



UP TO THE SOURCE

MONTHLY WORDS

October: *Love—a Gift and a Task*



The second word in our celebration of St. John Paul II's centenary is "love." Work was the first one. Why do we start with them? Work and love are the two key dimensions in our life journey. According to Genesis, through them we are images of God, called to become his friends and collaborators in his amazing design.

Visit our St. John Paul II web page at smarylittleton.org/stjohnpaul2.

St. John Paul II said once that when he was a young priest, he “learned to love human love.” He admired it as he accompanied many young adults and couples. As he wrote, “if one loves human love, there naturally arises the need to commit oneself completely to the service of *fair love*, because love is fair, it is beautiful.” For that reason, from the beginning of his priesthood, he devoted himself to the service of the family. John Paul II was certain that “young people are always searching for the beauty in love. If they give in to weakness (...), in the depths of their hearts they still desire a beautiful and pure love.”

Love: a Gift and a Task, a Passion and an Action

What is love? In his second account of creation, the book of Genesis explains that Adam in paradise was not content. He had received a wonderful body and world from God, he had beautiful places, plants and animals..., but he was alone. He needed an “adequate help.” God then sent a deep sleep upon him and formed Eve from his side. Adam was then filled with surprise and joy: “This at last!” Was Adam content after that? Many blessings come from Eve’s presence, but also many challenges. Adam encountered someone who was not like him, someone who, although complementary and of the same dignity, was radically different: she was someone who saw the world from a completely different perspective and opened new horizons for him.

The beauty manifested in the sexual difference does not leave us indifferent. It is like an arrow that wounds our heart. When someone “falls in love,” he experiences an invisible presence of the beloved within him, in his heart, in his thoughts, and everywhere in his life. From this passion of love, which is an interior presence, something we experience and suffer, we may be called to the action of love: to will the good of the beloved and to concretely pursue that relationship.

The journey from the passion of love to the actions of love is long and difficult. It is not enough to love! We need to love in the truth. It is necessary to learn to love and to grow in virtues, which are the strategies of love. In the words of John Paul II, “love is not something that is learned, and yet there is nothing else as important to learn!”

We need the virtue of true love, the integration of our sexuality and of all our energies and capacities to love, which is called “chastity”, an intelligent love. True love is an affirmation of the person, integrating physical attraction and affections. It accepts no use of the other, nor any reduction of the other according to our feelings. When our love integrates our whole person, we can say to our beloved: “It is good that you exist.”

From Conjugal Love to Conjugal Charity

Spouses are “the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross.” Their own life, their joys and struggles constantly bring us back to Calvary, to Jesus’ death and future resurrection. As John Paul II explains, “the marriage of baptized persons becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ.” When we see a married couple, we remember the faithful and fruitful love of Christ (and of God) for us.

But there is more. Through marriage, “the Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us”. Marriage is not only a symbol of Christ’s amazing love. Marriage is the actualization, the “happening” of this divine love in the world. This is possible because through the Holy Spirit, “conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity”. In other words, the love of the spouses is transformed into charity. Their limited human love is now charity. What is charity? Beneficence? It is much more. It includes beneficence as an exterior manifestation, but charity is friendship with God; it is the love of God dwelling in us and moving us to love our spouse with the very same Holy Spirit that moved Jesus Christ. Conjugal charity is “the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross.”

Through this special grace, when the spouses love each other, they are not just communicating their human love, but they are giving and receiving the love of God, the fire of the Holy Spirit that transforms them into friends of God. Can you imagine something higher? This is conjugal charity: to live their friendship with God in their conjugal friendship. Through the sacrament of marriage they are sharers in the suffering love and in the salvation of Jesus.

Reflections on True Love

1. Which are the enemies of true love? Some are more evident (lust, mistrust, selfishness, using the other for my benefit, counting the cost...). Others are more subtle and insidious: a love without truth (relativism, cynicism), a love with excuses (mediocrity), being opinionated, thinking only in terms of me, isolation from other couples, a love that only gives but never receives.
2. Consider the virtues of love: intelligent love, gratitude, mutual appreciation, constant forgiveness, magnanimity, faithfulness, patience, perseverance, surprising love, long-suffering love (longanimity), creativity, humility...

Practices:

1. Plan a celebration with your children, to share stories of your courtship and engagement.
2. Exercise daily forgiveness (asking for forgiveness and offering it).
3. Consider a relationship in your life that is suffering and can be renewed through prayer and reaching out.
4. Start a “Gratitude journal” for your spouse, parents, children.
5. Our love needs a rule and a community: reach out to a couple or a friend that maybe struggling in their love.

To Know More

- K. Wojtyla - St. John Paul II, Love and Responsibility
- K. Wojtyla - St. John Paul II, The Jeweler's Shop
- St. John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio
- St. John Paul II, Letter to Families
- C. Anderson, J. Granados, Called to Love

Prayer

May the Virgin Mary, who is the Mother of the Church, also be the Mother of "the Church of the home." Thanks to her motherly aid, may each Christian family really become a "little Church" in which the mystery of the Church of Christ is mirrored and given new life. May she, the Handmaid of the Lord, be an example of humble and generous acceptance of the will of God. May she, the Sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, comfort the sufferings and dry the tears of those in distress because of the difficulties of their families.

May Christ the Lord, the Universal King, the King of Families, be present in every Christian home as He was at Cana, bestowing light, joy, serenity and strength. On the solemn day dedicated to His Kingship I beg of Him that every family may generously make its own contribution to the coming of His Kingdom in the world—"a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace," [183] towards which history is journeying.

Familiaris consortio, 86



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