

God is LOVE

LOVE. Probably one of the most important words in the English language. Something we strive for, something we freely give, something we receive with joy. It's been said that "Love is what makes the world go 'round," and with good reason. We all would be lost without it!

In the second reading this Sunday, 1 John 4:7-10, John makes the proclamation that "**God is love.**" Such a simple Truth, yet a sublime one. The God of all creation has made the universe, the world, the nations, the cities and homes—and you and me—out of His love and kindness. "Love" is mentioned nine times in this reading, and eight times in the Gospel for today, John 15:9-17. I believe there is nowhere in the Bible where a word (other than "the") is repeated this number of times in such short sections of the Holy Book. Must be pretty important—to God, and to us!

But what IS Love? St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, describes Love this way: *"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrong-doing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."* And Paul ends Chapter 13 with, *"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."* Incredibly memorable and meaningful words!

This passage hangs proudly on our bedroom wall, as my wife, Sandra gave me a hand-made wall hanging with these beautiful words imprinted on it—a cherished gift for our 10th wedding anniversary. It is one of the places I am drawn to see and feel the definition of LOVE. I often need reminding of what LOVE is, in this topsy-turvy world we live in these days.

There is another source I draw from for a definition of LOVE, also—one from the late Fr. Anthony de Mello—who died an untimely death at age 56 in 1987). He was an East Indian Jesuit priest who wrote numerous books and gave many marvelous talks on awareness, spirituality and living a healthy, happy life. His definition of LOVE was, *"Love involves clarity of perception and accuracy of response."* On first hearing this, many years ago in a video taped seminar, I really did not know what to think of it. It sounded so plain, so regimented and, well, so un-romantic. But the statement has grown on me over the years.

Over time, it dawned on me that Fr. de Mello really had something there. When we “clearly perceive” someone, we truly see them for who and what they are: their attitudes, preferences, dreams, goals...and also their downfalls. We see the whole person. From there, we can “accurately respond” to who that person is. Please excuse me if I tout my wife, Sandra, twice in one writing, (THIS is her Mother’s Day gift, from me), but she is a classic appropriate gift-giver. As seen above, she “*clearly perceived*” that my favorite verse in the Bible was 1 Corinthians 13—through thoughtful observation of my mentioning it many times, over the years—and she “*accurately responded*” with a personalized, marvelous hand-painted wall-hanging for both of us to enjoy. Her LOVE for me was extended through her awareness of how much the verse meant to me, and the gift was a natural and creative expression of that love. I believe THIS is what Fr. de Mello was speaking about.

Now, you too have two unique and enduring definitions of LOVE, and if you are anything like me, you probably have to have things spelled out to you clearly and succinctly in order to “get it” and live it. So when, as in John’s Gospel today, Jesus calls us to “Love one another,” hopefully you have a clearer idea of what Jesus was actually speaking about. LOVE defined, LOVE understood, LOVE lived!

by Rich Melcher