

“Joy”

“Body-Building Love” Call to a Higher Life, Part 1 – Taught by: Fr. Gary W. Thurman

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Body-Building Love

Call to a Higher Life, Part 1 – March 8, 2017

Fr. Gary W. Thurman

The theme for the Cathedral of the King this year is “Building Up Itself in Love: Discipleship Through the Family”. Each season has taken its weekly themes from this foundation.

The source of this theme is Ephesians 4: 16, which reads towards its end, “... causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Do you want to grow? Do you want the Church to grow? It happens as the Church learns to live out Divine Love. St. Paul continues this word on later in this letter in chapter 5, vv 1, 2: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you.”

This is not just an Ephesians thing. Every one of the Epistles - every one, all 24 of them - carry this message. I could show you verses and passages and even chapters from Acts through Revelation which shows the various authors of those letters being encouraged by reports of the strength of that Church’s or individual’s love, and further verses where they exhort the recipient of the letter to continue in and even increase in that love. It’s a common and strong thread, more like a cable.

This is particularly true in the letters to the Romans and the Corinthians, where St. Paul devotes entire passages or even chapters to the issue. The Church at Rome had a disunity problem, for the Jewish members thought they were better than the Roman members because they were Jews, and the Roman members thought they were better than the Jewish members because they were Romans. The whole letter basically addresses this issue, but in the center of it St. Paul says in Chapter 12, “All that I’ve written so far is good and true, but this whole problem goes away when you learn to practice Divine Love toward one another.”

It was the same thing in Corinth. That Church had more problems than a monkey on a rock, but after mentioning all of them he writes, “There’s a lot better way. You can have the greatest gifts, and do the greatest works, and sacrifice so much, but without love none of it means anything.” Then he goes on, as he did to the Romans, to list the qualifications and characteristics of God’s love, Body-building love. But in listing them he is not just making a checklist list of things we need to make Jesus happy. They are not a checklist, but a life, a life that starts from within.

This love is truly a call to a higher life, a love far different from what most conceive and purport love to be. Most people’s idea of love is something seek-serving and self-seeking,

which is a million miles from God's love. So tonight, and in these Wednesday nights of Lent, we want to begin to examine these characteristics of Divine love, in no particular order, and try to find ways to stir up this most excellent gift within our own hearts, that the Body can truly build itself up through Body-building love.

The aspect of Divine love which we will examine tonight is JOY. This word "Joy" is mentioned over 200 times in the New Testament, and its verb form "Rejoice" occurs over 225 times. It is on our list of characteristics of love because, first of all, 1 Corinthians 13: 6 says, "Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." This will not work with the human type of love: self-seeking and self-serving. Unrighteousness may seem to further my cause, but I do not follow that path or get excited about it if I have love. God's truth may not cause me to personally profit, but in love I rejoice over it anyway. God's truth is that Jesus reigns. That makes me joyful. God's truth is that righteousness is the foundation of His throne. That makes me rejoice. God's truth is that He supports the widow and the orphan. Even if I can't profit from that it makes me glad because I, too, love the widow and orphan.

Secondly, St. Paul wrote to the Romans that love rejoices in hope. (Romans 12: 12) What kind of hope? Basically the hope of the resurrection (Acts 23: 6) If you understand that the power of Christ's resurrection has destroyed the work of the enemy, and that He is the Firstfruit of many brethren, and we can share in the firstfruit of that resurrection even now, even as we will someday experience it fully at Christ's return, there is no place for anything but joy. Why be sad when you have such a blessed hope? A lack of joy betrays a lack of hope, and at the root, a lack of love.

Finally, the Romans are told that if they love they will "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." (Romans 12: 15) Jesus had taught His disciples something about this in the Upper Room: "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you." (John 16: 20-22)

Basically we see here that sorrow is based on loss or pain. These are things we all go through, they are common to all, believer and unbeliever alike. In the Proverbs it is written, "The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy." (Proverbs 14: 10) That may have worked for Solomon, but the Christian life walks on a higher plane. For the Body of Christ to be strong and built up, we must share each other's joy, and their sorrow, as well. But the purpose of sharing one's sorrow is to help them return to a place of joy!

But think about this: Isn't this difficult to do if we are not sensitive to each other? Only through divine love which is sensitive to each other's hurts and needs can this happen, and that is just not what man is taught today. Pay attention to any set of TV commercials or roadway billboards and you will see they are all encouraging us to focus on our own bodies, our own appearance, and our own well-being. This is not the kind of love that will build up Christ's Body!

A picture recently went viral on the internet. It was taken inside a museum in the Netherlands, where one of the world's greatest masterpieces, "The Night Watch" by Rembrandt, is displayed. But see how much attention the museum-goers are giving to this great work of art:



There has since been a report that the students were actually studying notes on the painting, but the one who captured the image said that he was watching this scene for a long time, and no one ever once looked up from their phone to the artwork. This image has since been labeled as a perfect depiction of our society today.

Another example of the need to focus and be sensitive to others is a story in Mark 8: 22-26. After Jesus heals a blind man and asks him what he can see he confesses, "I see men, for I am seeing them as trees, walking about." Wow, did Jesus fail? No, not Jesus. See what the Bible says next: "Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes, and he looked intently and began to see everything clearly." Before the man was not looking intently, he wasn't paying much attention, he was not being sensitive, and his sight was blurred and distorted. But when he looked intently - sensitivity - what a difference!

Love looks intently. Love pays attention to something other than itself. Love is able to tell when someone is rejoicing or in sorrow, and shares that experience. This is what makes a strong Body.

So how can we make this kind of love, this aspect of godly love, a part of our lives? If we do not ask this question, our time reading this post or listening to this first installment has been wasted. So what do we do?

I challenge us: let us ask the Lord, as we pay attention and be sensitive to our brothers and sisters, or even unbelievers, to show us at least one person a day who needs to share a sorrow, a pain, or even a joy. At first I thought five, or then three, but let's start with one. And after we have found such a person, ask the Lord how we can respond. Sometimes, it will be through prayer; and sometimes a more personal touch will be possible. This is a part of our Lent exercise and discipline: to walk in the joy of love, and help others to do so, as well.