

MISSION PEACE & JUSTICE

MPJ Monthly Newsletter "Hope in Action"

Volume 2, Issue 8

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Dear SJS Community,

With gratitude to the almighty God, I present you this last issue of the MPJ Newsletter this academic year. I am truly grateful to you all for your generous support and open hearts. I thank all those who submitted their articles to our Newsletter, and those who supported those in greatest need through our two Clothing Drives, Blood Drive, Rosary for Life, Archdiocesan Adopt-a-Family Program, and Lenten Collection. I thank Father Marco Durazo for publishing our Newsletter online, George Perez for his tremendous work with editing all the Newsletter issues, and Eduardo Pruneda for designing all the MPJ posters. In a special way, I share my words of gratitude with my MPJ Team 2019-2020: Dcn. Manuel Del Rio, Sergio Hidalgo, Roberto Villablanca, Jeffrey Roxas, and Joseph Cruz. Please, be ensured of their great effort and work throughout the entire year in organizing all the MPJ events. Finally, big thanks to all those who supported our MPJ activities with prayer and any other kind of support.



On behalf of the MPJ Team, I would like to thank you all for entrusting us this privilege of leading Saint John's Community in its Mission, Peace & Justice life. We wish you good luck during the finals and blessed Summer. For the future MPJ Team, we wish persistence and zeal in bringing peace and justice in our Community and the world.

As Jimi Hendrix notably pointed out, "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."

Some of our MPJ Team members wished to share with you following words:

We are grateful for the love and support you've shown to our brothers and sisters in need through our SJS MPJ ministry.
~ Jeffrey Roxas

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve and for all your support to help our neighbors in need. Let us always be a face of Christ for all those who are in need.

~ Roberto Villablanca

Kamil Ziolkowski, MPJ Lead

God will Never Abandon Us

By: Roberto Villablanca



The Coronavirus pandemic causes fear and anxiety for most of us. We fear being infected by the virus or transmitting it to those who are vulnerable. Many of our plans have been postponed, and we are uncertain when to pursue them. Due to this pandemic which caused unemployment, a great number of people are worried on how to provide a living for their family. Public masses are cancelled, and so, many of us are not able to receive the Lord sacramentally. Perhaps, at this difficult time, we might feel that God has abandoned us. We might ask ourselves: where is God? Why are we having this difficulty? I intend to structure my short essay based on the answers of the stated questions.

The assurance that God is with us on this time of trial is when the priest consecrates the bread and wine into the Body, Soul, and Divinity of Christ. Christ promised not to leave us, and He will never break his promise! He is in our churches. He is truly present in the tabernacle. His real presence should give us consolation at this time of difficulty. Also, I think it is proper to reflect on Pope Benedict XVI's commentary on the Ascension account of Luke 24: 50-53. Luke 24: 50-53 states "then he (Jesus) led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into Heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." The disciples were filled with joy, and we would expect a different reaction from the disciples.¹ Logically, we expect that the disciples would be sad because Christ left them definitively on this Earth. He parted from them; he went up to heaven. They would not be able to experience the company of their master here on Earth. It should make them sad. On the contrary, the disciples went back to Jerusalem joyfully. This begs the question: why were the disciples joyful when Jesus ascended into Heaven? The answer for this question can help us understand that Christ does not abandon us. I think it should also give us joy and hope.

Pope Benedict XVI comments that the disciples were convinced that Christ, in his ascension, did not go to a faraway place up in the heavens. Rather, they are certain that Christ is present in a "new and powerful" way. A presence that is not bound within time and space. Christ's ascension is his participation in God the Father's dominion over all creation. Hence Christ did not abandon his disciples. Instead, his ascension, his parting from his disciples to the Father makes it possible for Christ to be present with us now and forever. Since Christ ascended to Father, "He has not gone away but remains close to us. Now he is no longer in one particular place in the world as he had been before the Ascension: now, through his power over space, he is present and accessible to all—throughout history and in every place." The disciples' trust that Christ is present in a new and powerful way brought unsurmountable joy into their hearts. They were convinced that Christ was with them and will never abandon them. Like the disciples, we should also be convinced that Christ is with us even in this pandemic. The disciples developed their deep trust in the Lord because they constantly talked to the Lord and shared their lives with him. We, too, should also do the same through prayers. We should constantly talk to the Lord and ask him to increase our faith in him so that we will always be convinced of his presence.

In this pandemic, a second question may arise: if God is truly present with us, then why are we still having this difficulty? This question is a difficult one to tackle. Perhaps, we will know the answer completely when we encounter the Lord face to face. In the life of Jesus, however, we know that even him suffered on the Cross. Suffering is part of our worldly existence. Jesus did not come into the world to eliminate suffering. Rather, he conquered suffering and death and turns them into a pathway that leads to eternal life. God allows suffering so that a good fruit can spring out from it. God has a better plan for us that's why he permits this pandemic. Perhaps, God allows this pandemic to free us from any obstacle that hinders us to grow in holiness. Perhaps, God allows this pandemic to help us realize that our work, savings, and worldly successes will not give us lasting security. Perhaps, this pandemic makes aware that we are not self-sufficient. Perhaps, amidst this lockdown, God is calling us to reconnect with our family members and form stronger bonds with them. Perhaps, God is calling us to return to him and depend only on him.

There are two things which I am certain amidst this difficulty: God never leaves us, and he helps. He is with us in this difficult time. He is the One who gives us encouragement whenever we are in states of desolation and fear. He is the one who gives us the grace to endure this difficulty. He helps us to carry this cross. We should completely trust in his plan and abandon ourselves on his hands because he will never forsake us. With a disposition of trust and abandonment, regardless the difficulties we are facing, we will have the joy that the disciples possessed after the Ascension.



¹ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). Jesus of Nazareth: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, tr. Philip J Whitmore. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011. p. 280.

² Ibid. p. 281.

³ Ibid. p. 284.

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On the Many Varieties of Love

By Dr. Alan Vincette:

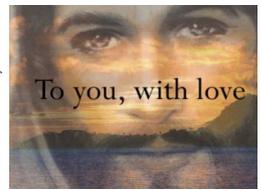


Love takes many forms and places many demands on humans. It is possible to succeed dramatically in some of its variants while failing miserably in others. Ideally one should embrace love in more than one limited dimension.

A first form of love is the one to which Plato and Aristotle devoted their lives, the love of truth or wisdom. This is the dedication to acquiring knowledge and wisdom about reality and what is good and communicating it to others. It is possible, however, to have a passion for the truth yet disregard other important forms of love. Think of the surgeon dedicated to honing his craft yet indifferent to the personal needs of the patient, the teacher who is a brilliant researcher yet barely able to deliver a coherent lecture, or the psychologist so devoted to her patients that she neglects her family at home.

In addition to the love of truth then one must not disregard love for other humans. Such a love for persons involves several different aspects. As the medievals, such as Aquinas, recognized one must be benevolent, or literally "will the good" of another. One must not just think of and act on the basis of one's own needs but on the interests of those around one as well. Such a love of others also should involve what the French existentialists such as Lavelle and Marcel termed availability. One must be present to others, prioritize them in one's life,

respond to their needs, and give them the "time of day," nay, our undivided attention. Finally, with the German phenomenologists such as Scheler and Von Hildebrand love involves a gift of oneself to another, a willingness to devote oneself to another person and sacrifice oneself as necessary. John Paul II and Benedict XVI take up these ideas and develop them in their encyclicals, writing that: "authentic freedom ... is manifested and lived in the gift of self, even to the total gift of self, like that of Jesus ... on the Cross" (*Veritatis Splendor*, 89) and that love must be "nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them. ... I must be present in my gift [to others] as a person" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 34). Still one can be so focused on loving individuals that one forgets another form of love, the love of charity, or communities. One might forget about fairness in giving oneself over to some individuals and fail to responding to the needs of others, or one might be so focused on responding to the immediate needs of individuals present at one's footsteps that one is blind to the needs of those not so immediately present or lax in ameliorating the root causes of those needs. Think of the pastor so focused on the parishioners showing up on Sundays or during scheduled meetings that he ignores the real needs and hurts of those who are unable or unwilling to attend for various reasons as well as impoverished members of society at large.



Thus another important love is that of charity in the Patristic sense, caring for the sick and poor in society by welcoming guests, caring for their wounds and injuries, and distributing alms to the poor. Such a social ethics has become increasingly important to the Church and has been stressed by Leo XIII, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis I. One must be in solidarity with the needs of the poor, displaced, and oppressed, and seek to remedy both their results and causes. As Francis I exhorts "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 187). Yet even here there are dangers of an all-too inclusive love. One might be so focused on the material needs of the poor that one neglects their need for companionship or their spiritual needs. Think of the priest who fails to defend the doctrines of the church out of fear of offending parishioners, or the social advocate who fails to respond not just to the material needs of poor but their spiritual needs as well. Benedict XVI accordingly writes that charity, in the end, must be based on an intimate encounter with God wherein "I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern. This I can offer them not only through the organizations intended for such purposes, accepting it perhaps as a political necessity. Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 18). And Francis I similarly notes that commitment to the poor "does not consist exclusively in activities or programs of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilizes is not an unruly activism, but above all an attentiveness which considers the other 'in a certain sense as one with ourselves.' This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good. This entails appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, and in their ways of living the faith ... the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. ... They need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 199-200).

Again, one can be so engaged in meeting the needs of others in society that one neglects to love oneself in a true manner and to foster one's own prayer and spiritual life, even to the point of being willing to compromise the love of truth and religious doctrine in order to satisfy one's more base desires. Take Jean Vanier. Though only God can know what is in the heart of humans I would hazard a guess that his love for the disabled and destitute was pure. But Vanier notably failed in his love for Christ and the truth. He failed those who came to him for spiritual direction, choosing to instead seek physical pleasure from them, to the point of engaging in bad theology to try and justify it, at one point telling a woman, "This is not us; this is Mary and Jesus. You are chosen, you are special, this is secret." Vanier, who ironically wrote a thesis on the philosophy of Aristotle, did not succeed in maintain a love for the truth. Such a failure to love the truth and Church teaching is nothing new. Some priests were charged by the Spanish Inquisition for falsely telling penitents that they must confess their sins unclothed, and Martin Luther King, Jr., Karl Barth, and Karl Rahner are known to have fostered relationships with women that went beyond what is proper even if the jury is still out on whether or not they involved illicit behaviors. And



one of the most shocking things about certain cases of clergy abuse is the degree to which a false theology reminiscent of the heresy of Quietism was utilized to justify such acts, telling the victims that in perfect love all is lawful or that sexual acts with priests occur on a spiritual plane beyond the standard moral order. In short, a charitable love for others must be balanced by a love for God and the truth, as well as a love of one's own spiritual good and the spiritual good of others.

Let us therefore embrace love in all its various dimensions. While we open our hearts to the neediest among us, let us also make sure to not lose sight of the love of justice and the love of truth and the Church, nor especially to comprise these things based on an improper love of the self. And while we dedicate ourselves to academic studies and the love of truth, let us not forget to act for the betterment of others and to apply what we have learned to ameliorating the needs and conditions of the worst-off among us. And while we dedicate ourselves to our work let us not neglect our prayer life and spiritual good. And while we devote ourselves to the parishioners visible in our churches let us not forget about reaching out to those not as noticeable and see how we can address their needs, desires, and wishes.

