

+ J. M. J.

One of my great-aunts lived relatively close to the seminary. I knew that she didn't have anyone to visit her, so every Wednesday night regardless of how much homework I had or whatever else I had to do I would stop by, have dinner with her, and do her grocery shopping. She would tell me about her problems and worries, sometimes several times. The funny thing was that as trying as these visits could be sometimes on my patience I began to look forward more and more to them. I was on a thirty day silent retreat when I learned that my great aunt died, and for the rest of the retreat I meditated on love.

St. Paul's list of the attributes of love reads like a litany. "**Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous,**" etc. That list culminates in the truth simply stated, "**Love never fails.**" Love is an absolute. It has always existed, it is more real than any of the other realities we face daily, and everything else is in relation to it. That means that love in our lives can ask more and more of us to the point that we give our lives for it. That is because love itself even transcends death, a truth that in the depths of our being we know. Intuitively a mother spares nothing to give life to her children. Our greatest works of literature are about someone giving his life for a friend.

As Jesus preached in Nazareth those who heard him were amazed at his words. Love has a couple of facets to it. One is this quality that draws us to another person because somehow that person pleases us. That though grows as we are interested in discovering the depths of the other, and there is an infinite depth to each person because we each have an immortal soul. We seek the good of that person over even our own good and our selfish desires which are inevitably mixed in with love at the beginning must be purged away. Jesus challenges the affection that his neighbors have for him. He is inviting them to the next level. Unfortunately there is the real temptation to take an easier, safer route and to turn away because the cost is too high. Love has to be purified because there is the danger that in loving another we are in love with some image of we would like the other person to be. We though, are to love that person, not an image.

Jesus came for the purpose of revealing how much God who is love loves us. In his final discourse Jesus tells us **“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”** (John 15:13). Jesus loves us immensely and he loves us for exactly who we are. For that reason he does everything for us, even becoming man so that in dying for our sins and rising we can have eternal life. Truly Jesus does lay down his life because as we hear in the Gospel before it is his appointed time he is able to simply pass through the midst of the people. It is so that he may continue to preach and work on their hearts and get them to accept him for who he is.

It is through our vocation, through children, through the people they we may not especially like that we learn to love. Jesus taught us even to love our enemies. The rhythm of our lives is a constant invitation to give more of ourselves. Out of love we have to say no to certain things and set boundaries. Out of love we need to share spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy with our spouse even when we do not feel like it. It is when we are selfish and worry about ourselves that we stagnate. When we think of the other before ourselves, we begin to experience a freedom and a joy that is counterintuitive to everything the world would have us know.

Ironically, it is in the face of separation and ultimately death that the depth of love we have begins to take focus. Separation and death have no power over love because love transcends them. When Jesus rose from the dead, love conquered death. It is that supernatural love which is the divine life of God within us that causes us to rise from the dead at our deaths, which is why we are called to a life of love and a life of charity. It is love that causes two souls separated by distance or time to be more closely united through prayer than if they were in the same room. It is in Eucharist that we can see the physical embodiment of love, love that bonds us to those who now stand before Christ in heaven, whose body we eat.

Today Christ challenges us to grow in love just as he challenged his neighbors in Nazareth. Take then a moment to examine all of our relationships and meditate on where Christ is asking us to grow.

**“Love is patient, love is kind.**

**It is not jealous, it 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.”**

May God bless you.