

## Sixth Sunday of Easter – Mothers Day

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Easter / God's Love / [Acts 10:25–48](#); [1 John 4:7–10](#); [John 15:9–17](#)

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What great readings for Mother's Day right? Focused so specifically on our God who IS love and the expressions of God's love that we experience in our lives and relationships. In a very particular way, we experience that love of God through our moms.

The term "love" is quoted approximately four hundred times in the Bible, making it one of the most frequently used terms in the Sacred Scripture. When we talk about love, we really do need to be careful to distinguish between our understanding of love as either rooted in and originating from God or as a concept or feeling that human beings determine for themselves. As human beings, we are built to love and be loved. We need love. And it makes sense that that would be so. As scripture says, God is love. And since you and I are created in the image and likeness of God. We are created by love, in love and for love. Not in the sense that Love is God, that Love is the creator, but instead, in the sense that God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a communion of Love. So that love that God is, is in us by design. [Saint Francis De Sales](#) wrote a beautiful reflection on the [original innocence](#) of man that expresses the above truths of God and us.

*IF there were a man existing in that [original uprightness](#) in which Adam was first created, he would, without any further aid than that which God imparts to all His creatures, incline to love Him above all else, and readily succeed in doing so. He has implanted in man's heart a special natural tendency not merely to love that which is generally good, but specially His Heavenly Goodness, the best of all good things; and were there a man on earth so blessed as I have imagined, God would of His Sovereign Goodness inevitably give him all such aid as was needful to carry out his inclination.* Francis de Sales. (1888). [Of the Love of God](#). (H. L. S. Lear, Trans.) (p. 36). London: Rivingtons.

Unfortunately, our reality is not that of living in original innocence. We are all born suffering the consequences of the [original sin](#). Our human nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin. That means we are not able to experience the fullness of our humanity which necessarily excludes us from the fullness of love. When we choose to persist in this state, everything about us is negatively affected. It becomes impossible for us to know God as God is and therefore, we cannot love as God loves. Over time, as a result, we experience a mere shadow of love. We only know parts separated from the whole. We idolize those individual parts. We raise them up as being all that love is and we then try to build human relationships with types of love that are incomplete or worse, that have become completely unrelated to love in its origins. Such is the sad state of life without relationship with God.

Good news for us though, we are not doomed to life lived in the shadows and brokenness, apart from God and the fullness of life and love. Recall the truth we cling to, as expressed in [Eucharistic Prayer IV](#) which gives a fuller summary of salvation history in the context of the Mass, "And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the domain of death. For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you." In the fullness of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit through baptism we are drawn into the divine life, born again by water and the Holy Spirit, a child of God.

Let's pause here for a moment to reflect on what it means to be a child, a child of God. If we don't understand ourselves to have been created by God as well as how and why it is we can become children of God, then we will never understand why we can't determine for ourselves the meaning of love. First, we must be clear that

although God loves every human being that was, is or will be in the future. But we must also be clear that God's love for all does not make all of children of God. To be a child of God is a particular relationship, just as it is to be a child of your mother and father. Children are those who are born of another naturally or have been adopted into the family just as one who is born naturally into the family. In order to be a child of God, a person must be born of God. We are not born of God in the same way as Jesus, begotten not made. We are re-born of God, born again. Recall paragraph [1213 of the Catechism](#), where the Church teaches us that *“Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission.”*

In this new state of being alive in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, we experience the fullness of love. The love we were made to receive to give. Love one another as God loves, that is no longer impossible for us but is now made possible by God. Having been renewed in God who is love, we can embrace our true nature and seek the Good. We can know, love, and serve God. We can embody this love. We can become images of Christ. Imitate Christ. Put on the mind of Christ. To experience the fullness of who we are, in God. God is Love and so we cannot experience the fullness of that love until we are born again.

We have covered many important points to better understand what it means to say that God is love and how that matters to our ability to understand our own nature and desire to give and receive love. But we also need to reflect on the use of the word love in the Scriptures. The New Testament was written primarily in Greek, which is a much more precise language than English. In the Word of God, we are exposed to [four different ways of speaking of love](#). The last and greatest of which is Agape. The first three are [philia, storge and eros](#). Agape, we're all familiar with from going to church, religious education, from hearing homilies and reading scriptures. Agape is the fullness of love, the of God from which flows the other three expressions. Unfortunately, in our brokenness which breeds a lack of proper understanding we subdivide these expressions of love as though they are independent. We get fixated on one and often make an [idol](#) of the one that appeals to us in our fallen state.

The fullness of the way in which we ought to understand love, as with all other things in creation or having to do with creation, is found in Christ who reveals the Father to us. As we look at Christ, we see that there is love expressed and experienced in friendship. We see this especially, in the relationship between Christ and the ones he chose to follow him. We are also taught by Christ that this love, called by the Greeks, philia, is expressed and experienced in loving your neighbor. It is in this expression of love that we come to understand how we experience our proper freedom. We have the freedom to choose the good. Just as God first chose us and invites us to choose God.

Then we have what is referred to as Eros. This love goes beyond general and appropriate attraction, affection, and friendship. It is the Greek word for the kind of love between man and woman which includes sexual desire. This expression and experience of love, appropriately understood, is essential for the biblically described reason that moves a man and a woman to leave mother and father and become themselves a new family in marriage. It is essential to the way in which God will invite them to forsake all others and to participate with God in the creation of life which is to be appropriately experienced in the intimacy of marriage. The love between them is to become procreative, open to natural children. Interestingly, this is meant to be such a unique expression of love and experienced in very particular circumstances, that the Greek Old Testament uses the word eros only twice, while the New Testament does not use it at all.

The next expression of love articulated in the Greek language of the New Testament, is called Storge. This is expressed and experienced as familial love, affection and fondness found in a special way among family members. This is exemplified in the Holy Family. In our own experience, we might also encounter it among

friends. Friends who become so close that they become like one of the family. Parents demonstrate this kind of love to their children. We form small communities that also reflect this kind of love because these communities are in many ways, familial in nature.

Now we come to that highest form of love from which all other expressions flow. Agape, the kind of love that God is and freely gives to us. It is the love which we are invited to return to God. To love in this way is to selflessly will or effect what is best for another person. To desire for them, the highest good. It is guided by the desire to move the beloved to what is best for him to achieve salvation. It is the fullest experience of love because agape is God's full and unconditional love for human beings. Agape is, we might say, the primal love, a gift-love from the creator and author of all good gifts. I first chose you. I love you. And I invite you to love me fully, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now, having a greater understanding of love, as God made us to express and experience it, we will be better able to recognize the importance of the family, as domestic church, as the fundamental building block of society, as the first school of prayer, as the indispensable communion that must not fail in forming every child in love. The family. Marriage. Father, Mother, Child are an icon of the Trinity. In the ideal, we can also say that a mother in her expression of love in the family, for her children, is itself an icon of God's agape love for us. This is especially clear and true for a mother who has a relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our mothers may not perfectly always exemplify this, but even in the imperfections of our mothers, they desire and strive to love us in this way.

The mother of a friend once told me, and I've since noticed that many mothers have written the same thing; she said I love my children, but I don't always like them. If not for the fullness of love in which we are invited express and experience, then our mothers could just choose to abandon us when they don't like us. They might choose to put their own needs and desires ahead of ours because dealing with us is too much work, not fun, not rewarding. But that's not what we see in a mother. Although she may not like her child at a particular point in time because of their character or behavior. Mom still loves them. Because she is also expressing familial love for them. Often when children do and say the most terrible of things to their moms. Mothers never stop loving them. She is made to love them even during such intense pain. Of course, Mom could stop here. She could just say 'you're dead to me child'. The world wouldn't blame her. Yet, though tempted in her weakness and pain to give up, she can't stop loving us. She cannot deny within herself, from the depths of her being, her love for you. Her agape love for you. The sacrificial love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return. Though we are all called to agape love through Christ's example: *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* ([Ephesians 5:1](#)), it is in a mother's love that we see it most consistently lived.

The love that God has for her. She demonstrates for us. Love that goes beyond I love you because 'I'm your mom'. Mothers express this love for a natural child, an adopted child, a foster child, a spiritual child. In the way that the Father sent his only Son to give his life for us, so too mom will give her life for us. Love serves, love sacrifices. Mom would sacrifice so much and in so many ways for our good, so that we would realize the highest good. How often do moms say? How often do we try to refuse her sacrifice, to reject her gift of this love? And, when we do, when we push back, she pleads with us and speaks to the boundless love that impels her; I just want the best for you. I just want the best for you! Hidden in her plea is her desire for us to know God and to grow into the kind of person who can love fully. The kind of person who knows what that means. Mothers teach us these things. They put their dreams on a shelf sometimes, for the good of the family. In order that the good be realized in each person in the family.

Our mothers, in the way in which they love us, they teach us each of the four loves. They teach us of the love of God. Wrapped in their love is the invitation of God for us to love God as God has loved us. There is a very particular nature to the love of a mother for her children that images for us so well the love of God. For us, the love that he built us to desire that he. Like for him?

When we say God IS love, we are saying that to know God is to know love. If we have been begotten by God, then as the Father loves the Son and the Son loves us, we too can and will love God and others. Just as understanding love is inseparable from understanding God, understanding what it means to be a child of God must be inseparable from love. God wants us, according to the call to Holiness, to be perfect like the Father in heaven to have the mind of Christ. God's love enables us to do what he commands and to remain in him. Let's be careful not to allow ourselves to trivialize the meaning of 'God loves you' / 'God is love'. To meditate on the true nature of God, who is love, is to become profoundly humble before that great gift. It is to recognize that so much of what we hunger and thirst for is in fact the fullness of living in God. If we allow God to satisfy that hunger and thirst, the possibilities for the world and for us are extraordinary. We have an opportunity because the Father sent his son. Born of that love we have an opportunity, every day, to be renewed in perfect love.

As it says in [paragraph 219 of the Catechism](#), *"God loves humanity more than any mother loves her children, more than any bridegroom loves his bride, and more than any son loves his father."* God chooses to love us even though we are flawed, weak, frail, and imperfect. *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you"* ([Jeremiah 31:3](#)). God's love for us is everlasting because God is love. God's very essence and being is love, as revealed throughout the whole span of salvation history: Creation, the Exodus, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and eventually when Christ returns. *"God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and Spirit of Love in fullness of time, God has revealed [an] innermost secret: God is an eternal exchange of love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and [God] has destined us to share in that exchange"* ([CCC 221](#)). Since God is love, and God is with us and God abides in us, then we are called to love as God does: wholly, divinely, and without reservation. *"We love because God first loved us"* ([1 John 4:19](#)). To love is divine because love first comes from God and unites us to Christ and each other; therefore, love begets love, according to Pope Benedict XVI in his first papal encyclical, [Deus Caritas Est](#) (2006) (18).