

- **Pope Benedict XVI on Love** - Excerpts from his first Encyclical "On Christian Love"
- **Thoughtful Questions** - questions to ask yourself and to bring to prayer

# CHRISTIAN LOVE

Jerry Johnson

When you hear or see the word "love" what first comes to mind? Do you think emotion or feeling or maybe attraction? If God is truly love as Sacred

Scripture says, what does that say about God's nature? What does it tell us about our creator? To begin with, the word "love" can have many meanings depending on who is doing the defining. There are many aspects of love for us to choose from. So when we see the word "love" in

scripture what does it mean, literally? The Greek language, from which much of our Scripture is translated, has a number of words which we would translate as the word "love". The word "agape" is the word used almost exclusively in the New Testament. Agape love is a total self giving, self sacrificing kind of love. This is the love of God, the love that *is* God. We are created out of that love and for that love. As Christians, we are called to return that love to our heavenly Father and to share that same love with one another. So in reality, what does this *agape* love look like in our lives?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us in paragraph 458 that one of the very reasons that God took on human flesh and became man was so that "we

might know God's love". "...God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" because this is the only way we can truly love as

**"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" 1 John 4:16**

God loves. Paragraph 459 tells us that another reason Jesus was sent was to be our model of holiness. Jesus tells us in John 15:12 to "Love one another as I have loved you". He is our example of

perfect holiness and perfect love. We need only to look at the life of Christ in the Gospels to see what *agape* love looks like. What aspects of that love do we see lived out in Christ's life? Certainly a compassion for others and a desire to heal them both physically and spiritually. He always wanted what was best for the people he came into contact with, although they didn't always recognize or understand what was best for them. An example would be the rich young man who went away sad after Jesus suggested that he sell his belongings and follow him. Christ recognized the priority that riches had in this man's life and wanted to set him free from the slavery of that sin. What is best for us does not always make perfect sense at the time. This is one aspect of love that we don't often like to hear. Hebrews 12:5 tells us "...do not

disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines". As any parent could tell you, discipline can be a very important and necessary act of love. Over and over again Jesus gives us examples of love in the way He treated people. Some we can easily recognize, as when He fed thousands who were hungry. Other actions, such as his angry clearing out of the merchants from the temple, or his chastising of the scribes and Pharisees may not be so easily seen as the acts of love that they were. Who would have thought that the supreme act of love could be the suffering and crucifixion of the God man, Jesus Christ. True love is seldom easy, but always possible with God's grace. More than just a feeling or emotion, it is also an act of the will moved by the Holy Spirit. The question "what would Jesus do?" may sometimes be difficult to answer, but is still the measure by which we can judge our actions and our love for one another. As 1 Cor. 13:8 tells us "love never fails" and it will never fail to bring us closer to God. This is always what is best for us. Growing in communion with the one who is "love". The one who will bring us into His love for all eternity. Thanks be to the God of love!

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert's and catechist for more than 20 years. He chairs the St. Lambert Faith Formation Committee and is currently in the Master Catechist Training program of the diocese.

## Pope Benedict XVI on Love

### Excerpts from his first Encyclical "On Christian Love"

"In the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives. He has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love. God does not demand of us a feeling which we ourselves are incapable of producing. He loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has "loved us first", love can also blossom as a response within us."

"In the gradual unfolding of this encounter, it is clearly revealed that love is not merely a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvellous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love."

"Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the "yes" of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never "finished" and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself."

"Love of neighbour 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."

### Thoughtful Questions

1. Who do I love and why?
2. Whom do I find difficult to love? (pray that Christ might give me the eyes to see them as He sees them)
3. Do my ideas of love come from God through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition or from modern society and the media?

## SACRED SCRIPTURE ON LOVE



*If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. . .*

**-1 Corinthians 13:1-8**

*So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

**-1 Corinthians 13:13**

*'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.*

**-Mark 12:30-31**