

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

What is Love Anyway?

This coming Thursday, many people will recognize a holiday that celebrates love, Valentine's Day. This holiday mostly celebrates the idea of romance, part of what true love can be. How many of us would think of chocolates, flowers and jewelry as true love? Sure, they are all wonderful and they express the pleasures of this life. However, true love takes us beyond this life. True love helps us to enter into the life of God.

So, what is true love? True love goes beyond gift-giving. Hopefully, we understand that gift-giving is a mere symbol of the love and care that we have for another. However, there is one gift that expresses true love, and that is the gift of the self. One great example of this type of self-gift is the Sacrament of Marriage. In Marriage, the spouses give themselves completely one to another. [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, "She Said, 'Yes!' – Ok, Now What?", August 26, 2018] In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], we learn that through marriage, "a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life." [CCC 1601] In other words, they give themselves "wholly" to one another. The value and the goal of all romantic love is this type of self-gift.

Spousal love obtains its great dignity in part because it both emulates and participates in the love of God, who is love. "Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign [of] the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church." [CCC 1617] Christ gave Himself completely for the Church. In fact, we should understand that the Church was not born until Christ gave His life for it.

Besides spouses, there are other examples of true love too. Certainly one can find examples of self-gift in the love a parent has for her child, or a friend might have for another friend. Many a good parent gives up his own good in order to provide some good for his child, like a father who takes a second job so that his daughter might attend medical school. Also, a friend may give of their time in order to attend to the needs of a sick friend.

This last example leads us to the kind of self-gift that is usually part of ministry. One can think of the example of Mother Teresa, and how she gave herself completely for the poor. However, we don't need to be Mother Teresa to show true love in ministry. For example, someone might volunteer to be a lector at Mass, giving of their time to bring the Word of God to life; or they might volunteer to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, bringing the Eucharistic Jesus to the sick. Another might decide that they would really like to make a difference by bringing food to the poor, perhaps as part of our Van Ministry. These are just some of the myriad examples of acts of true love.

So, if you really want to be someone's Valentine, if you want to give someone a gift that shows that you truly love them, give them yourself.

Next week, we will begin a study of how true love plays out in our lives, by exploring the fruits of love – the Theological and Cardinal Virtues – and the lapses of love – the Capital Sins.

