

## LOVE IS THE ESSENCE AND VOCATION OF THE HUMAN HEART

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Foundress

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Talk given by Mother Adela to married couples of the Legatus Organization

### THE HUMAN PERSON IS MADE TO LOVE AND BE LOVED

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*, Servant of God John Paul II stated, "God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being" (no.11).

In his book *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla reminded us of a truth so much forgotten in our times, a truth that reveals the essence of our identity and vocation: "Love is exclusively the portion of human persons" (p. 28). Love is an exclusive reality of the human heart. We were created out of love, and we were created to know love, to live by love, and to communicate it in such a powerful way that it will give life. Just as Saint Maximilian Kolbe always said, "Only love creates."



Love is an exclusive experience of the human person. Of all creation, only the human heart can know love, live by love, and give it generously. Animals, trees, stones, mountains, and oceans are incapable of loving...only persons, only hearts can love. We are capable of love because we are capable of God; we are capable of freely choosing to live according to our dignity as the image and likeness of God. As St. John tells us in chapter four of his first letter, verses 7-8: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love."

As human persons, we have been endowed with the gifts of intelligence and will. We can, with our reason open to the light of faith, understand how wide, how long, and how deep God's love is. We can come to know and believe in the love that God has for us. We can come to know that His love is the source of our lives and the force that moves us to respond to love by loving. By the gift of our wills, we can choose to freely love and to freely live according to our dignity as human persons. The greatest dignity of the human heart is its capacity to freely choose to love. It is your dignity to have been able to choose your husband and your wife and to have chosen because you loved him or her. It is your dignity to continue to choose daily to foster, guard, and nourish the love, the treasure, that was entrusted to you the day you gave your fiat to each other. It is your dignity and responsibility to protect this love from all the interior or exterior forces that oppose and weaken love.

Yes, my brothers and sisters, since only human beings are capable of love, then we are also responsible for allowing love to conquer in our hearts when selfishness invites us to choose the wide path or to run away from the difficulties or the duties that love requires. You have the responsibility to form your hearts for love, to live your marriage in love, to create in your homes living schools of love, and to influence society by building in your own families a civilization of love. In a few words, we are responsible for living out our vocation - that is, to live for love, and to shape our hearts, marriages, families, communities and society for love. You, together with your spouse and your children, are responsible for being witnesses in the heart of the world of a new civilization of love. Just as John Paul II in his Letter to Families stated: "the family is the center and the heart of the civilization of love" (13).

### LOVE IS MEANT TO BE LIVED IN COMMUNION

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (no.18), John Paul II, cites a passage from his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (no. 10): "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."

The human heart was created to love and, therefore, needs to live this vocation in communion with other hearts. John Paul II spoke movingly of the human person's "existential loneliness," based on the passage Genesis 2:18: "it is not good that man should be alone." Adam was the first human person and the only one in creation who could love; this is why the Creator saw that he needed another human heart to give his love to and to relate to him in love. Love is meant to be given and love is meant to be received. Therefore, a communion of hearts is necessary to live out the human vocation to love.

In that same chapter from Genesis, we can see the deep joy and the satisfied longing of Adam's heart expressed in the words that he said upon seeing Eve: "This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my

flesh" (2:23).

We are made to give ourselves to another and to receive another; our very physiological make-up demonstrates this. And this mutual giving and receiving is to be fruitful by bring forth new life. Thus we are all, in the depths of our being, hearts that require a spouse and children for the fulfillment of our being and vocation - whether that spouse be of the natural order and the children be biological children; or the spouse be Christ's, as in the case of religious sisters; or the spouse be the Church, the Bride of Christ, as in the priestly vocation; in the two latter instances one's fatherhood or motherhood is a spiritual one.

Since love is the driving force of human hearts, we can conclude that love unifies persons... love forms communion of hearts. Because the only adequate response toward a human person is love, and the only way to live the vocation of love is in communion with persons, we can only come to fully realize ourselves and discover our identity by giving ourselves to one another in love. This is what John Paul II called the "law of the gift": we become fully ourselves by our self-giving; he who loses his life will find it (cf. Mt. 10:39; 16:25). The realization of the human heart is in loving and in allowing one's heart to have the rhythm and the movement of love. Love has only one movement: outward. Love can only do one thing: give itself. This reminds me of what the Heart of Jesus told St. Margaret Mary in his first apparition to this Visitation nun: "I cannot contain my love, I must give it."

Love is to be given; only then can it really be called love. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friend" (John 15:13). The human heart accomplishes maturity by choosing to give itself in love. "This self gift reveals...a particular characteristic of the essence of the person. When God said: 'it is not good that man should be alone' (Gen 2:18), He affirmed that 'alone,' man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing 'with someone' - and even more deeply and completely - by existing for someone" (John Paul II, General Audience, January 9, 1980).

### **LOVE MUST BE FORMED IN THE SCHOOL OF LOVE: THE FAMILY.**

In his Letter to Families (1994), John Paul II reminded us that the family is the community on which society is founded and that it is by nature linked to the civilization of love.

The civilization of love is distinguished by personalism, which moves the person to become a gift for others and to discover joy in the giving of himself. I sincerely believe that this civilization can only be built upon mature hearts, by a mature humanity, which finds full realization in the unreserved giving of oneself, in the generous and total donation of oneself. For John Paul, this civilization of love, of which the Christian family must be the microcosm, is a counterbalance to the "culture of death and selfishness" so present in our times. The Christian family is called to be the first and most luminous witness to this new civilization of love at the beginning of the Third Millennium.

The human person finds his or her fulfillment only through the love that is best illustrated through familial relationships. John Paul II consistently tells us that for this reason Christ came into the world through means of a family - to show us that this is where love starts. And if love starts in the family, then the family becomes the first school of love - the place, the environment, and the context in which each member can be formed in and also practice the ways of love.

Marriage and family are a school - where persons learn to love and where their hearts can be shaped for love. The family is a school, in the profoundly formative sense, for all members of the family; and true formation must change hearts.

In marriage, learning takes place in the midst of busyness, caretaking, and the noise and routine of daily life with its changing patterns and realities. The couple has many opportunities to grow in all the virtues: patience, kindness, self-denial, sharing of common goods, compassion, forgiving and being forgiven, humility and meekness, the capacity to welcome and to generously let go, the cultivation of a flexible and discerning heart, the ability to work toward reconciliation, the art of expanding circles of care, and the capacity to listen to one another's needs... All of these are part of the art of love.

Indeed, the marriage relationship is most emphatically a school in the sense of being an environment in which the art of love is learned. But in a school we not only learn about things, we learn to do them. The family is a school where love is to be put into action, the material learned is to be practiced...it is the school where love is to be known, recognized and clearly perceived.

### **EDUCATION FOR LOVE**

An important part of this task is educating the children for love: teaching them to care for others, to share, to know love as self-giving according to the Gospel of Christ. Children have to be taught the primacy of love, the values of self-sacrifice and of seeking the common good. The best school for this is a family where parents put this into practice. The children need to learn to revere and welcome new life and to see the joy of openness to life. Children need to see discipline as formation, to be helped so as to become self-disciplined. This must be learned from parents who give example of moderation in all areas, parents who place their priorities in the values of their heart. Children must become tender and compassionate towards others, and that is so easy to imitate when they see parents who cherish each other, who communicate with each other, who share their lives as "one flesh," and as "one heart." Children are to be educated in purity, in pure love... in real, concrete, strong, and pure ways of showing affection. This education for love will form mature and stable personalities, virtuous hearts, loving hearts. Children need to be formed in the "school of the virtues"; therefore, virtues need to be taught, honored and practically lived in the family.

## LOVE MUST BE PUT TO THE TEST AND LOVE MUST CONQUER

"Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion; its flames are a blazing fire. Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away" (Song of Songs 8:6-7). Love is stronger than death.

Love must be put to the test to prove its authenticity. Love must go through the force of winds to prove the strength of its roots. There are many good things that are part of relationships: physical attraction, desire for company, idealized affection, common interests, etc. All of these are good and necessary, but are not the rock upon which a committed love can be based. Love must be based on fidelity, and fidelity is revealed and matured at the foot of the Cross.

Love is a daily conquest. Love is a daily task. Love is a constant choice. Genuine and solid love, authentic love, is never achieved at once. It grows, it matures, it develops by being chosen at all times, and it obtains a particular strength and vigor when it is more difficult to choose it. "Love is never something ready made, something merely 'given' to man and woman, it is always at the same time a 'task' which they are set. Love should be seen as something which in a sense never 'is' but is always only 'becoming', and what it becomes depends upon the contribution of both persons and the depth of their commitment" (Karol Wojtyla, Love and Responsibility, p. 139).

1. Love is put to test when the fire and passion of the beginning seem to have lost some strength, when the sensual and emotional reactions themselves have grown weaker, and when sexual attraction as such has lost some of its effect. That is the time when the inner force of love can become stronger; it is the time when the value of the person and the totality of the heart of the other becomes so visible, so tangible, because the outer self begins wasting away and the inner self is being renewed (2 Cor 4:16). This is the time when the heart of the other is contemplated in a new dimension and from a new angle and when the attention, values, and beauty of the other person's heart become a primary value, become the reason for love, and become its choice.

I have been honored by the Lord to have in our spiritual family a couple who is a witness to this kind of love. Gonzalo and Maira were engaged to be married when Gonzalo had an accident by which he became a paraplegic. When he realized he was paralyzed, he spoke to Maira to release her from her commitment. Maira asked Gonzalo, "Is your heart the same, or has it changed with the accident?" Gonzalo responded to that question by saying that his heart was not only the same but it had learned the value of love and life. Then Maira told him, "I did not fall in love with your body but with your heart." That choice of love has continued for over 13 years, and it has been so fruitful in bringing so many hearts to love the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. They are the leaders of the Marian branch of lay members in the Family of the Two Hearts in their country.

2. Love is also put to the test when one of the spouses fails and when love must choose not to cease loving. The test of that moment calls for one to allow love to triumph over hurt and distrust and to turn it into mercy; it stems from a desire to receive the other back, and requires that one allow the other to enter probably through the same wound that he or she caused (Just like the Pierced Heart of Jesus). The heart of the wounded spouse may experience a desire to abandon the other...to run away...to leave...to withdraw and self-protect; but if he or she chooses to love, he or she will be able say the words of Isaiah 54:7: "for a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back."

John Paul II spoke so beautifully in his book Love and Responsibility about this kind of spousal love: a love which is stronger than human weakness, stronger even than the sin which has injured it; a love that is stronger than the death experienced by the hurt caused by that sin. "The strength of such love emerges most clearly when the beloved person stumbles, when his or her weaknesses or even sins come into the open. One who truly loves does not then withdraw his love, but loves all the more, loves in full consciousness of the other's shortcomings and faults, and without in the least approving of them" (p. 135).

This kind of love is possible, this kind of triumph of love is possible, because it looks deeply at the essential value of the other person. He or she is more than the sin or the fault committed. This is the way God the Father looks at each one of us. This is mercy: to see the fullness of the person and not only the sin or the fault committed, but the totality of the person; the other is much more than his or her sin. To look at a spouse in this way is to see his or her dignity.

To pass this test means that love is stronger than death. I can really say that this would be a great triumph given to love, and that to allow love to triumph in this arduous test would require humility, abnegation, and forgiveness.

3. Love is put to the test through the passing of time. In time, relationships are to grow, mature, and become stronger. But also, in time, if we do not nourish these relationships, they can grow cold by routine, they can become tiresome by the weight of duties, they can become dried out by a lack of attentiveness to water them with affection; they can become distant by taking the presence of the other for granted and not investing time in communicating; they can become stagnant when each one loses interest in pleasing the other; they can become hardened when each closes its heart in self-protection; they can become a battlefield when each one is keeping track of the faults of the other... Time can be a powerful tool for relationships to mature in love, but this requires that both hearts take responsibility not to allow the law of time and decay to extinguish the fire of love. It is your responsibility to continue to make love visible to each other through the passing of time. It is your responsibility to remember that love must be perceived.

## LOVE MUST BE PERCEIVED

If love is the essence of the human heart, it must be lived, and if it is lived, it must be visible and perceptible. Love must be incarnated in the small actions of daily life...Love must be revealed. It must be such a powerful visible reality that it can cause others, beginning with your spouse, to believe in love and in the God who is Love. Love must be recognized by the actions it produces. A spouse must be able to see, to know and to believe that she or he is loved by the other.

Many spouses fall into the great mistake of taking for granted that the other knows that he or she loves them, and they begin to neglect the little details of love which can be expressed in the simplicity of daily life. This lack of showing, in a perceptible way, the love that you hold for one another can become a sharp pain in the spouse's heart.

I invite each one of you to live in profound awareness that love must be visible, love must be perceived, and that failures to love can be healed and restored with simple but clear actions of love.

Do not ever forget that the essence of your existence is love; that the path of living it is a communion of love; that the first place to learn it and practice it is the family; that the way to mature it is faithfulness to it in times of trials; and that the way to manifest it is by making it visible and perceptible to those to whom your love must be revealed.

I would like to conclude by inviting you to keep your eyes fixed upon the reason for your communion - love - and to remember that love grows through love and that love triumphs by choosing freely and constantly to love at all cost.

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