


# Charity: the basic hallmarks

Religion

Society

Community

11 January 2004 | Anthony J. Frendo |  3 min read

Times of Malta

Once again the Catholic Church in Malta is celebrating Charity Day, and this year's theme is "Giving is more beautiful than receiving" (all church collections next Saturday evening and on Sunday will go towards Church homes, institutes and charitable activities).

When hearing the word charity, our first impulse is usually to think of a donation (generally of a financial nature) to those who are in some way less fortunate than we are. This is true; however, it is far from being the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

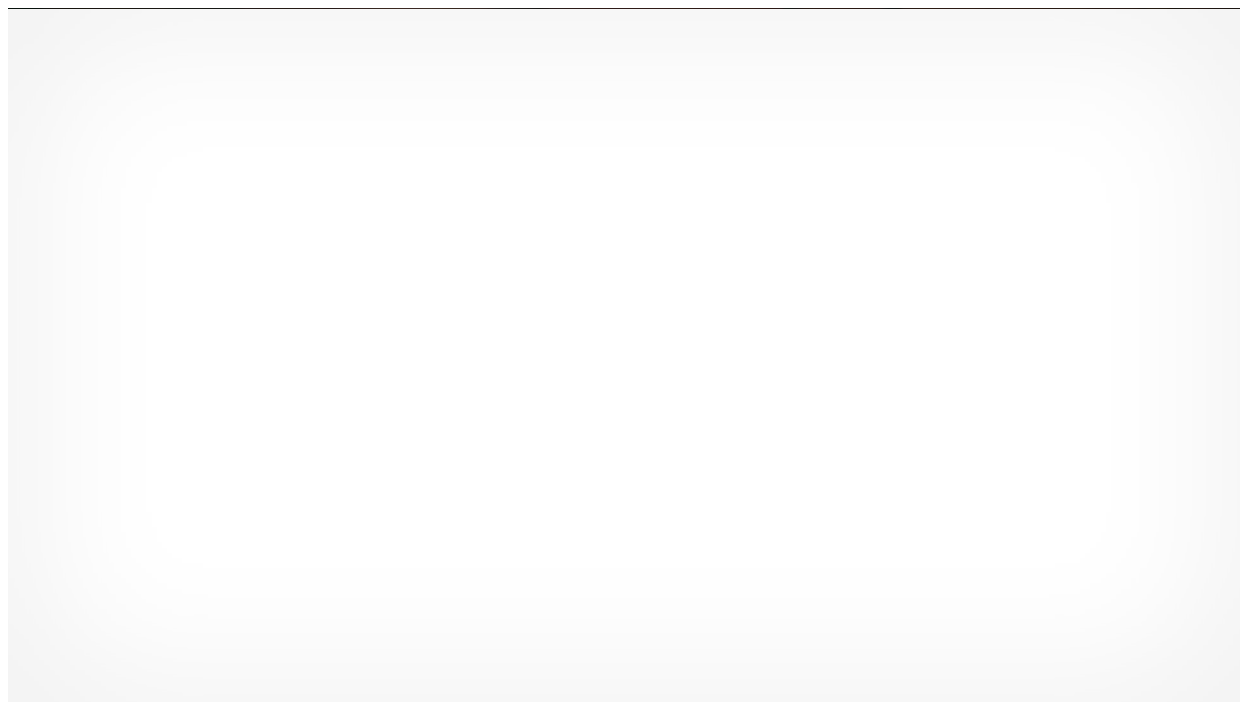
Charity is much more than that. In the Christian vocabulary the word charity is synonymous with love, and the latter is identified with God Himself. The New Testament is explicit about this: "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides

Privacy

in them" (I John 4: 16). But how does love look in practice? What can love, and therefore benevolence, mean in reality?

The answer can be found in St Paul's hymn to love (I Corinthians 13: 4-7) which is in fact a portrait of God's love for each and every one of us as revealed in Jesus Christ crucified who, in virtue of His being absolute love, later rose from the dead. In this hymn St Paul teaches us that, among other things, love is always patient and kind. This already shows us that love is basically linked with deep internal attitudes.

ADVERTISING



Indeed, St Paul's hymn to love is preceded by a very difficult but telling statement: "If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but I do not have love, I gain nothing" (I Corinthians 13: 3).

Despite the fact that some manuscripts have a different reading for a part of this statement, namely body to be burned instead of body so that I may boast, its essential point remains the same. Hence, even if I were to give to others all that I am and have, this would be of no value at all unless it is animated by real love.

This means that all our actions (including those which seem to be extremely charitable) are authentic only if they are motivated by a benevolence springing from the heart.

Now benevolence means wanting to do good to others, and therefore ultimately it is simply another way of saying that self-fulfilment is being for others. The aforementioned Pauline texts show clearly that we need to do quiet a bit of soul-searching to ensure that the

motivation for all our actions is love - which for the Christian means an undivided love for God and man - and that therefore we are thoroughly imbued with benevolence.

We do not have the strength to live this type of love, which is divine, without God's grace. In fact, charity in the sense of being for others can be found in its fullness in God Himself.

And it is precisely because God is love that he cannot be other than a community of love in His own being - and that is what the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is all about.

Three persons in one God is identical to three relationships of love which cannot exist in any way other than by being completely geared one to the other. Christian charity should emulate such self-giving, and in practice this includes the quest for justice as a starting point.

*Independent journalism costs money. Support Times of Malta for the **price of a coffee**.*

Support Us

## Sponsored Articles