

Week beginning 26th April Do you know how loved you are?

Few of us have experienced unconditional love. Within the human context, there is always some kind of price to pay. Rightly or wrongly we feel we must earn or merit the love of others. It is no easy art, to do the loving thing. The profound poet Rainer Maria Rilke was well aware of this truth.

For one human being to love another human being:

That is perhaps

The most difficult task that has been entrusted to us,

The ultimate task, the final test and proof,

The work for which all work is merely preparation.

Loving God and loving another have much in common. 'The love with which God loves us,' preached St. Augustine 'is the same love with which we love one another.' He also insisted in his well-known, pithy phrase, *noverim me, noverim te*, that our knowledge and love of ourselves was a dimension of our knowledge and love of God. Because of the distrust and fear that grips our anxious hearts, we rarely surrender to true love. Older Catholics, especially, tend to haggle and bargain through their prayers, penances and good deeds, so as to demand, deserve or barter for divine forgiveness, unconditional acceptance and ultimate salvation. It takes a special grace to undo the fear-filled damage to our bodies and souls arising from the instilled anxiety, in childhood, about judgement and punishment. . .

This grace of unconditional love is always available to us, always freely offered by the God who is in love with us. The grateful acceptance of the reality changes everything. It is something like what happens when we fall in love-only more so. God's crazy infatuation with us, we can never lose. All we have to do is believe in it . . . The ceaseless calling of God's ecstatic desire for us will transform our often barren hearts, souls and bodies – our very lives - into unimaginable power and beauty. And we need images and symbols to help us understand the mystery of God's love for us. Incarnation's revelation is a song to be sung, a poem to be recited, a new language to be 'learned by heart'.

'It is very important to understand that love is another fundamental means of cognition and a 'language' in its own right. Thus did Pascal enunciate his famous motto, 'the heart has reasons that reason does not understand' and insist that one must distinguish between the *esprit de geometrie* (objective, measurable, knowledge of the head) and the *esprit de finesse* (heart-language and heart-thinking) . . . which can bring us to the beating heart of reality, to the tabernacle of our being, the Inner Christ.' (Peter de Coppens)

Once we draw near to that 'beating heart of reality, to the tabernacle of our being, the Inner Christ,' then our tendencies to judge and condemn, to worry about past hurts and future disasters, begin to loosen their grasp on us. Because fear and guilt cannot co-exist with love we become a new creation. We reflect and shine with the light of God in whom we live and move and have our very being. We grow beautiful before ourselves and others. And the good news of this reflection is that this 'little' miracle often happens quite suddenly.

(Travelling Light pp 85, 86,87)

Follow-up - If you would like to explore mindful meditation, try this simple daily praxis:

Let every intake of breath in your prayer today be a welcome to the unconditional love of God. Try to feel, in your body, the sensation of divine loving and delight. As you breathe out, give back that compassion to the whole world. Regularly and quietly, let the awareness of being nurtured by the arms and heart of God become stronger and more vibrant in your very bones and muscles, in your eyes and face. You may struggle with this exercise; you may doubt the truth or wonder about its efficacy. But these temptations are to be gently set aside. We are assured by Jesus of God's unwavering and life-giving devotion to each one of us. Also, during the course of the day, create regular 'trigger moments' to be mindful of the constant embrace of our Tremendous Lover . . . These 'mindfulness moments' for you might be occasions such as leaving the house, before eating the evening meal, on awakening or simply before going to sleep. Just a mindful pause, three breaths, an awareness of angels.