

This reflection is an extract from Episode 1 of 'An Astonishing Secret – The Love Story of Creation and the Wonder of You' video course, therefore please read as if being spoken.

**Daniel's reflection for week beginning 10th January
- Love changes everything**

'Love changes everything'. Your heart must surrender to love before your life is transformed. It is the experience of unconditional love that empowers you and blesses what you do.

Pope Francis says:

'God loves us first beyond each person faults of failings. . . We are drawn by the attraction of his (Jesus) life.' Pope Francis

Pope Francis is talking here about the unconditional love of God - how do I understand this more deeply? A lot of us are unfamiliar with this. We would have been brought up with a much tighter understanding of a judge for God, of a watchful God. The idea of having an unconditional lover as our God is new to many people because of what we were taught when we were small.

We are drawn by the *attraction* of God's love. Notice the words Pope Francis uses - attraction, enchantment and fascination. He wants our hearts involved as well as our heads. He is talking about the *experience* of love, the *experience* of grace, not just reciting the creed, not just knowing the catechism or doctrine that we learned by heart when we were small. Waiting to be confirmed, small, the Bishop used to come and examine us on the catechism. It had nothing whatsoever to do with the condition of our hearts and the flow of love through us and around us. We will be touching on experiencing Grace and experienced our freedom every moment of every day. It's a great feeling to know we don't ever disappoint God; God is never angry with us.

Fr Herbert McCabe, the Dominican, wrote

'God is helplessly and hopelessly in love with us. He does not care whether we are sinners or not. That makes no difference to him. We should not be deluded into thinking that we can merit our salvation, earn it, deserve it, win it. We cannot ever change God's mind about us. He is simply in love with us always. What God does again and again is change our minds about him. That is what our forgiveness is. We are not forgiven because we confess our sins. We confess our sins because we are already and always forgiven. And we gather to celebrate that freedom.'

Do you believe that? Again, many of us, especially Roman Catholics and some other denominations, were told a different story. Images of an angry, punitive, threatening God makes it so hard for us to trust God. Especially if you feel you've been betrayed by a friend or by God.

Again, Franciscan Richard Rohr tells us, 'There is nothing we can do to make God love us more all of us less.'

We cannot earn God's unconditional love, we cannot deserve it, we cannot improve ourselves into it we cannot win it. It is given. It is pure gift. All we have to do is say 'yes' and 'yes' and 'yes' again! It is only something we can gratefully accept.

When we are in the presence of true love, we are in the Real Presence of God. In fact, that true love IS the very incarnate presence of God. We do not have to struggle to find this presence because

we're already in it. In fact, we are the very incarnation of God's love – a love that lives in every breath we take. Every heartbeat means that God is choosing us now, and now, again and again. Listen to your heart – put your hand over your heart, feel your pulse; being aware of God's heart beating in your heart is a most beautiful prayer!

So that's the question I'm asking you - are you REALLY convinced that love is the core of your life, that the world is a web of love? That we cannot escape it. Because we ARE it! Our very daily life is already divine.

(An Astonishing Secret video course can be accessed at <https://astonishingsecret.org>

A DVD set of the video course can be obtained from Pauline Books and Media

<https://www.paulineuk.org/browse/dvds/item/astonishing-secret/5031446770610>)

