forgive one another as we would want God to forgive us and to live in peace with all people as much as possible. This love must be love that is tender, filial, sincere and lasting, a love that is totally perfect, which has compassion for their suffering and shares in their joys. As Saint John teaches us: "Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth."

(Sermon in Ronse, 1803)

Our only reference for our love for the neighbour is Jesus himself. He showed us what real love was, love that found its origin in the love of the Father. Because God is love. Jesus was the image and the reflection of God's love, of God's mercy in his forgiveness of sins and compassion for those who suffer. Forgiveness and compassion are the hands and feet of love, making it so real in our daily lives. Because beautiful words are not enough. We have to ask ourselves about the state of our forgiveness and compassion. Can we forgive the other who wronged us and are we really touched by the suffering of the neighbour on our path? That is showing love in our actions and in truth.

Heavenly Father, your love expresses itself lastingly in your compassion for those who suffer and in the forgiveness for those who sin. Grant that, from your love, this compassion and this forgiveness for the neighbours around us may grow in us. Broaden our heart, so that the suffering of the neighbour may find a place in it and forgiveness may be the answer when discord obscures our relationships. Then, as Jesus, your Son, taught us and lived, we will love with our actions and in truth. Amen.

Constant practice of mutual love. In all circumstances forestall the desires of others by the expression of reciprocal love. Never cause or show any annoyance, suffering or displeasure. Bear patiently with the failings of others. Never complain about anyone. Help one another. Never envy anyone. Show mutual kindness so that when you see good being done to others you rejoice in the same way as if it were done to you. Under no circumstances make slanderous remarks. Never speak about the faults; however petty or well-known, of others. Never deprive your sisters or brothers of anything. Never betray a person's confidence or say something that would cause harm or sadness; otherwise you sow quarrels and discord in the community.

(Writings, 1820)

To live in love with the people around us is a difficult task. So many times, someone says a wrong word, we lose our patience, we talk about others in a negative way, or we let pride get the better of us. Because it is always about pride. We feel better than others. Out of pride come envy and jealousy, which will manifest itself as arrogance. How many family dramas are caused by this? Love for each other is a matter of repeating it every day and it starts in our family, our community, our work. 'Charity begins at home' was a slogan from the 60s but it is still very relevant today and demands our constant attention.

Lord Jesus, love was the hallmark of your first disciples. "Look how they love one another." Grant us the strength, following the example of the first Christians, to let love grow in our relationships. May our community life be marked by love, so that our communities become true schools of love. Lord Jesus, grant us your love every day, so that we might become more loving every day. Amen.

As far as I am concerned I have forgiven my enemies a long time ago. I now publicly renew my resolve to forgive them from the bottom of my heart. I give them the kiss of true brotherly love and wish for them no other revenge than their reconciliation with God so that we become one in heart and mind, and thus be brothers in Jesus Christ.

(Sermon in Ronse, 1802)

These words of forgiveness were uttered by Father Triest after he had led a hidden life for five years in the aftermath of the French Revolution and was confronted with a very hostile environment. He had good reason to have difficulty accepting this and to retaliate for all the harm done to him. We know about retaliation after a situation of war, when revenge is the only thing in mind. Triest breaks through this vicious circle of hate and revenge and offers forgiveness instead. His objective is reconciliation, so topical in countries that have faced oppression or genocide. But this has to be a goal to pursue in our lives, as well. “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Lord Jesus, how difficult it is for us to forgive. Still, we receive forgiveness from your heavenly Father again and again. He will never refuse to forgive us when we ask for it. Grant us the strength to grow in forgiveness and reconciliation with those with whom we are at odds. May forgiveness be the medicine for our troubled relationships and the lovelessness with which we are confronted or in which we live. Only then we will live again as brothers and sisters of the same Father, your heavenly Father. Amen.

As pastor, I must be a good example in everything. I must teach you, I must place myself entirely at your service. I must give myself entirely and sacrifice myself for your salvation. I must set a good example to encourage you to become virtuous, to teach you your duties, and to put myself at your service to help you in all your needs. After the example of Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, I must practice before preaching it. It is disastrous for me if I am unable to stimulate you to virtuousness but it would be still more disastrous if I were to scandalise someone by leading and unedifying life.

(Sermon in Ronse, 1802)

In his first public sermon after having lived as a priest in hiding for five years, Father Triest presented his mission in three words: example, teaching, and service. He had reflected long and hard on it. Three words are timeless, and we can ask ourselves what place they have in our life. Is our life an example for others? What we say about politicians, “Listen to their words, but don’t look at their actions,” often applies to us, as well, unfortunately. Only if we consistently live what we tell others do we have the right to proclaim it and teach it. In fact, every instruction that we provide holds an examination of conscience. And both our example and our teaching must always be reflected in concrete service. Not an easy life’s mission indeed!

Lord Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Let us follow you consistently as our only Way towards Life, as the only Truth in our life. Let all human appearances and ambiguity be lifted and let us live in truth: in truth with God, in truth with ourselves, in truth with the neighbour. May your shining example help us. Amen.

My second duty is to teach. If I were to keep silent or if a single soul were to be lost through lack of instruction I, too, would be lost. It is my duty to teach you, to encourage you and to bring you back from your wanderings. Woe to me and woe to you if I do not proclaim to you the Word of God or if I did it only rarely. So there is not one of you whom I must not care for. O, my God, grant to my voice the strength to touch the hearts and the power to extirpate the faults.

(Sermon in Ronse, 1802)

Making a fraternal correction is probably one of the most difficult tasks that exist. Some believe that it is unacceptable to admonish another as we would be wrongfully passing judgement on them. But if we truly love our neighbour and we see that they are heading down the wrong path, we have both the right and the duty to speak to them about this. It is an act of true love of neighbour. It needs to be done out of love and with love, not out of a feeling of pent-up aggression and anger. Sometimes we talk more easily about others that did something wrong rather than to them. Let us take the example of Jesus himself in all this, and the way that He taught.

Lord Jesus, grant us the courage to be near to our neighbours with love. Give us the right words to encourage our neighbours when they face difficulties, to correct them when they stray, to thank them and to praise them when good prevails in them. Above all, grant us the courage to preach your word of love, also in places where there is very little room to speak your word and not much willingness to listen to it. Amen.

My third duty is service. I owe you my vigils, my care, my efforts, my rest not only at fixed times but at every moment, every day and every night, even if the paths are remote, rough and muddy. Call me whenever you want and do not spare me, do not be afraid of disturbing me. I am happy when, in imitation of Jesus Christ, my Master, I can sacrifice for you my rest, my health and even my life.

(Sermon in Ronse, 1802)

When love is without limits, the service that arises from it must be without limits, as well. In this way, we see the thread that weaves through Father Triest's life. God's unconditional and boundless love that truly overwhelmed him made his love for the neighbour unconditional and boundless, as well, which was made very concrete in his service. This is where the readiness sounds to give up his life completely for the well-being of the neighbour, after the example of Jesus Christ, who made the ultimate sacrifice. How far can we go in our service for the neighbour? What is our first reaction when a person in need calls on us? How much calculating and self-interest preclude us from truly growing in service?

Lord Jesus, your life was marked by service. Every sick person who came to you or who was brought to you could count on your healing word. Every sinner who repented their sins could be granted forgiveness. Your love for the neighbour was so great that you were willing to give up your life for them. Grant us some of that generosity in our service, so that we always seek the neighbour's welfare and not our own. For there is no greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. Grant us this grace, Lord. Amen.

We shall nurse the sick humbly and respectfully, seeing them as though they were suffering Jesus himself. If certain diseases repel you, then you must rely on your strong faith, and see Jesus himself in the person before you. With the eyes of faith we shall serve the sick zealously and fervently. It is true that people have a natural aversion to the fulfilment of this task. But love should take nature's place. Love should give us the strength to banish all those feelings of sadness and revulsion. Love gives us strength which nature cannot provide.

(Summary of the Virtues and Qualities required for Convent Life, 1833)

“Love gives us strength which nature cannot provide.” This is probably one of Father Triest’s most powerful phrases which characterized his life very well. It is a phrase that sounds for us, as well: our life should be guided by love, only by love. A great many things become possible, which, in a human way, seemed to be impossible before. We see this with people who selflessly dedicate themselves to take care of the poor, the homeless, and are willing to risk their own certainties. Of course, we also see this in a mother’s love for her child, in a father’s efforts for the education of his growing children. When love is the driving force of our actions, we will be amazed at what we are capable of doing.

Lord Jesus, your love for the neighbour in need was without limits. Strengthened only by your love, we can cultivate some of this limitlessness in our love of neighbour, starting from our own human love. Grant us resourcefulness in the love of neighbour and let us always pursue new paths to be near to the poor and those in need, comfort them, heal them, and restore their human dignity. Then our love of neighbour will be but a humble reflection of the love you showed those in need. Amen.

It is an honourable vocation to nurse and serve the sick. As you fulfil that service, you become a helper and a servant of God's providence regarding the sick. You must also realize that it is Jesus Christ himself whom you are serving when you serve the sick. It is He who benefits from your kindness, from your help. It is His limbs that you nurse with your hands. We must keep our hearts pure when serving the sick, and we must not tolerate that any other thoughts enter our minds. It is our duty to serve the sick at all times, but it is just as much our duty to raise up our hearts to the Lord continuously, and to render God present.

(Summary of the Virtues and Qualities required for Convent Life, 1833)

True charity is always about that loving attitude with which we go to the other, but also about the way we recognize, see, meet, and love Jesus in those we serve. Charity is always an encounter with Christ. However, it is not easy to see Jesus in every sick person and poor person we serve. He can disguise himself very well sometimes in a difficult patient, pupil, spouse, etc. But when we practise to recognize Jesus in the neighbour despite all obstacles, we will be able to serve them in a loving way more easily, tolerate them despite their objectionable behaviour, forgive them for the umpteenth time when they made things difficult again for us. We do it for Jesus and to Jesus!

Lord Jesus, open our eyes, that we may see you in the neighbour on our path. Make us hospitable, that we may meet you in the neighbour who knocks at our door. Open our hearts, that we may love you in the neighbour who asks for our love. May every encounter with the neighbour be a prayer in which we see, meet, love, and worship you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

We shall approach the sick patiently. Christ inspires us with zeal so that we might be capable of facing up to all the difficulties and the revulsion that the task of nursing the sick entails sometimes. We must be mindful of the fact that it was Jesus himself who suffered patiently for us. Our love must be sincere and must certainly not be feigned. Our carefulness must be infinite, and we must always keep in mind that it is the Lord Jesus himself that we are serving. We must fulfil our duty gladly, patiently and wholeheartedly. It is thanks to this spirit of love that we are capable of serving the sick with so much gladness.

(Summary of the Virtues and Qualities required for Convent Life, 1833)

Health care remains a true vocation. In a time that has become more and more businesslike, when economical and financial considerations play an increasingly bigger role, a time that is getting so technical that it seems to be gaining the upper hand over human closeness, that which Father Triest taught us about good care sounds even more impelling. Patience, tenderness, friendliness, joy: these should remain the true ingredients of good health care, including in our hospitals and nursing homes. Ill people and elderly people sense very quickly which carers have their heart in the right place, who actually considers their task as a calling, and who allows the service to be shined upon and inspired by charity. No, our hospitals and nursing homes cannot become medical enterprises. That is why charity has to remain at the heart of the care for people who are ill and for people who are elderly.

Lord Jesus, grant us a sensitive and compassionate heart, a heart like yours, that we may be near to every sick person we meet with love. Grant that love, compassion, and concrete mercy may be our answer to the cries of those who suffer, the preferred medicine for those who are wounded in body and spirit, and grant that love may remain the therapy of choice, even when there is no chance of recovery. Then we will be near to the sick in your name. Amen.

Treat everyone with gentleness and graciousness. Try to serve and to please as much as possible. Help the sick and the poor with the greatest care and the greatest possible attention. By your gentleness, kind words and responses make up for what you cannot possibly do for or give them. Do not harbour feelings of aversion for your neighbour. Avoid the slightest feeling of disgust by ignoring it and by offering assistance when needed. Avoid showing the slightest antipathy or displeasure in one way or another. In general, form a good opinion about everyone.

(Writings, 1821)

Charity will always be needed, even in a society that meets every need of its citizens. Pope Benedict wrote his encyclical 'Deus caritas est' based on this fundamental idea. This is why Father Triest's words and encouragements about the loving manner in which we should go to the sick remain so topical; they have even gained relevance. On the one hand, it should bring us joy that so much care is supported by a large social framework but on the other hand it should remain our concern that in this more structured and organized care, which is supported by the government, the necessary love for the ill person is still there. Love must remain the fundamental attitude in the care for the sick. And that is why it continues to be a field where Christians and their charity can bring that needful added value. And they should get the necessary space to do so.

Lord Jesus, in this technicized and commercialized world you invite us to create hearths of love, where the sick and those who suffer are approached, treated, and cared for as human beings. You remain our example not to give in to a care and a way people deal with each other that is becoming increasingly businesslike. Be the heart of our relationships and grant us the necessary strength to be and to remain a true neighbour as you have shown us. Amen.

You resemble God through your love and charity; you share in the mission of Jesus Christ. All the poor people whom you help bless you, and because you recognize in them the person of Jesus Christ suffering, they recognize in you the person of Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Consoler. You cannot imitate Jesus Christ more perfectly than by coming to the aid of those who live in misery, who carry the cross of poverty, along with the sickness and misery, who are burdened with disasters and misfortunes.

(Letter to the Sisters of Charity, 1827)

Charity brings Christ's presence to care in another way, as well. On the one hand, we should see, meet, and love Christ in the neighbour we serve, but we are also invited to be images of Christ in our loving care for the neighbour. Christ continues to be the example and reference for loving care for the neighbour. He really cared for every person he came across and for all without exception. Personal and universal continue to be the qualities of our love for the neighbour. Just like God loves each of us individually and all without exception at the same time. "Christians know when the time is right to speak of Christ, and when to let their actions speak, making Christ's presence felt through their actions, showing Him to the world," to paraphrase Pope Benedict. Do others see Christ in us?

Lord Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We want to follow you and truly go the way that you have gone before us. Then, our following will really be a life like yours, and the people will meet you and hear you in our words, in our actions, in the way we serve. Grant us the abiding strength to make you present in this world and be true heralds of your Good News. Amen.

The sisters will keep in mind that they are servants of the poor, and that they must serve Jesus in the persons of the poor mentally and physically ill. They will fulfil their task humbly, in all simplicity, carefully, attentively, loyally, and affectionately. They will nurse the sick, and they will serve them as though they were serving Jesus Christ himself.

Above all, the sisters will nurse the sick, and they will serve them as though they were serving Jesus Christ himself. That is why they will never show the least sign of something that might disturb or hinder love. They will even remain kind to the most unpleasant patients.

(Rule of the Sisters of Charity, 1833)

When love is the fundamental attitude with which we should approach others, service is the way we want to go. Father Triest summed up charity in three words: love, compassion, and service. Starting from a loving attitude, we are moved by the neighbour's suffering and we cultivate pity, compassion. This compassion results in concrete service, which expresses itself in works of mercy. Therefore, the works of mercy remain essential guidelines for our concrete service to the neighbour. It is good that we consider both the corporal and the spiritual works of mercy, and ask ourselves which of these works we have actually performed that day.

Lord Jesus, make us sensitive to the poor around us. Prevent us from closing our eyes to them, from turning away with our service and help, and from falling into complacency. Grant us only that wholesome restlessness, as our service and help always remain inadequate, so that, from this restlessness, we always take another step forward in our love and service. Be our example in this. Amen.

I am charged with the education of children. So, I am accountable for this precious charge of so many souls redeemed by the Blood of Jesus, of so many members of the saving God, of the salvation of those for whom I shall have to account before God's tribunal. How, then, shall I fulfil this duty? Through my commitment to my duties, that is by taking to heart this task, working for the spiritual and temporal welfare of these children, being kind to them, admonishing them, if necessary, but with kindness, showing no preference for anyone but seeing in each of them the Child Jesus. Doing everything with a pure intention, working for one and the same goal only, for the glory of God and the good of these souls.

(Undated conference to the Sisters of Charity)

Education is another important task for Christians. The education we organize in our Catholic schools must pay attention to the school's educational component. A school that only deals with instruction and neglects the educational dimension fails to do that which can essentially be expected from a school: instruction and education. For Christians, it is another opportunity to deepen the taught and lived general human values in education, starting from the evangelical radicalism to which Jesus calls us. Father Triest makes it very specific when he talks about education: care for the souls of these children, for both their spiritual and temporal well-being; Let us add substance to this in a contemporary way and it will be the first step of how we can develop education in a Catholic school today.

Lord Jesus, bless our work in the education of children and adolescents. Let us be near to them as good teachers, with love, encouragement, forgiveness, and let the care for their souls always be our true priority. May we take the Lord Jesus as our example in our education work and make him known and loved by our youth. Then, our education work will honour God and benefit the welfare of these young people. Amen.

Be humble and you will find peace for your soul: peace with God, peace with your neighbour, peace with yourself, a peace which the world cannot give you; a peace which here on earth, amid even the greatest trials, will make you really happy and lead you in eternal peace of heavenly Zion. The first and last degree of perfection, which is humility. In a house where humility reigns, there all the other virtues will be found as well. Therefore, if you are humble, others will be virtuous.

(Letter to the Sisters of Charity, 1829)

Humility is generally considered to be the mother of all virtues. When Augustine was asked which were the three most important virtues, he answered: “The first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is humility.” Humility was defeated by pride at the moment when man was tempted to be his own god. The Fall deals with the triumph of pride, which is the cause of sin and the first sin at the same time. Pride makes man turn away from God, convinced that he can be self-sufficient. He becomes intolerant of the other if he believes that the other has more than he does. Envy and jealousy are born of pride. And we know how far it can lead a person when that person is governed by pride, envy, and jealousy: it is Cain killing his brother Abel.

Lord Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our heart like yours. Dispel all pride and complacency and create a space in our heart for your presence, which is the source of meekness and humility. For only when we are humble, true love can grow in our heart. When I am weak in self-love, I become strong in divine love. Amen.

In vain does man lift his hands to God to beg pardon for his sins if he does not stretch out his hands to give alms to the poor. The works of the ministry have no merit and do not please God unless a spirit of piety, compunction, humility, zeal and charity animates them. The virtue of humility is the basis and essence of evangelical perfection. It enlightens one's judgement and enables one to discover more and more the greatness of God.

(Writings, 1804)

Our service for the neighbour should always be marked by humility. We follow the footsteps of Vincent de Paul, who called the poor his masters whom he wanted to serve with respect and love. It is good that we examine our concrete works of service: do we truly perform them from a spirit of humble service and do we place ourselves at the feet of those we serve, or do we still feel superior to those we help? Jesus washes the feet of his Apostles: that is the place of true service in humility. Are we ready to remove our outer garments of prestige to really put ourselves on the same level of those we serve? Paternalism and superiority have no place in our service.

Lord Jesus, you kneel before your Apostles to wash their feet. Strengthen us with your example, that we may serve others in utter humility. Shatter every form of pride that keeps us from true service. And, like you, may we kiss the feet of those we serve. Amen.

Humility is the most beautiful and most pleasing virtue that can be distinguished in a religious person. It makes him or her the equal of God's Son, who became a slave in order to humiliate himself. He came to serve us, and in the end He even gave up his life for our salvation. Thus the love of the virtue of humility will make us love the least in all things, and it will also make us despise ourselves in the eyes of the world. Meekness is a consequence of humility. It is the duty of every religious to serve the poor, in imitation of Christ.

(Summary of the Virtues and Qualities required for Convent Life, 1833)

Like Paul describes it so beautifully in his Christ Hymn, we must deny ourselves again and again, and banish all complacency from our lives. It is the kenosis to which we are all called and which is presented so many times in the Gospel as a paradox: the last will be first and the humble will be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. As long as we are full of ourselves, there is no place for God. Only when we create that necessary free space in our lives, God can be present with his grace and power. That is why we understand Paul when he says that we become strong when we are weak. Only when we know that we are weak, which we essentially are, the power of God can move into our hearts. The emptying of the self is the basis of a true spiritual life and the way to humility. And meekness is its flower.

Lord Jesus, your whole life was one great example of emptying the self, of kenosis. You went to extremes. Grant that our life may be one great movement of self-emptying so that, in the end, we may enter into the love of the Father completely detached. Let us repeat the words of Paul full of joy: "I no longer live, it is Christ who lives in me." Amen.

The spirit of Jesus Christ, which has been the good spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, that consists in humility, tenderness, patience, sobriety, obedience, purity, charity to the poor, and above all love of God, true love of neighbour and mercifulness to the afflicted and miserly members of Christ, is the spirit which, with particular zeal, all the brothers of this congregation of charity are to strive.

(Rule of the Brothers of Charity, 1808)

Father Triest was already dubbed the Belgian Vincent de Paul during his lifetime. He placed the congregations that he founded under the protection of this great charity saint. Father Triest was very impressed by the way Vincent gave shape to charity. He also understood that this charity was only possible as a reflection of God's love. In his rule, which he gives to his Brothers of Charity, he aligns it all. It is God's love that brings man to true love for the neighbour and that brings him the tried and true virtues: humility, tenderness, patience, sobriety, obedience, and purity. These are the fruits of the Holy Spirit that we receive here.

Lord Jesus, through Saint Vincent de Paul you gave us an example of true charity. He called the poor your icons and his masters. Grant that we may be near to the poor so that they may experience the love of your Father through our concrete love. Following Saint Vincent's example, our life will become a true reflection of your love. Amen.

Indeed, you imitate God's power and providence, for you feed the poor of Jesus Christ. You make manna descend on the hungry; you give to drink to the thirsty. You know, alas, the sad state of the miserable poor and sick people who never enjoy a day of happiness. Giving life to such people; providing them with clothes with which they cover their limbs; preparing medicine with which their affections, true enough, cannot be fully cured but, at least, be alleviated; distributing food so that their hunger is stilled; giving and making their beds on which they can rest their wounded and sick body; granting them another, more agreeable existence by cleaning and nursing their dirty, smelly and putrefying wounds: is this not resurrecting them and lifting them out of the depth of death, making the sun shine for them, creating for them a new heaven and new earth?

(Letter to the Sisters of Charity, 1828)

In the end, charity will always be focused on the resurrection. The faith in the resurrection is the power with which we go to the people, and we testify to this faith in the resurrection through our loving care. It is the faith in the resurrection that gives hope to people who have lost all hope in this life. It is the faith in the resurrection that gives us hope so that we can continue to dedicate ourselves to our neighbours who society has long written off as hopeless. It is the faith in the resurrection that makes us powerfully resist all trends that want to take away the lives of people whose situation is described as a dead end. No, starting from the faith in the resurrection, there are no hopeless or dead-end situations or people, only difficult ones and sometimes very difficult ones. Faith, hope, and love meet each other in the resurrection.

Lord Jesus, with your life, your death, and your resurrection, life took on a completely new meaning. Grant that we may adopt this new mentality and consistently live according to it. That everything we do may be marked by the perspective of the resurrection and that, through our actions, we may bring others, the poor and the sick in particular, the hope and the joy of resurrection. Amen.

There is nothing as precious as time. Every moment we have passed well is worth a whole eternity as eternal bliss is the fruit of grace granted only in this time. Our lifetime is not only precious but also short and swift. Meanwhile, what use have we made of this short span of our lives that is hastening towards eternity? What better use could we make of the remaining time that is so short and indeed irrevocable and will never come back. Awake then! By a holy use of the time still remaining to you, try to redeem the time lost. Think each day, at dawn, that this may be the last day of your life.

(Sermon, 1797)

Father Triest was a man who made the most of his time. It was as if he did not have enough time when it came to serving the poor and the sick. Because love pushed him to a commitment that could not be bound by limits. At the same time, he took all the time to nourish himself spiritually, he took his good time to be with God. From that good time that he spent on prayer and contemplation, he could spend good time on the neighbour. He probably thought that he could not give enough time to both God and the neighbour. That is why he thought that time was so precious and why he encouraged us to use this time well, both for God and for the neighbour. Perhaps, we should dare to ask ourselves honestly whether we spend enough time with God and with the neighbour, and how much time we lose to matters that are not meaningful, not for God, not for the neighbour, and, as such, not for us.

Lord Jesus, you were among us for only a short time. However, it was enough to change the face of the world. Let us continue to work on this task through a good use of our time, following your example, to change the face of the world in the places where we live and work. Then we may take part as men in your incarnation, salvation, and resurrection. Amen.

What happiness to live in a house where love, obedience, patience, peace, mutual service reign; in a house where one hears but God's praise; where one leaves prayer in love and silence; where works of charity become paramount; where there is no other fire than that of the hearts aflame with divine love; no complaints other than that of not being able to give each other still greater proof of one's love; where only tears of compassion are shed.

(Letter to the Sisters of Charity, 1829)

The final meditation that we receive from Father Triest is about the love we should live and experience in our specific communities: our family, our religious community, our working community. We cannot deny that we often dream of a time when it was good in our family, in our religious community, in our working community. Now, tensions seem to prevail and every day is fuelled by conflict. Let us ask ourselves what we can do specifically to change that. Who is the person we struggle to get along with? Perhaps we should love this person more than the others. Which situation always creates an obstruction for us? Perhaps it is up to us to take the first step towards a solution and towards forgiveness. Did I already speak a word of confirmation today to someone who did something good, or do I only see the other person's negative sides? If love would set the tone in our daily relationships, perhaps we could relive the dream of yore.

Lord Jesus, to live in community is not easy. You experienced how Peter denied you and how Judas betrayed you. And yet you still went on with these people, encouraging the good and forgiving them when they strayed. Grant us your love, that we may become affirming and forgiving people like you, from which a true community may grow. Amen.

Praying with Father Triest

Prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Most loving Heart of Jesus, since you ask for my heart, here it is, I give it to you. You are the only one worthy of it and you alone can make it happy. I give it to you so that you can heal it of all the wounds of pride, selfishness, attachment to earthly things and still greater attachment to myself, lack of love for my neighbour, in one word, of all his wounds. Do not leave a single one except the wound that your love has caused. Jesus Christ, my God, I desire one thing only: a place in your Heart.

Ah, Sacred Heart of Jesus, O source of all grace, origin of all perfection, guide our thoughts, purify our desires, sanctify our feelings, receive our adoration and our offering.

We wish to offer and submit all our hearts to you. Grant us, we pray, to be humble, meek and patient in suffering and to seek for nothing except your honour and glory, to love you alone now and throughout all eternity. Amen.

Prayer to Jesus in the Eucharist

Beloved Saviour, grant us this grace, we beg you, make our hearts like yours.

We have consecrated ourselves to you. Today we renew our consecration with the greatest fervour. Yes, all we have we give you without reserve.

We offer you this church, grant that your Sacred Heart will be adored here night and day with fervour.

We offer you this parish, be always its shepherd.

We offer you ourselves, may we never go back on our word.

Please accept our offering and fill us with your blessings. Convert sinners, grant perseverance to the just, console the sorrowful, relieve the sick, help the dying. Grant, O divine Heart, that we all serve you faithfully and love you sincerely in this world and that one day we will rejoice to be united with you in heaven.

Prayer to the Divine Love

But how shall I speak of you, o divine Love, since nobody can understand you. You are an incommensurable ocean, an abyss in which one gets lost! O source of love, come to the help of my powerlessness and make the hearts of my listeners feel what no human speech can make their spirit understand. The Heart of Jesus has loved us without limit, let us love Him then without limit.

Prayer for God's mercy

Meek and patient Saviour, I must confess openly with the prodigal son: "I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Lk 15:18). I confess that I have borne with so little love and patience the indignity and wrong done to me unlike the example you set me. I confess that I have tried to take revenge on my neighbour who wronged me. But now, O Jesus, I am won over by your meekness. From the bottom of my heart I forgive all wrong and debt that people have caused me or have tried to cause me. From now on I want to endure everything patiently for love of you! Come to the help of my sick and evil nature with your help and grace so that I, according to your teaching, can offer the other cheek to him who hits me. Like this I may obtain your forgiveness for all my debts because of my patience and forgiveness regarding the indignity done to

me. And so may I be united with You in heaven through the eternal bond of love, peace and quiet. Amen.

Merciful and dearest Jesus, I must confess that I was more inclined to follow You to Mount Tabor in order to enjoy your glory, pleasure and mirth than to follow You to the Mount of Olives to suffer with you in your anxiety and distress.

I have longed more to be with You at the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee in order to indulge my sensuality by eating and drinking than to be with you in the stable of Bethlehem and suffer cold, hunger and thirst, poverty and destitution.

But now I am won over by your great love for my poor soul. From now on I want to follow You everywhere.

I am ready to suffer with You, for I know very well and ponder the truth of what You said through your apostle Paul: "So our hope for you is secure in the knowledge that you share the encouragement we receive, no less than the sufferings we bear" (2 Co 1:7).

O Christ Jesus, I greatly fear that I am damned forever because You are just. But I also firmly hope to be saved because You are kind and merciful and my highest Good. Your godhead strikes fear in me, but your humanity strengthens my hope.

We come to You, good and merciful Saviour, who does not want the death of the sinner. You who draw water from the rock, soften our hard hearts with the dew of your grace, so that like Peter we may shed tears of repentance for our sins. Henceforth, we will avoid all occasions of sin that brought us to sin so often. In

one word, together with Peter, we will leave Caiaphas' palace and all occasions that lead to sin; we will shed bitter tears over our past sins.

Lord Jesus, turn to us as You turned to Peter, and look at us with eyes full of mercy as You looked at Peter and pierced his heart. Lord Jesus, so that You might listen to our prayer, we throw ourselves at your feet and cry out with David: "Lord, take pity on me" (Ps 4:1).