

# **The secret of love**

"God wants us to be friends of His friends and we can be so, if we are interiorly close to them... The world expects the testimony of Christian love that is inspired in faith. In our world, often so dark, the love of God shines with this love."

**The Holy Father writes about how it is through love that we experience God through love of our children, love of a spouse, and especially in being loving toward those whom we find difficult.**

His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, presented his first letter to the world on January 25, 2006. He also prepared an overview of that encyclical, here are excerpts.

I only wished to respond to a couple of very concrete questions for Christian life. The first question is: Is it possible to love God? More than that: Can love be something that is obligatory? Is it not a feeling that one has or does not have?

The answer is: Yes, we can love God, given that He has not remained at an unreachable distance but has entered and enters into our lives. He comes to meet each one of us – in the sacraments through which He acts in our lives; with the faith of the Church, through which He addresses us, making us meet with men touched by Him, who transmit light to us; with dispositions through which He intervenes in our lives; and also with the signs of the creation He has given us.

Not only has He offered us love. Above all He lived it first and knocks on the door of our hearts in many ways to elicit our response of love. Love is not only a feeling; to it also belong the will and the intelligence. With His Word, God addresses our intelligence, our will and our feelings, so that we may learn to love Him "with our whole heart and our whole soul."

We do not find love suddenly, all ready. Rather, it matures. We can learn to love gradually, so that love will involve all our strength and will open the way to an honest life.

The second question is: Can we really love our "neighbor" when he is strange or even disagreeable? Yes, we can, if we are God's friends, if we are Christ's friends and, in this way, it becomes ever clearer that He has loved and loves us, though we often turn our gaze from Him and live according to other criteria. If, instead, friendship with God becomes for us something ever more important and decisive, then we will begin to love those whom God loves and who are in need of us. God wants us to be friends of His friends and we can be so, if we are interiorly close to them.

Finally, this question: With her commandments and prohibitions, does not the Church embitter the joy of "eros," of feeling ourselves loved, which pushes us toward the other and seeks to be transformed into union?

The most profound promise of "eros" can nature only when we do not seek transitory and sudden happiness alone. On the contrary, together we find the patience to discover the other increasingly in the depth of his person, in the totality of body and soul, so that, finally, the other's happiness is more important than our own. Then, we no longer want to receive something but give ourselves and in this liberation from his "I" man finds himself and is filled with joy.

I speak of a journey of purification and maturation necessary so that the true promise of "eros" may be fulfilled. The language of the tradition of the Church has called this process "education in chastity," which, in the end, means nothing other than to learn the totality of love in the patience of growth and maturation.

I talk of charity, in the service of the communal love of the Church toward all who suffer in body or soul and are in need of the gift of love. Two questions arise here above all. First of all, can the Church leave this service to other philanthropic organizations? The answer is no. The church cannot do so. The Church must practice love toward the neighbor including as a community; otherwise, it would proclaim the love of God in an incomplete and insufficient way.

The second question is: Would it not be better to promote an order of justice in which there are no needy, and charity would become something superfluous? The answer is: Undoubtedly the end of politics is to create a just order in society, where what is proper to each one is recognized and where no one suffers from abject poverty. Justice is the true object of politics, as peace cannot exist without justice. By her very nature, the Church does not engage in politics in the first person; rather, she respects the autonomy of the State and of its institutions.

The search for this order of justice corresponds to common reason, just as politics is something that affects all citizens. Often, however, reason is blinded by interests and the will to power. Faith serves to purify reason, so that it may see and decide correctly. Therefore, it is the task of the Church to cure reason and reinforce the will to do good. In this connection, without engaging in politics, the Church participates passionately in the battle for justice. It corresponds to Christians involved in public service to always open, in their political action, new ways for justice. Justice never makes love superfluous. Beyond justice, man will always need love, which alone is able to give a soul to justice. In a world so profoundly wounded, as the one we know in our days, this affirmation does not need to be demonstrated. The world expects the

testimony of Christian love that is inspired in faith.

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Benedict XVI