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Contd...Twelfth promise of Our Lord Jesus Christ...for those who have devotion to His Sacred Heart...the grace of final repentance, and that they will not die in My displeasure, nor without receiving the Sacraments, and that My Heart will be their safe refuge at the last hour.



Berthe Petit Contd..."by Her sufferings; by Her sacrifices and Her immolation on Calvary endured in perfect correspondence with My Grace for the salvation of mankind." Contd...

J.M.J.

## Charity (LOVE)

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In the previous article we reflected on how **love is often misunderstood**, giving special emphasis to what we called **the sentimentalist mistake: the idea that equates love with feelings**. In this article we will discuss the true nature of love. What better way to begin than with a leading question: **What is love?**

**St. John the Evangelist** provides a direct and rather stunning response to that question when he **tells us simply that love is God**. He establishes a cosmically significant equation: **God = Love**. The two realities are interchangeable. Let us listen to him as he spells out his argument. **"God is love," he writes, "and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."** The Latin is so stately and sonorous that it too must be cited: *Deus caritas est et qui habitat in caritate in Deo habitat et Deus in eo.*



The first lesson to be learned about **true love** is this: it is **grounded in God. It is indistinguishable from God**. It is by no means coincidental that **the first and the greatest commandment enjoins us to love God with our whole heart and soul and strength and mind. That is the beginning and the end of all true love. Unless we are first firmly fixed in Love Himself, nothing else can follow for us by way of genuine love**. Another way of putting it is to say that unless our love is anchored in the supernatural it cannot rise to its own proper nature. Putting it yet more plainly: **unless we love God, we are incapable of loving human beings; we are incapable of love, period.**

**One of the biggest delusions** we can entertain about love is **the idea that we can dispense with supernatural love and make do with natural love alone. This just doesn't work for the simple reason that without supernatural love natural love ceases to be natural love. It is transformed into a cruel caricature of the real thing, sterile and morbid. It is a monstrosity.**

**Because God is the source of human love, then, it is only genuine as human love, to the extent that it flows forth from our love of God. The second greatest commandment tells us that we must love our neighbor as oneself.** That would seem to be easily enough understood. **But what does it really mean to love neighbor as oneself?** St. Thomas Aquinas gives us a crisp, pointed response to that question, I think, through **his general definition of love**. He reveals the essence of love when he says that it is **"willing good for another."** There we have the heart of the matter, and a huge heart it is.

**To love is simply to will the good for another.** Please note, first of all, where **all the emphasis is placed when genuine love is at issue. On the other.** Not on the lover, but on the beloved. **If I truly love then my attention is not focused on myself. The wants and needs of the other person take precedence over my own wants and needs.** The infamous Number One (the self) is dethroned. The other is declared absolute regent. **True love implies complete selflessness. Every true lover is a self constituted second class citizen, gladly giving way, gladly giving himself away, for the sake of the beloved.**

Important clarifications are in order. **When we say that love is willing the good for the other, we mean willing the real good, not the apparent good.** Furthermore, **we will the ultimate real good for the other. That means one thing, of course, that we will the supreme happiness of the other, which is to say, eternal life with God.** If we truly love another person then what we want for that person is the same thing we want for ourselves, the best, complete human fulfillment, and that is nothing else than the **Beatific Vision**.

How far we are here from that false Hollywood notion of love which has such a firm grip on contemporary culture!

What are the practical implications of the true meaning of love, as manifested in the love of our neighbor? **If we want ultimate happiness for those whom we claim to love**, then in our day to day dealings with them, **we will**, at the least, **never do anything which would hinder them from achieving that happiness**. And, positively, **we will do everything in our power to help them achieve their final end**. **No act directed toward or immediately affecting another person can be a truly loving act if it is not in one degree or another ordered to the real good of that person.**

All this being so, **we can readily see how wrong-headed and pathetically superficial it is to equate love with feeling**. Again, **to love another means to act toward the person in a way that serves the achievement of his final end**. And we should act in that way no matter what our feelings might be. It is reason and will that must be in charge here. Love is not sentimentality. Love is not merely a matter of being nice to people, that is, acting toward them only in ways that make them feel good, and, in the bargain, make us feel good too. Our Lord was not always nice to people (consider how he treated the Pharisees, and His own disciples at times), **but He unfailingly loved all those He encountered**. He loved people as only God could love them. **He always acted toward whomever He met in terms of what was truly best for that person**. It is not that we should ever act toward others with the principal purpose in mind of hurting their feelings, but when it comes down to a choice between hurting people's feelings and doing what is truly for their benefit, love knows what choice to make. The surgeon cuts, but he cuts to heal.



Love is selfless. More, it is self-sacrificing. Our Lord cited the laying down of one's life for a friend as an example of the greatest kind of love. With such an example in mind, who could ever doubt the surpassing seriousness of love? The example is so striking, as coming from Christ, because He presented it not only in words but in deed.

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