

Making God's Love Credible

As we end this holy Easter season, it is worth looking back on the writings of Saint John. His gospel is a hymn to Love. He constantly reveals to us that God is Love and that He calls us to live from this Love. Jesus clearly affirms that Love is the only measure of our life and its essential dimension. This is the first observation of Mr. Stéfán Thériault, director of Le Pèlerin centre, in his *Meditation to Nourish Hope* # 58, concerning the gospel of Jn 15, 9-17, with the title: *Love First*. I quote it at length.

[In Jn 15, 9] Jesus begins by reminding us that the Father is the source of all Love and that He loved us with this very Love of the Father: *'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.'* What he desires for us, for all his disciples and, in fact, for every human being, is to learn to remain in his Love, and this, by keeping his *'commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'* [Jn 15, 12] This commandment is in reality very reassuring, because it tells us that He shares this Love with us so that we can live it between us. Therefore, we are not left to ourselves, but rather called to be drawn into his Love, and from this Love learn to let ourselves be loved, in order to love others.

It is an overwhelming lesson, the Love of Christ. It requires a lot of humility, firstly because, as humans, we do not like receiving from others, and even from the All-Other, and because this Love highlights how difficult it is for us to let ourselves be loved and to love others. Our love is always measured [it seeks reciprocity], because too often, we have learned that love has a price: if I am such a person, if I act in such a way, I accept such a role; if I disappear [I forget myself]... then I will be loved.
[I will have won love. And in relation to God, I will have won my heaven.]

The Love of God is excessive, because it is completely free. It shakes up in us all the false measures learned from love. It is in no way what we have known and it leads us where we do not know how to go: *'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.'* [Jn 15, 13].

At the dawn of his passion, these words of Jesus are certainly not empty, because they are already prophecy of the death which awaits him, for his Love for each one of us. Those words have all the density of his Life offered to us..."

...Jesus invites us to an intimacy with Him, an intimacy which is a true union of Love, where we are in Him and He in us. This experience shatters in us that of a love full of restrictions, of a love that is disloyal and leaves us alone too often. Unlike that worldly love, we live a Presence. We experience our life in this accompaniment of Christ whom, in everything we live, we never miss.

All that we are called to live, the good as the most difficult, and in those difficult times a pandemic, illness, isolation, renouncement, betrayals, rejections, etc., nothing, as Saint Paul will say, can separate us from the Love of God. *'For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,*

will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rm 8, 38-39). As 'friends', Jesus lets us enter into this, 'No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.' [Jn 15, 15]

Thus, Jesus reveals to us that the Father is only Love, Mercy, Forgiveness, Tenderness... and that, in all that we are called to live, we have to learn to live it in this Love, Mercy, Forgiveness, Tenderness... And this learning is not an ambiguous Love, because Love is always a deeply personal relationship and experience. *'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.'* [Jn 15, 16]

And so, using the precious gifts of the Holy Spirit received at Pentecost, and with the inspiration of Frédéric Ozanam and his companions, we are the advocates of this Love of God by the concrete actions that we take. As Saint John writes in I Jn 3:18, we manifest it "in action". And this, not only toward those who are dear to us, but also toward those who are looked down upon as the repulsive, negligible, despicable poor.

Certainly, there is the lack of money, but above all, there is the denial of human dignity and the absence of affection. How can we believe that this world is born out of a surge of love and is enclosed in a network of charity, when we no longer count for anyone? What good is it to live? So let us add a part of our heart to groceries for the hungry, clothes for the needy, a bed for the homeless. Thus, we will respond to an even deeper thirst and make credible the faith in Goodness that is at the origin and at the end of the human adventure.

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I invite you to say the following prayer in all humility:

Divine heart of Jesus, make our hearts similar to yours.
Nourish our awareness of your Love in us more and more.
Strengthen our trust in your benevolent will.
Help us dispel our fears in this time of pandemic.
Inspire us with the appropriate gestures
so we may reflect your kindness to people.
Give us the energy to accomplish them in communion with you,
Who reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and
for centuries and centuries. Amen