

GOD IS LOVE

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Mother of God Prayer Meeting

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God **IS** love (1 Jn 4:16) - the only attribute with which God is *defined* in such an absolute way. Love sums up all his other attributes. It is the deepest essence of who God is; it speaks of him more clearly than any other characteristic.

What does it mean that God is love? Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9). Not just "as much as" but "*as*." How has the Father loved Jesus? By completely pouring himself out for his Son in infinite self-emptying love, for all eternity. It is this eternal drama of love that was *made flesh* in space and time by Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). This is the mystery at the heart of who God is.

God's love is one with all his other attributes:

His love is *infinite* - it is total, never half-hearted, never conditional, never measured. An example: my mother will soon be donating her kidney to my cousin who has diabetes. When I asked her, Has he gotten over his alcoholism? She said, I don't know. She doesn't even know whether he has gotten his act together yet or not. Not only that, but she is willing to follow through her act of love by moving to New Hampshire to care for him because his own mother no longer can. The one-time act of self-donation is not enough - she wants to make sure it has its complete effect in him so that he can live a full life. She is risking a diminished life (and possible death) for someone whom many would say doesn't deserve it - yet this is only a pale reflection of God's love for us! God never says, "Shape up, kid, or forget it."

His love is *unchanging* - it is never affected by our response or by circumstances. When I was preparing for my first vow of consecration to the Lord (January 1997), I began to experience different forms of attack (self-pity, a sense of failure, irritation toward others, etc.). Finally I recognized that this was a manifestation of God's love for me. None of this sin was a surprise to him! He knew it was there all along, and had already atoned for it by the cross. His only desire was to deliver me from everything that would keep me from being fully united with him, by allowing me to see it so I could repent for it.

His love is *all-pure*, it is not mixed with any selfish motives, it is never tainted by the slightest resentment or pettiness. One time when I was praying, I suddenly experienced the Lord's tender love for each of us in the Community. I had a clear sense of how incredibly close he was to each person as they went about their day, how much he was caring for the needs of each and longing to draw each to himself.

His love is *faithful*, it is totally committed, passionately caring about our response (Jer 31:3). What truly faithful husband or wife would be indifferent as to whether their love was requited? It is in the nature of love, even selfless love, to desire a response on the part of the beloved. "God loves us just as we are, and he loves us too much to let us stay that way."

His love is *wise*, knowing exactly what is best for us. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was" (Jn 11:5f). Why would he do that? Sometimes it seems obvious to us what is the best way for God to show his love in a situation, but he sees further than we and loves us too much to simply go along with our wishes. Jesus wanted so much more for Lazarus than simply physical well-being; he wanted to give him resurrected life! But at first they were unable to see that.

His love is *humble*, enduring our coldness, our mistrust, our rejection. The Lord is attentive to us at every moment of every day, yet how little attentive we are to him. St. Francis used to weep his heart out because "Love is not loved."

What a privilege it is that we can know these truths, so we can stand on them, rest in them! We don't have to be dominated by circumstances, plundered by Satan, or carried away by runaway thoughts. Example: in the midst of my "eye crisis" in Italy, when I was in intense pain, afraid all my hopes and dreams were coming to an end, unable to read or study, I felt shattered like a piece of pottery. One day, I went into a little church to pray, and just sang and praised the Lord with all my heart for a couple of hours. It has never been so hard to praise him, yet I knew that it was a grace to be able to stand on the truth of God's unchanging goodness, love and majesty. This is our inheritance!

Our response

First, God's love *always precedes us*. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). One time when I began a retreat, and I was all fired up to pray, fast, discern, etc., the director said very simply: "Let Jesus love you." It was exactly what I needed to hear.

"We have been given two assurances in life: that we are infinitely loved, and that we have the capacity to love infinitely." We are being called to enter into unlimited love, which is all-consuming. We are to let love take over our life so that every thought, word, action, emotion, are in Jesus and for him through the Holy Spirit. We are to *become love*, just as God is. What else could it mean to "participate in the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4)? We can't do it - but God can! We just need to take small steps into that love, and desire to know and participate in it in the deepest possible way. Let's not sell ourselves short!

How? The first and most important step is to *know and believe* the love God has for us. "So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16). How easy it is to doubt! We've all had experiences of being disappointed by human love, when someone fell short of what we expected in their love. Human beings are imperfect, but Jesus' love is so perfect, so total, so completely committed, never failing or disappointing in any way. If we think he has let us down, it is only our limited vision.

How could the Father not want us to know his love? I used to think that somehow it was more heroic to become holy without experiencing God's love, which I thought of as a "warm fuzzy." One of the biggest healings in my life was when I came to know that God *wants us* to experience his love - this is the only way we can become holy. It is much deeper than a warm fuzzy. The paradox is that we can only know it when we recognize our own poverty. The next step is to *abide in* that love, to drink it in every day, e.g., "sunbathing" in the presence of the Lord. "Love is the answer to all our problems" - *God's* love, if we abide in it.

Three possible responses

1. to turn away. The rich young man (Mk 10:17-22) missed the look of love on the face of Christ. He was preoccupied with doing the right thing, and with worldly possessions.
2. to mix doubt and faith. Martha and Mary said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn 11:21, 32). You can hear the disappointment, almost the reproach, in their voices. How painful it is when we are misunderstood. How much more wounding to God, who does and allows everything in our lives out of most pure love, when we doubt and mistrust him.
3. to abandon ourselves to him. St. Gertrude is a great example of that. She experienced extraordinary graces of the Lord's presence and the sweetness of his love, yet she always recognized that this was never because she deserved it. The more she recognized her unworthiness, the more she abandoned herself with limitless confidence that Jesus would continue pouring out graces on her. Jesus taught her that the only thing that distressed him was when she began to put a limit on his generosity - to doubt his love because of her own sins.

"One day when she was out walking, she said to the Lord in great dejection: 'I deem it the greatest of your miracles, Lord, that the earth does not refuse to bear such an unworthy sinner as myself!' The Lord, who exalts the humble, deigned in his kindness to be touched by these words, and replied: 'The earth bears you gladly, while the heavens in all their immensity, in a mighty surge of exaltation, dance for joy, awaiting the hour when they shall have the honor of receiving you.'"

These words will only become life if we take them to our prayer and scripture reading, ask the Lord to give us *personal* revelation. From theory to reality - like the scent of wine on someone's breath vs. drinking wine.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you recall some significant moments in your life when God brought you to a sudden new awareness of his love? Is that awareness still alive in you? If it is not, ask the Lord (persistently!) to renew it in you.
2. Can you think of a "dying Lazarus" situation in your life, i.e., a situation in which you were (or are) tempted to distrust the Lord's love and doubt his sovereignty? How can you take this as an opportunity to abandon yourself more deeply to him?
3. Ponder Mk 10:17-22. Spend some time in prayer seeking to see the Lord's look of love. What might Jesus be asking you to let go of that keeps you from noticing that look?
4. In Jn 15:9 Jesus tells us to *abide in his love*. In the very next verse he tells us how to do that. What does he mean? Meditate on these verses and try to live them intently for one day (or two, or eight...). What results do you notice?
5. Look up some of the [scriptures](#) and "take them into your day." What revelation about himself is God giving you through one of these?
6. **Some scriptures about God's love**

[Ex 34:6-7](#)
[Ps 136](#)
[Ps 145:8-9](#)
[Song 8:6-7](#)
[Is 43:3-7](#)
[Is 54:8](#)

[Jer 9:24](#)
[Jer 31:3](#)
[Hos 2:19](#)
[Jn 11:5f](#)
[Jn 15:9-13](#)
[Rom 5:5](#)

[Rom 8:35](#)
[Eph 2:4-7](#)
[1 Jn 3:1](#)
[1 Jn 4:10, 16](#)
(see also the *Catechism*,
par. [218-21](#))

7.

[NCCB/USCC](#)

- New American [Bible](#) Online
- [Catechism](#)