

Love... How else can we so concisely summarize all of salvation history? The nine biblical readings of the Easter Vigil span from the dawn of Creation to the dawn of rebirth when Jesus rises from the dead on Easter Morning.

Love cannot be contained. Love must grow. Love must share. In six days, God created the world. His crowning achievement was the creation of man. "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). "God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: 'Be fertile and multiply' (Gn 1:27-28). God created us for love. God created us to grow and to share and to love God and our neighbor in return.

Love requires sacrifice. God put Abraham to the test asking him to offer his son Isaac to the Lord. Abraham trusted God even though he did not know what the Lord had in store. Abraham passes this test of faith and receives a blessing from the Lord. "I bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore" (Gn 22:17). All we have is a gift from God. The best gift we can give God is to offer him all that we have. This requires sacrifice and trust on our part.

God spared Isaac and sent his own Son as a sacrificial lamb. "In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him" (1 Jn 4:9).

Love requires freedom. The Israelites suffered in slavery. They were not free to worship God. God chose Moses to lead his people out of Egypt fleeing the oppression of Pharaoh. At God's command, Moses stretched out his hand to part the Red Sea. "The waters were split, so that the Israelites entered into the midst of the sea on dry land, with the water as a wall to their right and to their left" (Ex 14:21-22). Freedom of religion is one of our basic human rights. Secular ideas often try to enslave our religious liberty. As God loved the Israelites, he loves all of humanity. God hears our cries when we are oppressed. Let us not take God for granted. Let us love him freely and without reservation.

Love requires discipline. In time, the Israelites took God's love for granted. They worshiped false gods. They grumbled and found fault with God. They turned from God. In their sin, they returned into slavery abandoning God. God sent prophets and they scoffed at them. There are definite consequences to turning our back on God. Foreign powers invaded the Holy Land, destroyed the temple, and took many into captivity in Babylon. For some 70 odd years, the exiles suffered as the Lord disciplined them for their own lack of discipline.

Love requires forgiveness and reconciliation. "The LORD calls you back, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, a wife married in youth and then cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back" (Isa 54:6-7). God forgives us and calls us to forgive others in return.

Love is mercy. God calls for a response on our part. "Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their way, and sinners their thoughts; Let them turn to the LORD to find mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving" (Isa 55:6-7).

Love is eternal. “Hear, O Israel, the commandments of life: listen, and know prudence! ... She is the book of the precepts of God, the law that endures forever; all who cling to her will live, but those will die who forsake her. Turn, O Jacob, and receive her: walk by her light toward splendor” (Bar 3:9, 4:4-2). “Lord, you have the words of everlasting life” (Jn 6:68c).

Love heals and brings the dead back to life. “I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts” (Ez 36:25-26). Are there not times when we have been rebellious and acted with “hearts of stone?” Lord send out your Spirit and renew our hearts with compassion and a profound understanding of your loving ways.

Love lives for others. “Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life... [Jesus] died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:4, 10-11). If we are to live for others, then it is helpful to keep the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane ever on our lips. “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will” (Mk 14:36).

Love is full of surprises. The disciples mourned and wept at the death of Jesus. All of their hopes and dreams seemed to be dashed against a stone. Their faith was shaken. Their hearts were full of grief. In the death of a loved one, we too experience that same loss and deep sadness. “Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him” (Mk 16:1). There was no one to anoint. They were utterly amazed at an empty tomb. How much greater their joy when they encountered the risen Christ?

God awaits us in eternity. We will be reunited with loved ones. We will walk with angels. We will receive a share of God’s eternal life that we too may live for ever and ever. The future holds more surprises than we can imagine.

We live in the present where God asks us to build up the Kingdom of God. God calls us to bring his love to others. “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:15-16). Go bring the surprise of God’s love to those who long for the love of God but do not yet know him.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, 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 wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (1 Cor 13:3-8a).