

The Four Ways of Love

How to love as the Lord loves us

Introduction

How many ways are there to love God? Surely an infinite number, because God is infinitely loving and infinitely lovable. Originally in Old Testament times there were ten ways or commandments. As people sought to explain the Ten Commandments, then hundreds of ways or laws developed. Then the prophets came to clarify God's way and their words sought to explain God's will. Finally God's own Son came and was asked what is the most important of these commandments. Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31). Later He said, "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Finally He said, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34). So there it is. Love as Jesus loved us. Okay. But the chorus rises anew, "How do I do this?" and "What would Jesus do today?" Countless answers flood the radios and TV screens and pulpits and water coolers of our world. Seemingly there is a different answer for each different answerer. Jesus asked his disciples who the people (answerers) say I am. Then He asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Ultimately in this life we must decide who Jesus is and what that means for our life. We must decide the way we will love like Jesus loved. In His infinite goodness God gave us a Church to direct us in the way we should go. In my finite goodness I would like to make this simple. Jesus loved us in four ways. He prepared. He praised. He prayed. And He gave abundantly of Himself, what I will call "plus-giving" (to give a term for His abundant giving). If you want to learn how to love like Jesus loved, learn the four ways of love....

The Four Ways of Love

The Catholic faith is as old as St Peter. On this rock Jesus built His Church and from the day He called Peter the rock, we have been called to be part of the building up of this Church. Many years and many Saints and many movements have passed through to enrich the faith with the individuality of each person the Lord has called and inspired and led to guide the Church. Though many ways and paths have been followed, the faith remains the same. The Church proclaims the truth that the gates

of hell will not prevail against.

These four ways are a new look at some classical ways of following the Lord that can make a dramatic difference in how we see and follow the Lord. A deeper walk into the waters of our faith and a simple though challenging way to grow closer to the Lord and experience life at an amazing, joyful and meaningful level. Each way is solidly based in the Word of God and in the tradition of His Church. So there is no “new” revelation, just a different way of looking at and organizing how we follow the Lord to give order and maximum impact in our lives. For me, it gives order, meaning, joy, purpose, depth and challenge in my life. It stretches my physical, mental and spiritual muscles so I grow stronger in the Lord and as I practice my faith each day I grow in definite, satisfying and consistent ways.

So let me introduce you to the four ways of love. These words came to mind as I was overhauling my own life and putting it into order. They came gently as a whisper one day, but over time I came to see how powerful and full of life and possibility and potential they could be. Indeed they are potent!

These four ways are: preparation, praise, prayer, and plus-giving. All start with the letter “P” and are easy to remember that way. I would like to briefly introduce each “way” in this pamphlet then as we learn and practice we can look at them on a deeper level to see how they relate to each other and how they can more deeply enrich our lives.

Prepare

First we prepare. As the Old Testament prepared for the New Testament and as John the Baptist prepared for Jesus, we prepare in our lives. We prepare one way or another for everything we do. Sometimes we prepare well and enhance events and phases of our lives. Sometimes we prepare poorly and the results are dissatisfying. But we need to prepare. A golfer prepares to swing. A baker prepares to bake. An executive prepares for a meeting. A priest prepares for mass. We are always preparing for things in our lives. But how do we prepare? And how do we best prepare? How does God want us to prepare? Did Jesus prepare? Does Scripture and the Church have anything to say about this? (Hint: yes, they do!)

The first thing that precedes anything we prepare for is humility. John the Baptist told us to prepare by repenting and being baptized. We must realize that we have sinned, we need help. We need God’s help and God’s help through others to proceed in life and if we begin with humility, God promises to help us (James 4:10).

The second thing we need to realize about preparing is our purpose for life directs our preparation. One of our first tasks is to determine what purpose God has us here for. If we are to prepare, we must know what we are preparing for! Then the many

facets of preparation will be directed to this purpose and give our lives meaning and fulfillment.

Preparing is step number one. We love like Jesus loved by preparing how Jesus prepared.

Praise

The second way is praise. What is praise? We praise those who have done well. We praise our team when they excite us with a good play or a score. We praise our children when they achieve what we hope they will achieve. We praise our employees when they exceed our expectations for them. We praise to encourage and to show we believe in someone. Why do we praise God? Because He is our Creator and deserving of our praise. We are His works of art and any good work of art gives praise to its creator. What do we praise God for? A sunrise, the stars, and moon in the sky. For things in our life that work out the way we want them to and for close calls when we escape a threat or an accident. "Praise God! That was close." We praise God to acknowledge His intervention in our lives and when we experience His blessings.

But there is another way to praise God with a slightly different focus. What if we praised God for things that weren't what we wanted, for things that caused suffering, for things that didn't seem right at the time? This is the realm of faith and belief in things not seen or understood. This is where our faith becomes real faith and not just thanking God for another beautiful sunset. Praise can be a powerful way to exercise and express our faith in God for all things, good and bad. We need to praise God for our sake so we can see the world with eyes of faith. To see the world the way that God created it to be and to believe He is acting in it, whether it looks right or not to us. We actively show our love for Jesus as well as our faith and trust by praising God always.

Prayer

The third way of love is prayer. What is prayer? It is simply our direct communication with our Creator. There are many types of prayer. Praise is a type of prayer. Intentions we offer and exclamations we cry out communicate to God our needs and desires. Recited prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary), intercessory prayer (for or in place of others) and communal prayers (Mass, Prayer Meetings) all communicate to God in a special manner. But there is a very specific focus to the way of prayer that is the

essence of the third way of love. It is mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret" (Matthew 6:6). All of the other ways of praying should be a part of our lives and there are seasons and times for all types of prayer. But this is a special intimate way of prayer that Jesus encourages us to use in communicating with the Father. The reason we pray is to humbly bring ourselves into God's mighty presence and ask for His help and guidance. So the third way is a quiet, solitary, sometimes contemplative prayer in God's presence. Jesus showed this when He often went off at night to pray or rose early in the morning and prayed. He showed us how important it is to bring the rest of the day and our life before God to learn how we might better live life. This way is to simply sit in the presence of God and receive God's guidance, love and comfort or even experience His awesome silence which communicates to us in our soul on a deeper level. As we grow accustomed to meeting God in the silence of our hearts we then carry that Presence with us through our day and learn to "pray always" by living in the presence of God. Then we may love as Jesus loved in this way of prayer, "As you, Father, are in me and I in you...they also may be in us" (John 17:21).

We grow in the love of Jesus by praying and living in His Presence.

Plus-giving

The fourth way is abundant or plus-giving. We have our life. We have our jobs. We have our duties. We have our obligations in life. We work. We feed ourselves. We raise kids. We help neighbors and friends. We mow our lawns and rake our leaves. Is this the essence of life? Why did Jesus challenge us with these thoughts? "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors." "If you only love those who love you, what recompense can you expect from your Heavenly Father?" "If you only greet your brother, what is so unusual about that?" "If you are pressed into service for one mile, go with them for two miles." (All in Matthew 5). Jesus doesn't just think outside the box. He breaks down the sides of the box and floods light over our limited boxed up ideas. Jesus introduces us to a new way of giving we thought ourselves incapable of. Jesus challenges us to give more. So the fourth way is giving more than we are expected or required to give (two miles or at least twice as much as required by law). Do what you aren't expected to in your home. Do what you haven't been asked to do. Give what you are not paid for at work. Coming early, staying late, doing a project for someone. Give money. Give time. Give friendship. Give the unexpected and unrequired and give joyfully, because you will be giving of yourself to others and for God. Not to receive a reward but because God gave us an abundant world, an

amazing body, so much beauty and wonder that what else could we give in return? God gave so much, He emptied Himself (of the capital H) and became a man (a himself). And through being persecuted and abused He loved and healed and taught and gave and gave and gave life. Then He gave His body to be beaten and spat upon and hung cruelly on a cross until only blood and water came out when He was pierced. God gave for everyone who was and who is and who will be and the grace and redemption of His giving will superabundantly provide for everyone's salvation and life who has and will ever exist. He gave everything for love of us.

And this is the essence of how we are to give. Not only to give as Christ gives, but to let Jesus Himself give through us. "No long I live but Christ lives in me. I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given his life for me" (Galatians 2:19, 20).

The fourth way we show our love is by giving to others, by giving more to others, by giving extra, by plus-giving to others through the power, presence and guidance of Christ within us. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). As Jesus guides us to give through His presence in our lives we are able to walk in the steps of Jesus. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). We love like Jesus when Jesus lives in us and gives His life through us to others.

Finally we show the love of Jesus by laying down our life with Christ so we may more abundantly give our lives by Jesus' power, through Jesus' grace, as Jesus directs – so we may live and give as God our Father wills.

What now?

We humbly prepare to fulfill our purpose and praise always no matter what happens to show our faith in God and pray in His presence so we may live in His presence and go out into the world to lay down our lives with Jesus. So we may give as Jesus abundantly gave to us.

We give all we have prepared, praised and prayed for. Love that is given flows from our hearts and blossoms to renew the lives of others and becomes one with the love that God has given us. Then we become the shining, joyful, happy, fulfilled, world changing wonders that God created us to be.

Let us begin....