

Love

1. God is love and so love is the essence of what being is.

- We are made in God's image. Love, therefore, is all that matters for us

"God is love. If we abide in love we abide in God and God abides in us"(1John 4:16).

"We are enclosed in the Father, and we are enclosed in the Son, and we are enclosed in the Holy Spirit. And the Father is enclosed in us, the Son is enclosed in us, and the Holy Spirit is enclosed in us"(Julian of Norwich, "Showings", chapter 54^l).

"You share the divine nature"(2Peter 1:4).

"The greatest gift is love. Pursue it"(1Corinthians 13:13 - 14:1).

"The only thing that counts is faith working through love"(Galatians 5:6).

"God lives in us and his love is perfected in us"(1John 4:16).

"Father, may the love with which you loved me be in them, and I in them"(John 17:26).

"O most beautiful of creatures, transcendent spirit, who long to know where your beloved is and where you may find him so as to be united with him. He dwells within you. You are yourself the tabernacle, his secret hiding place. Rejoice, exult, for all you could possibly desire, all your heart's longing is so close, so intimate as to be within you; you cannot *be* without him"(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle, Stanza 1,7).

"God will show you how to love Him as perfectly as you desire ... Transforming the soul into his love, God gives you his own strength by which you can love Him. As if he were to put an instrument in your hands and show you how it works by operating it jointly with you, He shows you how to love and gives you the ability to do so"(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 38,4).

"At the evening of life, you will be examined in love. Learn to love as God desires to be loved, and abandon your own ways of acting"(John of the Cross, Sayings of Light and Love n.57).

2. Love as we see it in God is a love of mercy for us who are sinners

"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins"(1John 4:10).

"God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us"(Romans 5:8).

"God, of your goodness, give yourself to me, for you are in love with me"(Julian of Norwich).

"Mercy is a sweet, gracious operation in love. It mingles with plentiful pity, for mercy works, protecting us, and mercy works, turning everything to good for us. Mercy allows us to fail to a certain extent; and inasmuch as we fail, we fall and die. For we must necessarily die inasmuch as we fail to see and feel God, who is our life. Our failing is dreadful, our falling is shameful, and our dying is sorrowful. But yet in all this the sweet eye of pity is never turned away from us, and the operation of mercy does not cease ... Mercy is a property of compassion which belongs to motherhood in tender love; and grace is an honourable property which belongs to royal dominion in the same love. Mercy works, protecting, enduring, giving life and healing, and it is all of the tenderness of love; and grace works with mercy, raising, rewarding, endlessly exceeding what our love and labour deserve, distributing and displaying the vast generosity of God's royal dominion in his wonderful courtesy"(Julian of Norwich, "Showings" chapter 48^l).

3. Believing that God loves us we can learn to love ourselves as God loves us

"Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us"(Ephesians 5:1).

- True love of self is our sharing in God's love for us, a love which is a gift of grace.
- I am a creature totally dependent on God, and so totally dependent on love. Genesis speaks in terms of our being made up of dust (held together by God's creating power) plus breath (experiencing the gift of God's Spirit, and so made in God's image, able to dialogue with God).
- I am a person dear to Jesus
 - "You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body"(1Corinthians 6:20).
 - "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"(Galatians 2:20).
 - "Christ Jesus has made me his own"(Philippians 3:12).
- I am a temple of the Holy Spirit.
 - "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us"(Romans 5:5).
- I am a person who belongs to the world and to my fellow creatures, especially other people. Because we belong to others, love is the way we are meant to be: being a willing gift to others that expresses and realises a transcending of one's present self and that creates the proper environment which enables another to respond in love.

4. A loving response to God is expressed in commitment to doing God's will

"Whom have I in heaven but you? Earth has nothing I desire besides you ...

My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever ...

As for me, it is good to be near God"(Psalm 73:25-28).

"The union of love of God is a habitual and loving attentiveness of the will to God"(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 28,10).

"You can know clearly whether or not you love God purely. If you loves him, your heart, your love, will not be set on yourself or on your own satisfaction or gain, but upon pleasing God, and giving God honour and glory"(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 9,5).

5. God's will is that we love others with God's love, as we experience it in Jesus

- Creation is God's gift of Himself. To love is to give oneself. To the extent that we are in touch with our true being we recognise ourselves as gift and we are in touch with God the giver.
- To be, then, is to share in God's self-gift to another. When the other accepts this gift and responds to it, we experience well-being, a being-in-love. When the one to whom we offer ourselves in love does not accept us or fails to respond, we experience pain. But by virtue of being a creature the only way to be is to give oneself in love to another.
- To accept as true that I am totally dependent on love, is to accept that that is also true for every person and for all of creation. To know this is to be drawn into God's own love for all that God has made.
- Love, then, is a primary sacrament, for it is being part of the divine grace that flows, giving life to all. In love we are at the very heart of religious experience.

"Doing the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into Christ"(Ephesians 4:15).

"The heart yearns, in simple, silent, pleading, for action that does not mimic love but springs forth from it ... My single desire for God will be of more help to my friends because my single desire for God will birth the kind of action that will really help them. It is not desiring God instead of doing helpful actions, but desiring God as the source of the actions that are going to be really helpful. It is that simple: put efficiency first, and the world gets to be the

way it is today; put love first, and the whole meaning of efficiency is transformed"(Gerald May *The Awakened Heart*, page 234).

"If we give ourselves more space between feeling and response, and enter that space in a consecrated way, we will find ourselves empowered for whatever response love calls for. I am sure of it. The power then is not just ours; it is the nuclear fusion of divine grace and our dignified willingness ... Authentic loving responsiveness invites us to turn our consciousness toward the exact point where our hearts are already looking: to the source of love. There, and only there, is the wellspring of authentic responsiveness found"(May, page 240).

"Find your heart as best you can, follow it towards the source of love as much as possible, consecrate yourself, and trust. God's grace is present, God's love is irrevocable, and you can trust it and trust yourself within it. There are no exceptions. There are no places inside you or in the whole of creation where God's love does not exist. It is alive in prisons and hospital wards, in earthquakes and hurricanes, in your own selfishness and addictions. It is always crying out to your heart, and your heart is awake, responding. Seek it and trust it"(May, page 244).