

Voluntas Dei Institute

“It Is Possible to Get Along with Others”

Lesson: January 2018

To Love Oneself, Unconditional Acceptance of Others, and To Respect the Liberty of Others (pp 36-48)

“Love the Author of Freedom”

Opening: John 15:11-17

Jesus said, “I have told you all this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves because a slave does not know what the master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.”

Introduction:

These three topics are interrelated and can be nicely woven together. This guide will offer a variety of reflections based on the text and connected to similar themes. It is best to read Fr. Parent’s text first and then engage with these reflections.

Ultimately, we are challenged to consider the power of love to set us free – free to be ourselves; free to live with and beyond our limitations; free to accept others and to be accepted; free to live in God’s presence.

To be seen...

In his book, *The Yellow Brick Road*, Fr. William Bausch tells a story along these lines. A young girl, an only child, is taken to a nice French restaurant by her parents who likewise host another couple. As the waiter begins to take the order he asks the young girl what she would like. “A hot dog,” she responds. Her mother quickly reprimands her, “They don’t have any hot dogs here. Have the chicken cordon bleu.” After taking all of the other orders, the waiter returns to the young girl saying, “I’m sorry, I have forgotten what you would like.” She replied, “Sir, I would really like a hot dog.” To this the waiter says, “Then mademoiselle, you will have a hot dog.” Turning then to her mother, the excited girl exclaims, “Mommy he sees me and he thinks that I am real!”

Often we struggle with love – love of self and others – because of the people who first love us and teach us to love – our parents. While they often set out to be “perfect parents” (a problem in itself) ultimately they will have to settle to be “good enough.” Often wanting the best for their child, they seek to make the child like themselves, in their own image. In their responsibility to form the child, love quite frequently comes with some conditions. Perhaps now and then they offer a sign of unconditional love, however the child will often be suspicious of the generosity. We then, too often, believe that God works in the same kind of way.

Love means allowing each child to be and become his or her own authentic self. This means seeing them not in the parents' image, but as one who is created in a greater image, the image of God. Love means to see the other as other, and to see the other as real. Love means to give the child freedom.

Loving the difference...

As Fr. Parent recognizes, quite often we “unconsciously wish the other to be the same as we are” (p. 40). This comes from what we have learned as children and from insecurities we have learned along the way.

Andres Nygren wrote a famous book *Agapé and Eros*. He identifies the two loves as a kind of selfless charity and self-interested love. Often in Christian spirituality we wage a kind of war between disinterested charity and a caring for others that gives us pleasure. Building on C.S. Lewis' four loves, the Dominican Donald Goergen writes of the five loves – self, friendship, community, ministry, and prayer (the love of God). All these loves mutually influence and condition one another; not like rungs on a ladder, but more like gears in a machine. What he writes of friendship is particularly helpful.

Goergen recognizes four stages in friendship with the first being a “falling in love.” We are attracted to the other by likeness. Next comes “jealousy” or the recognition of real difference between us. The third stage consists of “reconciliation.” This, I see, as “accepting the truth of the relationship.” Can we accept the other who is different? Can we build a relationship that doesn't demand the other to change? The fourth stage is a commitment to the relationship – to continue or to walk away. The choice to continue leads to genuine love. Such a love can place us in the presence of the Holy One – a living of the difference between Creator and creature.

This takes us back to Fr. Parent who notes that in accepting others and diverse personalities we can recognize some remarkable similarities – first the paradox that we are both different! Coming to feel OK about the difference can then open one to become “intoxicated with the other's good qualities” (p. 44). Here we find new freedom.

When we can recognize the good qualities of another, especially when some of these qualities are different than our own, we can move beyond valuing others because they are like us. We can move beyond our need to change others – something that always offends and is always impossible. Rather than feeling a need to provide all kinds of helpful advice, we can be quite comfortable in providing information. Fr. Parent notes, “to leave to others their liberty is to set ourselves free” (p. 47).

All of this, of course, rests on the interplay of self-acceptance and the acceptance of others. As Fr. Parent puts it, this reflects the mutual interaction of recognizing the treasures of others and recognizing our own treasures. Robert Wicks, *Touching the Holy*, reminds us “God creates people with inherent value.” He offers the insight of Professor Anthony Hoekema that the Christian life is not just believing something about Christ; it is also a belief about self.

To close, two additional observations from Wicks. With regard to a poor self-concept he quotes Anthony De Mello.

Why is everyone here so happy except me?

Because they have learned to see goodness and beauty everywhere, said the Master.

Why don't I see goodness and beauty everywhere?

Because you cannot see outside of you what you fail to see inside, said the Master.

For the second observation, Wicks quotes a contemporary African catechism:

Why did God make you?

Well, God thought you just might like it.

Created in the divine image we are meant to enjoy creation, as God does, in all of its diverse beauty and goodness.

Discussion Questions:

How might “seeing others and thinking that they are real” be part of the practice of the “three fives?”

Suggest some practical examples or personal experience.

What might this mean in terms of seeing the goodness and qualities of others?

Can one really become “intoxicated with the other’s good qualities?”

Robert Wicks writes that we fear unconditional love more than rejection. What do you think he means by this? Why might this be the case?

Robert Wicks draws on Professor Hoekema regarding a statement of Christian faith, “Having a proper Christian self-image, therefore is an aspect of our Christian faith. Conversely, failing to see ourselves as new creatures in Christ is a denial of our faith” (p. 106). What do you understand as a proper Christian self-image? What does it mean/look like to be a “new creature in Christ?”

What do you see as the difference between advice and information? How do the dynamics of giving advice and providing information differ?

What do you see as the relationship between love and freedom?

How does allowing others to be free enhance one’s own freedom?

Closing Prayer:

Let us pray that God’s will might be accomplished in us...

Our Father...

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