



Abbaye Saint-Joseph de Clairval
F – 21150 Flavigny-sur-Ozerain

Dear Friend of Saint Joseph Abbey,

DURING his trip to Chile in 1987, Pope John Paul II uttered these hope-filled words : “ Can the Holy Spirit raise up in our day apostles of the caliber of Father Hurtado, who manifest the vitality of the Church through their heroic example of charity ? We are convinced He can, and ask this of Him with faith. ”

Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga was born on January 22, 1901, in Viña del Mar, Chile. He was just four years old when his father died. His mother, Ana, plunged into distress by this sudden widowhood that left her without means, took refuge with her two sons in the capital, Santiago. Homeless, they had to go from house to house at the mercy of more or less benevolent relatives. Alberto suffered greatly from this precarious family condition. In spite of it all, he succeeded in his school and, in March 1918, began studying law at the Catholic University of Chile.

“Whom should I love?”

His difficult childhood deeply marked the young Alberto—for the rest of his life, he was driven to take care of the poor. He devoted himself to apostolic activities on their behalf, and became involved in politics to get government aid for them. He was, in fact, unable to see suffering or any need without seeking to relieve it. Later he wrote, “ Whom should I love ? All my human brothers. Suffering their failures, their miseries, the oppression of which they are victims. Rejoicing over their joys. Starting by remembering all those I have met on my path. Those from whom I have received life, light, and bread. Those with whom I have shared a roof and bread... Those with whom I have fought, those I have made suffer, those I have disappointed, those I have wronged... All those I have helped, aided, to whom I could lend a strong hand... Those who were against me, scorned me, wronged me... All those who live in my city, in my country... All in the world are my brothers. ”

But is such a love of neighbor possible ? Yes, explains Pope Benedict XVI : “ Love of neighbor is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by JESUS. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my

eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of JESUS CHRIST. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern... I can give to others much more than their outward necessities ; I can give them the look of love which they crave ” (Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, December 25, 2005, no. 18).

Alberto hesitated between the priesthood, consecrated life, and marriage. In the end, after intense prayer, he offered himself to the Lord : “ I give You all that I am and have, I want to give You everything, to serve You where there will be no restriction to the total gift of myself. ” He then chose to become a novice in the Society of JESUS. On August 7, 1923, the young man brilliantly passed the final exam at the Catholic University, and received the title of lawyer. Despite the prospect of a very promising future, he entered the Jesuits. He wrote to a friend : “ Finally, here I am a Jesuit, as happy and satisfied as is possible in this world. I give thanks to God Who led me to this Paradise where one can be entirely His 24 hours a day. ” He was sent to Cordoba, Argentina, where he took his vows on August 15, 1925. His spirit of service led him to ask to do the humble work of the kitchen. He applied himself to the practice of the virtues, particularly with respect to others : “ Do not criticize my brothers, hide their faults, speak of their virtues. Always speak well of superiors and their decisions. ” In fact, “ Honor is the social witness given to human dignity, and everyone enjoys a natural right to the honor of his name and reputation and to respect. Thus, detraction and calumny offend against the virtues of justice and charity ” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2479).

Alberto Hurtado was sent to Spain to study theology there. But in 1931, the political unrest that raged in the Iberian peninsula forced him to go to the University of Louvain, in Belgium. The testimonies of his brothers were unanimous in depicting him as joyful, hard working, and a servant to all. On August 24, 1933, he was ordained a priest. “ There it is, you see me henceforth a

priest of the Lord!” he wrote to a friend... “God has granted me the great grace of being happy in all the houses where I have lived, with all the companions I have had. But now, in becoming a priest forevermore, my joy is overflowing. From now on, I desire nothing but the exercise of my ministry with the most intense interior life, and corresponding external activity. The secret to this harmony and its success is in devotion to the Sacred Heart of JESUS, that is, in Our Lord’s overflowing love.”

As high as possible

He helped found the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Chile and went to great lengths to find professors, books, and journals. On October 10, 1935, he brilliantly defended his doctoral thesis in pedagogy at the University of Louvain, and then visited a number of teaching institutions throughout Europe. When he returned to Chile in February 1936, Father Alberto taught at the Jesuit high school. Young people were attracted to him, and he led them in charitable and social actions. During retreats preached according to the *Exercises* of Saint Ignatius, he exhorted souls to an ever deeper encounter with the Lord and helped them to earnestly seek the will of God: “Retreats are for souls that want to rise as high as possible. They are for those who have understood the meaning of the word ‘love,’ and who understand that Christianity is love, that the primary commandment is to love.”

Driven by an immense priestly fervor, Father Hurtado was a model of Eucharistic devotion; a Capuchin missionary said that if priests celebrated the Mass like Father Hurtado, they would become saints. In 1941, he was made chaplain for the Youth Movement of Catholic Action for the city of Santiago, which extended his apostolate to students in public high schools. He encouraged vocations. In a book titled *Is Chile a Catholic Country?*, he opened the eyes of his contemporaries to the situation in their country, pointing out the grave problem of the lack of priestly vocations. But this difficulty did not restrict his deep-seated optimism, and soon his pastoral success earned him a promotion to national chaplain for the Youth Movement of the Catholic Action. He criss-crossed the country, preaching retreats everywhere.

During a large torchlight procession in honor of the Most Blessed Virgin MARY, on the hilltop overlooking Santiago, Father Albert shouted to the thousands of youth present: “If Christ came down tonight, He would repeat to you as He looked at this city, ‘I take pity on it’; and, turning to you, He would tell you with great tenderness, ‘You are the light of the world. You must illuminate this darkness. Who wants to work with me? Do you want to be My apostles?’” He thus

echoed Saint Ignatius who, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, had JESUS say, “My will is to conquer the whole world and all My enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of My Father. Whoever, therefore, desires to come with Me must labor with Me in order that following Me in suffering, he may likewise follow Me in glory” (no. 95). And Father Hurtado commented, putting these words in the mouth of JESUS: “I have need of you... I do not force you, but I need you to realize My plans of love. If you do not come, a work will remain undone, that only you, you alone, can realize. No one else can take on this work, because each has his role to fill. Look at the world. The harvest is already ripe; what hunger, what thirst is there! ... Many are starving for religion, for spirituality, for trust, for the meaning of life.”

The triumph of failures

But not everyone understood Father Hortado’s zeal. He was accused of not submitting to the hierarchy, of having excessively advanced ideas in the social domain, as well as being too independent from other branches of Catholic Action. In particular, the general chaplain for youth opposed him. In November 1944, Father Hurtado decided it best to resign from his position as chaplain for Catholic Action, an act which caused him deep suffering. Nevertheless, he did not lose sight of the fruitfulness of this trial: “In Christian work,” he wrote, “there is the triumph of failures! Delayed triumphs! In the world of the invisible, that which appears useless is the most effective. A total failure accepted wholeheartedly yields more supernatural success than any triumph. Sow, with no concern for what will grow. Continue to sow despite everything. Thank the Lord for the apostolic fruits of failures. When Christ spoke to the rich young man in the Gospel, He failed, but how many others have learned the lesson as a result! And when He announced the Eucharist, how many fled—but yet, how many came running! You will work! Your zeal will seem still-born, but how many will live, thanks to you!”

On a cold and rainy night, he met a poor man, sick and shivering, who approached him and told him he had no place to stay. Such misery made him shudder. A few days later, in preaching a retreat to a group of ladies, he spoke of the poverty that pervaded Santiago: “Christ is wandering in our streets in the person of so many poor, suffering, sick, thrown out of their miserable hovels... Christ has no home! Couldn’t we offer Him one, we who are able to have a comfortable home, plenty of food, the means to educate our children and ensure their future? *As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me*, JESUS said (Mt. 25 :40)”. At the close of the retreat, he was given a plot of land, some jewelry, and a few checks that allowed the “Hogar de Cristo” (Christ’s Home) to be born. Six months

later, the archbishop of Santiago blessed its first establishment. Since then this work has not ceased growing to receive the poorest, creating a movement of solidarity that has gone beyond the country's borders. But its purpose is primarily spiritual : " One of the first good things we must give to our poor is an awareness of their personal value, of their dignity as citizens and, even more, as sons and daughters of God. "

The first poverty

Father Hurtado's experience illustrates well the words of Pope Benedict XVI in his 2006 Lenten message : " In the face of the terrible challenge of poverty afflicting so much of the world's population, indifference and self-centered isolation stand in stark contrast to the 'gaze' of Christ... Even in this era of global interdependence, it is clear that no economic, social, or political project can replace that gift of self to another through which charity is expressed. Those who act according to the logic of the Gospel live the faith as friendship with God Incarnate and, like Him, bear the burden of the material and spiritual needs of their neighbors. They see it as an inexhaustible mystery, worthy of infinite care and attention. They know that he who does not give God gives too little ; as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta frequently observed, the worst poverty is not to know Christ. Therefore, we must help others to find God in the merciful face of Christ. Without this perspective, civilization lacks a solid foundation. "

In 1947, Father Hurtado founded, along with some young academics, the Chilean Trade Union Association (ASICH) as a means to " bring about an organization that makes the Church present in the professional environment. " The organization offers workers a Christian formation centered on the Church's social teaching to defend the dignity of human work, free from any ideological influence. " There are people, " Father wrote, " who wish to advance in holiness but without suffering. They have not understood what it is to grow. They want to develop themselves by chant, by study, by pleasure, but not by hunger, by anguish, by failure, by the hard work of each day, nor by accepting the powerlessness that teaches us to rely on God's power, nor by letting go of our own plans, which enables us to recognize those of God. Suffering is beneficial because it shows me my limits, purifies me, makes me stretch out on Christ's cross, forces me to turn to God. " In doing this work, Father went to the United States and to Europe, participating in, among other events, the 34th Week on Social Justice in Paris, and in the Jesuits' International Week in Versailles. In Lyon, he took part in a congress of moral theologians on Church-State relations. His opinion of the social Catholic movement in France was positive, but included certain reservations, especially on the proposals he heard at the congress in Lyon. There he

observed " an excessive desire for renewal and a certain tendency to forget the real values of the Church, the traditional vision. " This tendency results in the Church being left " without authentically Christian leaders, but only with social mystics, not social-Christian ones. " Nevertheless, he observed that there was a " great desire to serve the Church and a very real devotion. " During a pilgrimage to Rome in October of the same year, he received the encouragement of the Superior General of the Jesuits as well as of Pope Pius XII.

Like a rock battered by the waves

When he returned to Chile, Father Hurtado firmly rooted the work of ASICH in the foundation of Christ and the Church. In 1948, he gave some talks that were very well received, sometimes drawing up to four thousand people, and that were rebroadcast on the radio. Nevertheless, he was the object of misunderstanding and unjustified criticism. He had written, " If someone begins to live for God, in self-denial and love for others, all possible difficulties will come knocking at his door. " He noted, " I am often like a rock that is battered on all sides by the towering waves. There is no way out but up. For an hour, for a day, I let the waves break against the rock ; I do not look toward the horizon, I lift my eyes to God. O blessed active life, entirely consecrated to my God, entirely given to neighbor. Its radicalness itself forces me to turn to God to find myself ! He is the only possible way out of my worries, my only refuge. "

But Father Hurtado, who was a saint, kept his feet on the ground. He knew that man, even in the service of God, must conserve his energy. " One must not exaggerate and squander one's strength in an excess of conquering force. The generous man tends to move forward too fast : he wants to restore the good and destroy injustice, but there is an inertia in both men and things that he must take into account. Mystically, it is a matter of walking in step with God, of fitting exactly into the plan of God. All effort to move faster than God is useless, and even worse, harmful. Activity is replaced by activism which goes to the head like champagne, aspires to unreachable goals and leaves no time for contemplation ; a man is no longer master of his life... The danger of excessive action is compensation. An exhausted man easily seeks it. This is all the more dangerous when one has, to some extent, lost self-control. The body is tired, the nerves are agitated, the will vacillating. The greatest stupidities are possible in these moments. One simply has to slow down, find one's calm again among truly good friends, recite one's Rosary mechanically and fall asleep sweetly in the Lord. "

In January 1950, the Bolivian bishops invited him to participate in the first " National Meeting of Directors of the Social-Economic Apostolate. " The youth of

Bolivian Catholic Action also invited him to a national gathering. "The hour has come," he told the youth, "for our socio-economic action to cease being satisfied with repeating general prescriptions drawn from pontifical encyclicals, and to begin proposing well thought out solutions for immediate application in the socio-economic field." In the meantime, his interest in the intellectual apostolate led him to found the periodical *Mensaje* (Message), a journal he wanted to be "high level," to offer a religious, philosophical, and social formation.

A collaboration moment by moment

But the depth of Father Hurtado's soul revealed itself most of all during his final illness and death. Knowing that he was suffering from pancreatic cancer, he exclaimed, "How could I not be happy! I am entirely grateful to God for it! Instead of a violent death, He has given me a long illness so that I can prepare myself... Truly God has been for me a loving Father full of tenderness; the best of fathers." For a long time, our saint had ordered his intense activity with an eye to this hour: "Life has been given to man so that he may cooperate with God in carrying out His plan; death is only a completion of that collaboration, a return of all our powers into the Creator's hands. May I every day prepare myself for death, consecrating myself each moment to collaborating with what God is asking of me, thus fulfilling my mission, that which God expects of me, that which only I can do." He had always desired eternal life, that is to say, the definitive meeting with Christ: "And me? Before me, eternity. I am an arrow, shot towards eternity," he wrote. "May I not be attached to anything here, but in all things keep my eyes on the life to come. May all creatures be transparent to me, so that I always see God and eternity. When they become opaque, I become earthly and lost. After me,

eternity. It's there that I am headed, and very soon... When one considers how soon the present time will end, one reaches the conclusion: be a citizen of Heaven, and not of earth." The image of the arrow demonstrates at once the transience of life and his concentration on one single goal—eternity. Moreover, it is this perspective of eternity that kept him from being indifferent to the suffering of man. "Enclose and carry all men together in my heart," he wrote. "Each one has his place, because naturally there are different places in the heart of man... Unify all my loves in Christ. All this in me, as an oblation, a gift which makes the heart explode; a movement of Christ within me which awakens and enflames my love; a movement of humanity through me towards Christ. That is what it is to be a priest!"

Father Hurtado died a holy death on August 18, 1952, surrounded by the Brothers of his community. Shortly before, he had written, "In leaving, in returning to my Father, I would like to impart to you: each time the needs and miseries of the poor make themselves known to you, seek a way to help them as you would the Master." His funeral Mass was a true triumph. As the attendees were leaving the church, a cross of clouds formed in the sky, an impressive event that was reported by the newspapers of the time.

Father Hurtado was beatified by John Paul II on October 16, 1994, and canonized on October 23, 2005 by Benedict XVI, who pointed out: "The priestly ministry of Albert Hurtado was distinguished by his sensitivity and availability to others, truly being a living image of the Master *meek and humble of heart*. At the end of his days, despite the great suffering caused by illness, he still had the strength to repeat: 'I am happy, Lord, I am happy,' thus expressing the joy with which he always lived."

Let us ask Saint Albert Hurtado to obtain for us the grace of a profound joy in the service of God and neighbor, throughout the sufferings imposed by this devotion.

Dom Antoine Marie
O.S.B.

P. S. This monthly letter is free of charge. We gratefully accept the addresses of other persons who may enjoy receiving it.

– Also available free of charge are: tract about the divinity of Jesus Christ; tract about the Truths of the Catholic Religion; scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, with explanatory notice; the promises of the Sacred Heart; the mysteries of the Rosary.

Contributions may be sent to this address in France:

- **From U. S. A., U. K. or Canada:** by ordinary cheques payable to "Abbaye Saint Joseph," (no need to have special international cheques) in U. S. \$, Pounds Sterling or Can. \$.
- **From Irish Republic:** by ordinary cheques in Euros.
- **From other countries:** by postal order, or bank drafts in Euros.

Credit card (Visa, CB, Mastercard, American Express): through our website: <http://www.clairval.com/>

Fax: 00 33 3 80 96 25 29 – E-mail: abbey@clairval.com – <http://www.clairval.com/>