

FAITH AND LITERATURE

Love grows only through love

We are in the mid-800s when an English poet wrote: "If you have to love me, do it for nothing but love." This is Elizabeth Barrett Browning and this is the sonnet XIV found in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850).

The poet asked her beloved husband Robert not to base his love on what is fleeting: her smile, her way of speaking, her gaze... but to love her only for love.

If we read this request with a Catholic gaze there would really be much to think about.

Can a love based only on feelings and physical attraction last forever? No. Feelings come and go, physical beauty fades. No relationship can be eternal if it is not based on Love par excellence: Christ Jesus. He taught us to love in total fullness of our being so as to give ourselves totally, without asking for anything.

This is fundamental in married life. Looking at the other with eyes of faith, as one to love and cherish, a complementary part of oneself. Patience, understanding, joy and everything becomes the fruit of love.



The couple's relationship becomes a journey where together one improves and learns how to love. That is how love matures, by making those who love mature and taking ever stronger roots in the Word of God.

Loving is not simple. I mean loving for real. We are human beings and we are often taken by selfish feelings and we seek perfection only in the other. But if we dwelt a second longer on what we seek, we would realize that, what we often pretend of others is missing in us. We tend to ask those around us to be perfect, when we should strive for perfection together.

This is why it is essential to always stay in contact with God: the sacraments, the Word and prayer keep us anchored to him and thus never to lose that perspective of faith that leads you to see the image of God himself in the other. Love grows only through love and finds fulfillment in it. It makes us a One while remaining in our diversity, it maintains a lively and ever new marriage, projecting our life together into "a love eternity".

Valeria Nisticò

Be as amazed... as God

Jesus is God. Yet he manages to be amazed. He knows the Father from eternity - and, in truth, no one knows the Father except him, who therefore remains the only one that can truly reveal him - and yet manages to marvel at what He accomplishes over time, on earth and in the history of men. Wonder fills him to the point that it emerges on his lips, dressed in praise: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will" (Gospel according to Matthew 11, 25-26).

The ability to praise, rejoice and exult in the depths of the soul for what God does every day is typical of whoever remains as a child before Him, capable of welcoming his novelty without preconceptions, without thinking of having already understood everything about Him. That is why, it is typical of God and of Christ. After all, Jesus always remains as a child before the Father: he remains the Son. He knows the Father and yet remains eternally thirsty of knowing him; he knows that everything has been given and will eternally be given him by Him. The Christian faith is entirely contained in this relationship between a Father and a Son, who give each other reciprocally and always know each other again, through the Holy Spirit. Baptism immersed us in this very dynamic of love and knowledge, of life exchange - a wonderful, surprising exchange, Saint Augustine would say (admirabile commercium, an admirable exchange).

Where there is true faith there is no habit or monotony and there is no room for habitua-

tion. Faith is newness, newness of life and knowledge, joy of discovering yourself daily again, differently and as always, loved and saved (Psalm 51, 14), accepting Jesus' invitation to get converted and believe in the Gospel and walking in the new way of the Commandments and Beatitudes. But this, if we always remain simple and as small children, willing to let ourselves be amazed by the Lord who reveals himself daily, through his Word and also in the apparently insignificant circumstances of our existence, and accompanies us. On the contrary, if we become "grand", if we think we already know everything about him or are already morally perfect and holy, if we think we can dominate his Revelation with our mind, the amazement disappears and our faith and our announcement of the Gospel become arid, monotonous and stale.

Then, let us ask the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Redemption "for the grace of amazement before the God of surprises. [...] She is the mother and regenerates the wonder of faith in her children, for faith is an encounter and not a religion. [...] The Church too needs to renew the amazement of being the abode of the living God, Bride of the Lord and Mother who generates children. Otherwise, she risks resembling a beautiful museum from the past. The "Church museum". Our Lady, instead, brings into the Church the home atmosphere, that of a house inhabited by the God of novelty. Let us welcome with amazement the mystery of the Mother of God [...]. Let us allow ourselves to be looked at, be embraced and be taken by the hand by her" (Pope Francis, January 1st Homily, 2019).

Father Davide Marino

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FOR A LOVE WITHOUT BORDERS

Reflections starting from the Message of H.H. Francis
in view of the 4th World Day of the Poor (15.11.2020)

The title and leitmotif of Pope Francis' Message, in view of the next World Day of the Poor, to be held in November, are taken from the Book of Sirach: "To the poor man also extend your hand" (cf. Sir 7, 32). Words full of meaning that resonate today as a clear invitation "to focus our gaze on the essentials and overcome the barriers of indifference" (Message).

At the heart of the Pope's speech the value and dignity of the human person, beyond skin colour, origins, ethnic, cultural and religious differences emerge: "The Word of God goes beyond space, time, religions and cultures. The generosity that sustains the weak, consoles the afflicted, soothes suffering, restores dignity to those who are deprived of it, is a condition for a fully human life" (Message). This principle makes us aware of the fact that we cannot focus our attention only on the religious aspect, leaving aside taking care of the poor, whoever he is. Attention to the person, as the Pope claims, cannot be conditioned by "private interests", "pastoral or social projects disincarnated" from history (see Message).

The Pope also addressed words full of gratitude to all those who, engaged in different sectors (health, volunteering, etc.), in this pandemic time knew how to "reach out" to those who found themselves in a situation of suffering and necessity.

This was and is the authentic sign of charity, an unmistakable demonstration that in this world there is - as is often thought - only evil and violence, on the contrary there are many men and women who offer every day, with their lives, a great example capable of generating so much good and becoming models for many other people. The Pope notes that the advent of Covid-19 has certainly generated "a great sense of disorientation and helplessness", a clear symptom of our unpreparedness for dealing with global dimensions problems. This is the reason why, the Pontiff states, "you cannot be improvised as an instrument of mercy. Daily training is needed, starting from the awareness of how much we first need a hand stretched towards us".

This is a nice principle to understand that mercy is not something that arises from a quick improvisation, but on the contrary, as for any other Gospel truth to be incarnated, daily spiritual training is required. Only then does each virtue becomes the fruit of a training which, in any circumstance of life, might be put at the service of men and history.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Redemption, that all men may understand the dignity and value of every human person, so that each person becomes a true instrument of divine mercy.

Father Felice Raffaele

The
Lord's Day
ROMAN RITE

SUCH HAS BEEN YOUR GRACIOUS WILL
(XIV Sunday O.T. Year A)

HE SHALL PROCLAIM PEACE TO THE NATIONS (Zech 9: 9-10)

The prophet Zechariah sees his king entering Jerusalem in the guise of a humble, meek man sitting on a foal. It is an image that excludes every will of domination, conquest, war, struggle, blood shedding, slavery and submission. He comes like a king of peace. He is peace and peace is in Him. He is accessed through faith in his Word. One becomes the peace of his peace, letting be transformed from the Holy Spirit in the waters of Baptism. Having become one thing, a single life with him, we are in him and we are in peace. We get out of Him we return into the ancient enmity with God and creation, aggravated by our non-willingness to remain in Christ, to form with him a single body of peace and eternal life. But his is a special peace. It is a peace that does not free from suffering because it is peace that can take any suffering and turn it into a sacrifice of salvation and redemption.

BUT YOU ARE NOT IN THE FLESH
(Rm 8, 9, 11-13)

Before baptism, man is under the yoke of the slavery of sin and death. He cannot but produce fruits according to the flesh. In baptism, he is free from the dominion of the flesh. He dies to what he was and is born or rises under the dominion of the Holy Spirit, to live according to the Spirit. But if the resurrected to spiritual life does not walk from Word to Word, from truth to truth, dwelling in the Word and truth, the aggressive agents of flesh who are vice and sin come to his conquest and will easily drag him again under the dominion of

evil. The Spirit weakens and the flesh is strengthened. The Spirit grows, the flesh weakens and the Spirit lives. This is the spiritual path of the disciple of Jesus: growing boundlessly in the Holy Spirit so that the flesh always remains sleeping in him without it being able to manifest itself in its power of death and destruction of the spiritual man.

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU
(Mt 11: 25-30)

With Jesus, one must pass from the old law to the new, from the old yoke to the new. The new yoke and the new law is the Word of Jesus, it is his Speech on the Mount. The Gospel must not be seen as an unbearable burden, but as the sweetest will of God, that asks us to manifest to every man all the beauty and holiness of his love, his truth and his justice. Then, the yoke is not a duty to be fulfilled. But it is a service to be given to God in his favour. The Lord asks his disciple to be placed in the service of the Father's glory. The world does not know who the Father is and the disciple must reveal him in his truth, becoming true in body and soul, in spirit and his entire being. He must reveal him in his holiness and the disciple must be holy in all his work. He must manifest him as most pure light and the Christian must illuminate the world with his light. Being a service designed to manifest the glory of the Lord, if it is lived with love, it becomes very light. Love is never heavy. Non-love is heavy. Love is never heavy, for true love is an ever new gift poured into us by the Holy Spirit.

by the theologian,
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