



Love to ourselves as condition of love to the other

We live in an era with serious problems, deep economical crisis, environmental pollution, elevation of racism and resurgence of nationalism, intensity between political parties and disorientation of the citizen. Our society is ravaged by a generalized crisis with progressive concession of our intellectual basis and there is the need of maintenance of our national self-consciousness. No population can stand on his own, unless he has his own identity, which determines the historical and traditional elements, we should all know.

Today, more than any other era, man needs self-consciousness, laborious effort to meet himself/herself, to understand his/her particularity, his/her uniqueness with respect to the world he/she is surrounded by. An inner research and knowledge of the objective data is needed. It is necessary every man to learn well, who is exactly, what he/she wants but also what he/she is able to do. This interlocutory/dialectical relation of subject with the objective world is translated, practically, in right actions and decisions without undervaluation or overestimation of our potentialities. At social level emerge the results of self-knowledge given that moral ethics constitute a precondition for the cultivation of respect, love, solidarity and understanding among the people.

What does New Testament professes/mediates regarding to love to ourselves and, particularly, as condition for the love to the other?



Apostle Paul prompts men to love their wives ... "*as their own bodies*" (Ef. 5:28). He also recommends man how to behave to their wives: "*to love her as he loves himself*" (Ef. 5:33).

Based on these phrases we realize that:

1. Apostle Paul considers man's love to himself/herself as natural and self-evident. The interest, the care and the love to the spouse is condition of self-love and self-esteem.

The requested issue in human relations, in general, and the affectionate ones, more specifically, is the reciprocity in love.

2. Both Jesus Christ (Mc. 19,19. 22,39. m 12,31. 33. Lk. 10,27) and Apostle Paul (Gal. 5, 14 Rom. 13,9) aim to the maximum of the love to the fellow-man. Such an aim cannot be asked and be achieved, unless, it presupposes, the obvious, natural and mostly instinctive love of man to his own existence.

3. Love to ourselves is not selfish and blameworthy, if it functions as starting point and criterion of love to our brother fellowmen.

4. An intensified love to the other can be based on self-respect and self-esteem.

In the Holy Scriptures phrase: "*love your fellow-man as you love yourself*" (Mt 19:19, 22:39 Mk. 12:31-33 Acts 10:27) we observe that love to ourselves is unlimited. In relation to what we wish for ourselves, we all are in a constant frame (spiritual condition) to overpass the limits. Jesus Christ requires us to have the same condition also for our fellow-man.

Such a condition takes us out of the limits of a confined area or a measured offer. The stress does not fall into the self-evident love to ourselves. But if this love is set as a foundation, it is in order to show that love to the fellowmen should require or make explicitly self-evident the abolishing of barriers and borders.



the Gospel calls us to come out of our 'ego' towards 'you' and this exit is not unnatural but self-evident.

In the parable of the prodigal son it says for the younger son: "*he came to himself*". The son away from his father lost his property. However, he did not lose the image he had for his father, that he was a father with royalty and love, which accompanied him during his emigration.

He came to himself: This phrase refers to the discovering of his father's picture, which was hidden in his inner self, and not to self-criticism and repentance.

Self-criticism, "dig inside" (ένδον σκάπτει), would not lead to the return, if the father's picture was deterrent. The awareness of the recklessness is not enough. If there is no sense of the father's love then our self-accusation does not integrate the return.

Erich Fromm in his work "*The man for himself*" notes that the person who really loves himself is not characterized as selfish, on the contrary he is the one who can really love the others. It is wrong to set the segregation and the dilemma of the love to ourselves and the love for the others. This position is supported in Holy Scripture "... *love your fellow-man like yourself*", meaning that the respect and the comprehension of the uniqueness and integrity of ourselves is directly connected with the love and the respect to all human beings. Love for a person means love for the man as a person. True love is expression of care, respect, responsibility and knowledge, while it leads to the confirmation of life, happiness, development and freedom of man.



In his book *"the art of love"* Erich Fromm notes that the element of *"care"* is ascertained in the act of God to save the residents of Nineveh, despite the negative attitude and deeds of Jonas, to whom He explains that the substance of love is to labor for something. Love and labour are interrelated. Somebody loves that for which he labors and labors for what he loves. Similarly, the third element of *"responsibility"*, not with the meaning of duty but as willing and spontaneous action, is something that previously seems to be absent from Jonas. The third element of love, *"respect"*, is comprehended as the ability to conceive the uniqueness of each individual as a distinct person and personality. Finally, *"knowledge"* is related to the real interest, to know universally and objectively, what we love and, particularly, with awareness, that is by putting ourselves in the other's place.

Based on above mentioned, it becomes obvious that self-conscience constitutes a condition for maintaining our personal identity and, at the same time, a starting point for our creative participation to multiculturalism, on equal terms. The teaching of Christ and Church is a signpost to help us recognize to the other's their rights and, at the same time, to preserve the elements of our identity.