

GOD IS LOVE

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Foundress

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In St. John's first letter he exclaimed twice, "God is Love" (4:8:16). St. John, the beloved disciple - who intimately partook in the mystery of love in the Heart of the God-made-man, who heard Love beating from Christ's Heart as he rested his head upon Christ's chest in the Cenacle - wanted to testify to men this great mystery of God: God is Love!



According to a certain tradition, as time passed, the teaching of this Apostle daily became simpler; he spoke only of the love of God. About this reality one of his disciples complained to him and asked, "Why do you not speak about anything else?" St. John responded, "Because there is nothing more important than to proclaim, 'God is Love!'" Why did St. John consider this as most important? The apostle explained it to St. Gertrude in an apparition: "It is necessary to scream out to the whole world that God is Love... because a world that so easily declines in God's love can only be renewed, be raised from its lethargy, be restored from its ruin, and be inflamed in the fire of Divine Love when it knows the greatness of this love."

THE LOVE OF GOD IS A MYSTERY

The love of God is a mystery. Perhaps it is the most profound, the most immeasurable, and the most incomprehensible, for it deals with the very essence of God: God is Love! It is an unfathomable love because its depth is something no one can fully probe. It has a height no one can fully climb. It has a length and a width no one is capable of measuring completely. God is love; His essence is love. It is not just that He loves us, but rather, that He is Love. Everything that emanates from Him is love; there is nothing in Him that is not love; His being is Love; all his interior activity is love; all His external acts are love. My brothers and sisters, God does not do any other thing than Love...and Love to the extreme. He loves infinitely, He loves immutably, He loves eternally, and He loves faithfully and mercifully.

This love is the ultimate cause of everything that exists. This love is the ultimate cause of everything that occurs...it is the ultimate cause of our existence. That is why after the human heart makes so many turns in search of happiness and fulfillment - like the Israelites in the desert - the human heart finally realizes, like they did, that the Promised Land is so close. It is so close because man's happiness and fulfillment is to know that he is loved by God. Man's happiness is to know that he is loved by his Father and his Creator.

Even if we are unable to penetrate this mystery totally, God does want us to know that we are loved. This knowledge causes a profound healing in the heart of man. Knowing and living in this Love of God is the fulfillment of the human heart. As St. Paul prays in Ephesians, "that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:17-19). Only in God and in the intimate knowledge of His love does man find his peace. Only in this love does man find his peace, his self-fulfillment, his plenitude, his most profound rest. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of Matthew, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (11:28).

St. Augustine prayed, "Oh God, you have made us for thyself alone, and our hearts will remain restless until they rest in thee" (Confessions. Book I, Ch. I). In all his writings St. Augustine asked the question of how man could find the true happiness he so desires. After much thought and many different paths, St. Augustine concluded that the happiness of the human heart lies in discovering God and knowing that God is Love...and that God loves him. And this love, this love of God, this Eternal love, this imperishable love is the only love that is capable of guaranteeing man his happiness because it is the only love that excludes all fear of losing the beloved. It is the only guarantee of man's happiness because man always fears losing his beloved. And the only love that excludes all fear of losing the beloved is the love of God. That is why, after St. John tells us twice in the same chapter of his first letter that God is love, he next gives us these words: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet made perfect in love" (4:18).

Like St. John, His Holiness John Paul II, from the first day of his pontificate (of which we will celebrate 25 years this year; let us give thank to the Holy Spirit for these 25 years), when he came out on the balcony of the Vatican to wave at the people of God, exclaimed, **"DO NOT BE AFRAID! Open wide the doors of your hearts to the redemptive love of Christ!"** (October 22, 1978). This "Do Not Be Afraid" of his Holiness has been his continuous call. For the past twenty-five years he has repeated it so many times, like an echo: DO NOT BE AFRAID! And why does the Pope repeat DO NOT BE AFRAID so many times? Because God is love and fear cannot be part of God's love. Man should not be afraid, says the Pope. Man should not be afraid because he has a Father that loves Him, because he has a Father that loves him to the point of giving His only Son to save him.

The Holy Father tells us in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, **"Be Not Afraid...All have a need to hear these words: each person, each family, all peoples and nations of the whole world"** (cf. p. 221). It is **necessary**, we are told by the Pope that "conscience needs to grow in the certainty that Someone exists who holds in His hands the destiny of this passing world...Someone who is the Alpha and the Omega of human history - be it the individual or collective history. And this Someone is Love" (ibid, 222). **And because He is Love, His Holiness tells us, He is the only one - attention - the only one who can say to us with a guarantee, "DO NOT BE AFRAID!"** (ibid.).

GOD' S LOVE GUARANTEE'S MAN'S HAPPINESS

The Love of God is the guarantee of man's happiness. St. Augustine tells us in his *Confessions*, **"The more I enter into you my Lord...with my whole being, there will no longer be any sadness nor trials for me, and my life, all full of you, will be fulfilled."** (cf.) It is the Love of God that allows the human heart to find its rest, its healing, its restoration. There is a reason why Psalm 62 tells us, **"Rest only in God my soul because He is your only hope"** (vs. 6). The love of God is a love that removes fear. This is not the fear that we sometimes experience for a moment; no, it removes the fear that is deep within the heart of man. The Holy Father describes this fear: **"The man of today feels justified in experiencing fear by the very things that he himself has created, by what he himself has produced...and which have become every day more dangerous to himself"** (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, 15).

Yes brothers and sisters, if the Holy Father has been telling us for twenty-five years, "Be Not Afraid," it is because contemporary humanity is afraid. It is afraid of itself. It is afraid of having constructed a world without God, a world without His love. A world without God and His love has grave consequences. We have separated ourselves from the Love of God, brothers and sisters. And when we separate ourselves from the love of God, we lose, says the Pope, the axis of our existence, and everything turns into chaos (RH, 15-16).

A few weeks ago I was reading a news article that was speaking about a concern of many well-recognized scientists throughout the world. Most of the astronomers throughout the world have said that there exists a great possibility of a meteor hitting the earth. In this article they explained the catastrophe that would result if a meteor hit some part of the planet. And with alarming words they said, "It would be chaos; the human destruction would be incalculable; it would be a catastrophe with such impact that it could take the earth out of its orbit, and it would bring indescribable consequences."

I read this article, and, with the seriousness that this requires, I directed myself towards the Lord and said, "My God, we are so afraid that a meteor may fall upon us and take us out of our orbit. Yet, today's humanity and civilization has been hit with a worse meteor that has already taken us out of our orbit: the great crisis of faith and abandonment of God and His Love!" Brothers and sisters, already we have been taken out of our orbit; our orbit is God. We have separated ourselves from the love of God, and all of humanity has been wiped away by the consequences of this lack of love - because only God is Love and only in God are we able to love. We have separated ourselves from the love of God; we have left the House of the Father believing that we could survive without Him. And now we have to pick up the ruins...the painful ruins of broken hearts, of separated families, of divided families, of divorced couples, of societies without morals, of nations living in hate. How is it possible for man today not to be afraid if, as we are told by the Holy Father, "he is afraid of what he himself has caused" (RH, 15)? Man today is afraid to see what he is capable of being and doing without God.

Three days ago we heard in the news that a mother entered her apartment and found her three children decapitated. One hears this news, brothers and sisters, and we are afraid of what man is capable of doing! We have seen the concentration camps. We have seen the massacres in Africa, and we are afraid of what man can do. We have seen the terrorists' attempts, and we are afraid of what man can do. Man without God can do all of this because the love of God does not live in him!

The only solution, the only answer to the devastation of our civilization, the only healing and restoration possible for our modern day culture, is to recognize that we have a Father that loves us and that He is always ready - because He is a faithful and Merciful Father - to accept the prodigal son back home, the home of His Heart! My brothers and sisters, the only solution is that we give our heart to the Heart of the Father -

repentant - like prodigal sons to receive the embrace of the Father. He is the only One who can, as He did in the beginning of Creation, blow the Holy Spirit in us so that, in the midst of all the world's chaos, order may enter! "The earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss...then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:2-3). And everything began to have order.

"Do Not Be Afraid!" the Holy Father loudly cries. 'Do Not Be Afraid' of what modern man has created. 'Be Not Afraid' because our civilization's crisis of love can be healed by the love of God. The wounds of the hearts of families, societies and nations can be healed by the love of God. Brothers and sisters, our era has revealed the highest statistic rates of depression, anguish, panic attacks, and anxiety. It is so horrible how much our brothers and sisters suffer with these panics, with these fears. All of this depression that manifests itself, with few exceptions, is a product of some deep fear hidden in the hearts of men. All the sorrow of our contemporary society is the result of one thing: we have profaned the word "love." It is a profanity because when man - who has been created by Love, who has been created to love, who has been created to be the reflection of the love of God - separates himself from God and does not allow himself to remain in God (who is the fountain of Love); he then loses his capacity to love, and, worse still, he tramples on the gift of love. Only in God can we love because "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 Jn 4:16), and "apart from Him we can do nothing" (cf. Jn 15:5).

ONLY THE LOVE OF GOD HEALS THE WOUNDS IN THE HEART OF MAN

His Holiness told us in the year 2001, "Yes the love of God renews all things; it is a love that embraces all men, and embraces the entire man. It is a love that changes sorrow into joy, darkness into light, death into life. In a world tainted by the wounds of loneliness, by the wounds of suffering, fear and anguish, may God's love, truth, and warmth shine" (cf. Message to the Congregation of the Sons of Merciful Love, Aug. 11). Why? Because only by knowing that God is love and that He loves us will the wounds in the heart of man be healed.

THE LOVE OF GOD RESTORES AND HEALS THE WOUNDS BECAUSE IT IS:

1. INFINITE

Why? Because God is infinite Love. Write this down: "The characteristics of the love of God...God is infinite love." And why does His infinite love heal us? Well, brothers and sisters, because so much fear has been caused by the selfishness that limits love. "I will love you...until death do us part." What beautiful words are pronounced in the marriage vows! "I will love you, and until death do us part." The limit of this covenant is death.

But today's world finds that limits are much shorter and more vain; they are moved by pure selfishness: "I will love you while you are healthy...I will love you while I like what you cook for me...I will love you until I find someone I like more...I will love you if my commitment is not a sacrifice...I will live my vows (and this applies to all vocations) as long as I am not asked for something that costs me." It is such a limited love. Today's man is wounded, and these deep wounds can only be healed by the Love of the Heart of God, because His Love is infinite. In other words, it has no limits! It is a love without conditions, without frontiers, without divisions, without limits; it has no end. It is infinite because it is the fullness of love - total and absolute. It is a love that is for each and every one of us. It is infinite in its universality because it encompasses all men equally, and it is also infinite because it is for each person in particular. It is infinite because it encompasses you. St. Thomas of Villanova said to the Lord, "You surpass all barriers in loving me, Oh my God. What should I return to you for so much love? You have made all in number, weight and measure, but you have loved us without using number, weight or measure."

2. ETERNAL

The Love of God is Eternal. So much fear is found in the human heart when it sees that love has been changed into something so ephemeral and of such a short duration. "Forever." The "forever" we used to say seems to have disappeared from human lips and hearts. To say "forever" seems like too big a commitment. And my brothers and sisters, the human heart suffers such anguish not knowing - spouses not knowing if their husband or wife will be there next month; people not knowing if friends will be there tomorrow; parents not knowing if their children will be there or if they will leave when they discipline them; children not knowing if they will have parents with whom to play or to live. Oh my brothers and sisters, the lack of being able to see love as something that lasts "forever" has wounded our ability to trust, has wounded our capacity to give ourselves fully. For we are afraid to give ourselves away to someone that we do not know with certainty will be there tomorrow. Love requires perseverance, for only with time can we test if love is forever - and will be there forever. How restful it is for our hearts to know that we are loved forever. This is why the only love that heals us is the love of God because the love of God is eternal; the love of God is outside of time; the love of God has no past or future; it is an eternal present; it has no beginning or end; it is without succession; it does not change. It is always...always...always there for us. He has always loved us. And brothers and sisters, if we truly

think about this our hearts will be moved. God has loved us eternally. Before creating anything, He already loved us. Before we existed, He loved us. The prophet Jeremiah tells us, **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...and before you were born, I dedicated you"** (1:5)...**"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you"** (31:3). Brothers and sisters, we do not have to be afraid; we have always been and are loved eternally! He will love us forever; He will be next to us forever, and so He tells us, **"I will be with you until the end of time"** (cf. Mt 28:20).

3. IMMUTABLE

God's Love is an immutable love...in other words, it does not change. How quickly - and this is why we are so wounded brothers and sisters - how quickly is human love transformed into envy and even hate. (Do we not see it in divorce courts when those who swore to love each other forever are fighting? When those who swore that they would share all of their goods forever now fight in court to see who keeps more money?) How quickly do sentiments change. All of a sudden your business partner is your enemy...your brother...your neighbor...brothers and sisters from prayer groups...even the person you swore to love forever is your enemy. How quickly love changes to hate. We do not see the change in our sentiments. We judge people good when they do us good, but they are problematic if they cause us problems. Persons are seen as beautiful if they treat us beautifully. Have we not seen love convert to hate? When, because of envy, my best friend stops being my friend? When we live in fear, trying to appear to be something or someone so that people will treat me according to how they see me?

And yet, the Love of God is immutable, meaning it never changes; it does not alter; it does not decrease. Instead, it is stable and constant. It does not change according to how we respond. It is so difficult for us to understand this dimension of God's love because we are not like this. How difficult it is to comprehend that God never avenges our wrongs. His love does not depend upon our goodness or our actions in order to be good with us. He is never disillusioned with our weaknesses. On the contrary, He comes and saves us with His strength. He never separates Himself from us when we offend Him. He is not cold with us. He does not count the bad. He never abandons us...even when we abandon Him. This stability, this infinite and eternal stability, is His immutability. It is a love that never changes; it is above our inconstancies, our sins and our infidelities. And it is this stable love that heals the heart of man. Song of Songs says, **"For stern as death is love...Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away"** (8:6-7). In Isaiah the Lord tells us, **"Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, My love shall never leave you"** (54:10). And does not St. Teresa of Avila exhort us to trust in that immutability of God? **"Let nothing disturb you; let nothing frighten you. Everything passes. God never changes"** (from a poem found in her prayer book).

4. FAITHFUL

It is a faithful love. Is not human infidelity one of the greatest causes of sorrow in the human heart? My brothers and sisters, is not true love tested during difficulties, on the cross, in temptations, and in inconvenient situations? Is not love's fidelity tested when it requires of me a personal sacrifice to continue loving? Well many are not passing the test. At the very first moment of difficulty, they abandon their commitment to love.

Oh brothers and sisters, how much it hurts to feel abandoned by one's loved ones. Infidelity wounds and it is an even greater wound when one tries to justify it - when infidelity is justified with another love. And the Lord knows of this double wound. In Jeremiah 2 we read, **"Two evils have my people done: they have forsaken me - the source of living waters; and they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water"** (vs.13). Infidelity is so painful. Infidelity is so painful at a moment of weakness, at a moment of illness. How many spouses - because they are no longer as agile, beautiful, or handsome - are abandoned? Or what about the friend who stops being my friend because I have no more money; or elderly parents abandoned because they are a nuisance; or children who are rejected or aborted because they will change their parents lives; or the sick we want to disconnect from nutritional provisions because their life is a burden?

Yet, the Love of God is faithful. And we so need to recognize the greatness of a love that is faithful. In Exodus Moses invoked the Lord and He exclaimed, **"The Lord, your God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, continuing his steadfast love for a thousand generations"** (cf. 34:6). The love of God is faithful forever and under any circumstance. He does not abandon us even in the midst of our abandonment of Him. He is not unfaithful in spite of our infidelities. The more we distance ourselves from Him, the more He comes to draw us to Himself. The more we get lost, the more He comes to seek us. When we are wounded, He comes to heal us. When we are oppressed, He comes to liberate us. When we want to let go, He comes and binds us with strings of Love. Is this not the story of salvation, the revelation of a faithful and merciful Love of the Father for His children? And even in spite of receiving so much love, do we not see that, even since the time of Genesis, humanity rebels, forgets and separates itself from this Love? Yet the Father never abandons us; He does not settle for having lost his children. The Father profoundly suffers

for our rebelliousness and our infidelity; He suffers because He loves us. But His love is infinite, perfect and merciful; and that is why the more we distance ourselves, the more He seeks us, attracting us to His love.

The Father's love is so great that He says, "When Israel was a child I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me...Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks; Yet, though I stooped to feed my child, they did not know that I was their healer...How could I give you up, O Ephraim, or deliver you up, O Israel?" (Hos 11:1-4,8). **God is saying to Israel and to us, "I am your Father."** His love is so faithful that, despite the constant breaking of His covenants, God wants to make Israel "His spouse." **He wants to unite himself to His people with strings of perfect fidelity. In Hosea the Lord says, "I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you to me in justice and right, in love and compassion, I will espouse you to me in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord" (2:21-22). "Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death, but helped all men to seek and find you" (Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer IV).**

5. MERCIFUL LOVE

God's love is a merciful Love. God's love is not afraid of weakness, which is one of the greatest fears of our time. That is why John Paul II is a great witness; he presents himself to the world as weak - weak in what the world wants to see. The world considers him fragile. Is it not scary for us to have others discover our frailties, our incompetence, our limits or our weaknesses? Why are we afraid? We are afraid that it will be immediately utilized against us; it will be slapped in our face. We are afraid they will criticize our weakness and no one will help us to overcome them. We live in a very hard era. It is hard because it is hard on whom it wishes and extremely flexible with whom it wishes. That is why justice in our era is not truly justice; it is not being regulated by an authentic mercy. Our era lives in a crisis of mercy; it propagates a false mercy. Everything is permitted; everyone is free to do what they want; it is not necessary to place norms or restrictions. But as soon as something is done to us or someone falls that we do not believe could or should have fallen, then all the forces of the world come against the other to squash and irremediably condemn; we make sure we judge and submerge him or her forever. What a paradox!

My brothers and sisters, it would seem that during these times everyone is vigilant to see the faults and weakness of others. Pastors and leaders of communities come to mind. Many times I have spoken with priests and asked them, "What has been the greatest sorrow in your years as a priest?" All have said the same thing to me: "the weight that, no matter what I do, there will always be faithful who will criticize something." We should instead be praying for them! Brothers and sisters, if the priest kneels, it is because he kneeled; if he does not kneel, then it is because he does not kneel; if he sings, he sings; and if he does not sing, he does not! We should stop this hardness of heart! Man's justice is so hard because it has no mercy. David said, "I am in great anguish. It is better to fall into the hands of Yahweh, who is merciful, than to fall into the hands of men" (cf. 2 Sam 24:14). That is how it feels in our world today. We applaud permissiveness, we exalt an immoral life, but when someone falls that we believe should not have fallen, he or she is exposed on the front page of every newspaper in the world.

However, God's love is merciful; He is "slow to anger and rich in mercy" (Neh 9:17; Ex 34:6; Num 14:18; Ps: 86:16; 103:8; 145:8; Wis 15:1; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). **God is Love (1 Jn 4:8), and when He gives Himself to man who is sinful, weak and miserable, this love becomes mercy. The love that touches man is mercy. When God is loving man, the action of God loving him is mercy! JP II said in his encyclical *Dives in misericordia* that mercy is love's second name (no.7). The Holy Father said that this mercy is both maternal in character, born from a "maternal womb" (Is 49:15), and paternal, born from the heart of a Father" (no.15). St. Francis de Sales explains that "If God had not created man He would still indeed have been perfect in goodness, but He would not have been actually merciful, since mercy can only be exercised toward the miserable...Our misery is the throne of God's mercy" (Spiritual Conferences, conference ii). We need so much to know that we have a Merciful Father so we can rest, rest in the reality, brothers and sisters, that we are weak, that we are fragile. Let us not pretend to be something else because it is not true. I can rest in knowing that my reality is that I am a sinner, that I am fragile, that I am weak. But here is where the loving mercy of the Father is made manifest. For our weakness is not an impediment to his love, rather it is just the opposite: the more misery, the more Mercy. Jesus told St. Faustina that **human misery is not an obstacle to His Mercy: "My daughter, write that the greater the misery of a soul, the greater its right to My mercy; [urge] all souls to trust in the unfathomable abyss of My mercy" (Diary, 1182).****

Was not the revelation of God's mercy given to St. Faustina at the same time World War II was taking place... in the midst of man's sinfulness...as an example of the Father's love? Did it not take place in Krakow just a few kilometers from concentration camps? Where sin and darkness abounds, grace and the merciful love of God abounds all the more (Rom 5:20). **"Tell [all people], My daughter, that I am Love and Mercy itself" (Diary, 1074).**

My brothers and sisters, how much we need to be healed. We have such hardness in our hearts; we say that whatever weakness we have is a title, a label for us. We need to go to the Father's Heart who will take us in that misery - but then He lifts us up...because He never leaves us in our misery. It is love that heals, and it heals the wounds of the heart caused by today's world.

God the Father says: **"I wish the world would know my Mercy.** He says this to today's humanity, a generation that has desired to turn from God and is in great part submerged in sin; to us who bring so many wounds in our hearts caused by our own hardness or by the hardness of others; to a generation that has grown cold to His Mercy. He tells us, **"Let the sinner not be afraid to approach Me. The flames of mercy are burning Me - clamoring to be spent; I want to pour them out upon these souls"** (Diary, 50)...**"My mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world"** (D. 1484)...**"I desire that the whole world know my infinite mercy. I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those souls who trust in my Mercy"** (D. 687)...**"Encourage souls to place great trust in My fathomless mercy. Let the weak, sinful soul have no fear to approach Me, for even if it had more sins than there are grains of sand in the world, all would be drowned in the immeasurable depths of My mercy"** (Diary, 1059). Let us not be afraid to throw our faults, our past sins, our wounds, and our anguish in the merciful love of God. St. Therese would say: **"When we throw our faults, with a total filial confidence, in the devouring flame of love, how will they not be completely consumed?"** (Letter of June 6, 1897).

IT IS LOVE OF A FATHER THAT NEVER FORGETS HIS CHILDREN

God loves us with the heart of a Father. Isaiah 9 gives Him the title He always had - Father (vs.5). It is a love that is paternal, and His paternity is from always and forever. He loves us with a paternal love like the first letter of John says, **"So much has the Father loved us that He has called us children of God, and so we are"** (cf. 1 Jn, 3:1).

Being our Father, having created us for love and making us in His image and likeness, He has constantly suffered over the fact that we constantly abandon Him. He suffers the loss of His children, who are seduced by His enemy; they mistrust His love and His wisdom. That is why we hear so often in Scripture how the Father cares for us and warns us that there exists a thief who wants to steal us and separate us from His paternal love. Yet, each time that man abandons the Father, the Father comes in search of His children.

About two or three days ago the gospel was John 17, and I was moved when I heard the priest proclaim Christ's priestly prayer. Jesus says, **"Father, in your name I have taken care of those you gave me"** (cf. 11-12). Look at what Jesus and the Father were saying to each other. It means that before Jesus came here to earth the Father said to Him, **"Watch them as I have guarded them."** And now Jesus is reporting to His Father: **"Father, I have guarded them."** Jesus, the Face and Heart of the Father took care of us. What love! It is a love of a Father who cares for His children with great tenderness, who sympathizes from the depths of His being for His children, like Isaiah 49:15-16 says, **"Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name."**

A FATHER THAT COMES IN SEARCH OF HIS LOST CHILDREN

Brothers and sisters...He is a Father that always goes in search of His children. And His Holiness John Paul II tells us in Tertio Millenium Adveniente, **"In Jesus Christ God not only speaks to man but also seeks him out...It is a search which begins in the heart of God and culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. If God goes in search of man, created in his own image and likeness, he does so because he loves him eternally...God seeks man out, moved by his fatherly heart"** (no.7). Why does He look for him? Because man has turned away from Him. Man has allowed himself to be misled by God's enemy. So God looks for man through the Son; God wants to induce him to leave his evil ways - ways into which he tends to delve deeper and deeper. Making man abandon evil means to defeat the evil that has been extended in human history. The defeat of evil - this is Redemption! Therefore, John Paul II says that God goes in search of man because man has lost Him, and He is not resigned to losing His children - the children He Loves!

STORY OF A FATHER WHO LOOKS FOR HIS SON

I read in Scott Hahn's book, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises* (pg 13-14), a beautiful story that is appropriate for the message that I want to transmit. It occurred in Armenia in 1989. There was a terrible earthquake; in seconds the city was flattened. The people were confused, and all of a sudden they saw this man in anguish. The man was running like a crazy person through the streets. They asked him where he was going. He was going to the school where his son was. They asked him to stop. And he said that he could not. He said, **"When my son was born I made him a promise...I promised that no matter what happened, I would always be by his side."** As he ran he only remembered the promise he made to his son. The man reached the school and all that was left, brothers and sisters, was ruins. The building had completely crumbled. The man, with his paternal love, began to excavate the ruins with his own bare hands. He dug and dug and dug, removing bricks, stones,

walls, rocks. The people who came by stared at him as if he was crazy. "What person could possibly be alive in that place completely destroyed?" The father would not listen to their arguments. He told them, "You can either argue or help me." The few who decided to help soon became tired and gave up. But the man kept digging...because he had promised his son that he would never leave him. Hours passed...12...18...24...36 hours...and the father continued. At the 36th hour, he finally heard a noise, and he yelled, "Armando! Armando!" And a very fragile voice was heard from the ruins that cried out, "Daddy...Daddy." The man, with the little strength he had left, lifted a huge obstacle and screamed, "Armando! Armando!" Then he pulled out his son. Then the son, with the little strength he had left, helped his father pull out, one by one from the darkness, the trembling voices of the other classmates still in the ruins. One by one he pulled them out: 14 of the 33 classmates survived. When they were all out Armando told his classmates, "You see, I told you, I told you ...my Father would not forget us!"

Brothers and sisters, this is the kind of trust that we should have: Armando's faith in his Father that believes He will be there even if earthquakes should come. Yesterday a movie came out about a wave that covers cities. Come whatever may come; even if we are in ruins, our Father will not forget us! Because this is the kind of Father we have. He loves us in such a way that He sends His only Son to save us.

THE FATHER LOVES US IN SUCH A WAY

St. John tells us in his Gospel, "For God so loved the world" (3:16); in other words, we must know how the Father loved the world. "So loved" is like saying He loves us to the extreme..."For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

One day I read a story, one of those stories that are spread through the internet. When I began to read it, brothers and sisters, I could not detain my tears. It caused me great pain, and it allowed me to capture a glance of what the Father feels. I will explain it to you as quickly as possible. But I want you to hear it from the point of view of a father or mother's heart.

One day the news surges in the whole world that a terrible epidemic has begun to develop in a town in India. No one pays much attention to it, but a few days later the newspapers announce that millions of people have died in India and that contamination has already spread to other countries.

Personnel from the United States Center for Control of Infectious Diseases travel to India to investigate this epidemic, which they have called the "mysterious influenza." Soon, before the negative results of the experts, the European countries decide to close all their borders and cancel all flights that have contact with the affected countries. But it is too late; the news reports that a woman died in a French hospital with the epidemic. A few days later the epidemic has spread throughout Europe. Immediately, the United States closes its borders and stops all international flights.

The whole world enters into a state of panic and the epidemic quickly invades the United States and spreads throughout the whole world. Even the smallest neighborhood in the world is alarmed by the fear of this illness. Unceasingly, all the scientists of the world try to find an antidote that might cure the illness. All efforts are in vain. Suddenly, a group of scientists are able to decipher the DNA code of the virus in order to prepare the cure for the virus. But to prepare the cure they need blood that is pure, blood that has not been infected by the virus. All of the hospitals place an ordinance that everyone who is not sick must do a blood test.

A man comes as a volunteer with his family, asking himself, "where will all this end up?" When he is at the hospital he hears them call out a name; to his astonishment it is the name of his youngest son. The boy grabs his father's pants and says, "Daddy, No, No, No...I am afraid." But the father tells him, "Do Not Be Afraid...they are only going to do a test." They take the boy's blood and they discover that the boy has pure blood; they found the blood to make the antidote. In 5 minutes the doctors return to the father and tell him, "Your son's blood is clear; it is perfect for the antidote and to eradicate the mysterious influenza."

The news spreads everywhere; people cheer, laugh and pray with joy. Yet, the doctor approaches the father once again and tells him, "I need you to sign the authorization to draw your son's blood." As he reads the contract the father realizes that the line where it said the amount of blood is blank. So the father asks the doctor, "Why is it blank?" And the doctor tells him, "We did not think that it was going to be a boy; we were not ready for this but...we will need to draw it all."

The father cannot believe what he is hearing. He cannot contain the tears, and he says, "No, he is my son." But the doctor insists, "Do you understand many lives will be saved...the whole world will be saved; we need it all." The father asks, "Can't we give him a blood transfusion?" But the doctor says, no, because all bloods are contaminated; and he continues to insist him to sign because the whole world needs his son's blood. In silence and trembling, barely able to hold the pen, the father, knowing that he is sacrificing his son...signs. The doctor asks him if he wants to spend a few minutes alone with his son. He walks towards the emergency room where

his son is sitting on a bed. The father comes close to speak with his son. The son is there asking his father, "What is happening daddy?...I am afraid." The father takes his son's hand and tells him that he loves him, and now more than ever. He tells him, "Do Not Be Afraid...I will always be with you." At that moment the doctor arrives. He asks the father to leave, for they must begin the process since everyone in the world is dying. He takes the father out...and the father must turn his back on his son and leave him. As they are taking the son away, the son yells desperately, "Daddy, daddy why are you leaving me...why are you abandoning me?"

The boy gives all of his blood...

A week later they have a ceremony to celebrate and honor the boy. Yet the father observes that very few people attend. Some do not go because they prefer to sleep-in late; others because they went fishing; others because they were going to watch a football game. Some do attend but they are distracted. Still others go but with a fake smile, acting as if they cared. So the father goes in the midst of all those people and starts shouting, "My son...my son was the one who died for you. He died so that you could all be saved. How is it possible that you do not care?"

I think brothers and sisters that this is how the Father feels; perhaps this is what He would like to say to us now. I think this is how the Father felt when, in the movie The Passion, Jesus expired and we see a tear fall down from heaven; it is the Father's tear. He has loved us so much that He gave us the blood of His Son to take away the sickness of our heart. He has loved us in such a way that He gave His only Son.

God is Love! God is Love! If that does not move us, brothers and sisters, nothing will move us. If that does not heal our hearts there is no psychologist that will be able to heal it. If knowing that you are loved eternally...infinitely...immutably...faithfully and mercifully does not heal us, what will heal us? If seeing the Father take His scared child in His arms does not heal us, what will heal us?

God is a Father and He is a Father that is Love. And the reason for our existence is to discover this Love. This is man's happiness, this is man's healing, and this is man's fulfillment - to know that God loves him. We must come to know that Love is the one that moves all things, that He is the one who moves our lives, that He is the one who moves our individual histories and the one who moves the history of the world. Let us discover our own history in the light of His Love. Let us bring here today our history - our past, present and future history. Let us bring it to the infinite ocean of His merciful, faithful, infinite, eternal and immutable love. Offer to the Father your miseries. What are your miseries if not a little drop in the ocean of His Merciful Love? God's love is the only one that guarantees happiness to the human heart; He is the only one that can restore all things; He is the only one that can make us capable of resting and trusting. Let us spend our life like St. Mary Magdalene contemplating that love - its breadth, and length, and height, and depth (Eph 3:17-19). And may this contemplation take us to a profound interior healing...because God is Love! And even if we have forgotten Him, even if we might have been unfaithful people - He is Faithful. Even if we might have made thousands of turns having had the Promised Land right before us, even if we have rebelled, even if we might have abandoned Him...He wants us to be His Bride! He is so faithful that no matter what we might have done - or do - God is immutable. He Loves us...always...because His Love is faithful.

And in the end we will say like St. Augustine, "Oh God, you have made us for thyself alone, and our hearts will remain restless until they rest in thee" (Confessions, Book I, Ch. 1).

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