

# The Courage to Love

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“At last I have found my vocation.  
My vocation is love!”

~*Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*

Jesus' life mission and purpose is to reveal the Kingdom of God which pertains to matters of the heart as found in his teaching on love and advanced in the Beatitudes. Ironically, since childhood the Baptized are instructed in the ethical teachings of Moses found in the Ten Commandments, but are unfamiliar with the more transcendent teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. Holding at arms-length with an attitude of incredulity, the Beatitudes are romanticized by some as a utopian impossibility while never allowing their message to significantly touch one's community, politics or spirituality. The legalist tendencies and certitudes of the Old Covenant laws exact one's relationship with God without necessarily needing to enter into the Covenant of love.

However, throughout the Scriptures, God's message of love is echoed time and again. Christ the Bridegroom has arrived and the wise virgins who are prepared to receive the Beloved in the fire of contemplative abiding—rejoice! (Mt 25.1-13). Similarly, in the Song of Songs, discovery of God is found in love's deep stirring in the soul. Intimacy with the Divine is encountered after God's unrelenting search for the bride. Both the Lover and the Beloved long for the other and celebrate upon the discovery of the hearts' desire. Great philosophical speculations, theological inquiry, and the wisdom of God's laws may be of some value, but all that must lay bare at the doorway of the Holy of Holies as love is the entry to the sacred sphere.

Love requires courage. It requires that one not adhere to the standards of conditional love that may have been imposed by family, institution, and society. It requires that one trusts the radical nature of Jesus' message and begin to experience in oneself the giving and receiving of unmerited love. Jesus' message to all proclaims the God of Israel as a loving Abba *daddy* who provides far more than anyone else ever can or ever will provide.

The First Letter of John says, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar” (1 John 4:20). In contemplation we gradually learn to turn our whole being toward God. By experiencing love, one learns by its nature, that love disallows manipulation but rather lures one to enter into communion with God. In prayer we rediscover ourselves made in the image of God which in turn empowers discovery of the Divine Presence in others. In contemplation and detachment, one allows God to just BE. In surrendering ourselves, God's truth rises to the surface of our consciousness to transform our thoughts and hearts.

The vocation of love demands we trade our idols for the ideals of love as Jesus' message teaches. Christians can have every virtue but not have love and be a contra-

diction to Christ. The quickest road to God is through love as found in the uncompromising words of Saint Therese. When discerning her vocation she first sought many roles; soldier, priest, apostle, doctor, and martyr. However, God does not create persons ultimately to be identified with a role which at best can only be a shadowy reflection of himself; but rather, God has created human persons in his very Selfhood. God has created us in love, out of love, and for love, as Therese rejoices in discovering her true identity, “At last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love!”



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