



Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI IESUM

Dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

“Bless those who curse you”



Loving Our Enemies

How is this possible?

Christ does not *ask* us to bless those who curse us, or to love our enemies.

In strikingly clear terms, he *commands* us to:

“Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you. And to him that strikes thee on the one cheek, offer also the other. And him that takes

away from you your cloak, forbid not to take your coat also. Give to everyone that asks of you, and of him that takes away your goods, ask them not again.” (St. Luke 6.27-30)

And He actually went a *step further* — imagine ... even **more** ... if this were not enough: at the Last Supper ... on the night of His betrayal ... He said:

“A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you.” (St. John 13.34)

We are to love, not as *we* would have others love *us* ... but as **He** loved us! ... as *Christ* Himself loved us: And how much was that?

We need only gaze upon Him on the Cross! ... **That much!**

Will it surprise you, then when I tell you that Christ does not *ask* us to bless those who curse us ... or to love our enemies?

He does not *ask* us to do this:

In strikingly clear terms, he **commands** us to!

This is not an option for a Christian, it is the Lord’s *express will*, indeed ... His *commandment* ... that we should do so.

But How?

There are, of course, people that we do not feel drawn to — people, in fact, whom we do not like at all ... and some whom we even dislike *intensely*. It is, in fact, the case that there are people whom we simply find insufferable; even *intolerable*. And yes ... some people are even virtually consumed with evil ... but Christ still bids us to love them!

“What,” you ask, “is this madness? How can I *love* whom I do not even **like** ... and may even quite nearly detest?”

That, really, is the question at hand: How is it possible for us to love not only those we do not like, but even those who *curse* us ... those who *vitriolically hate* us, and

even wish us *dead!*

How profoundly we misunderstand love ...

Many never come to understand the true nature of love at all.

How many marriages end in divorce because “the flame of love” has apparently been extinguished? How many “beautiful romances” have ended in disillusionment? When some tragedy mars our beauty or encroaching age robs us of our youth, how often the “love” that had once accompanied it, simply dwindles ... even seems to disappear.

This terrible misunderstanding takes a toll on us that few of us recognize:

We have invested our *entire concept* of love in merely ***one aspect*** of love alone: what is immediate and *sensory*. Love is reduced to, and then totally invested in, simply our *emotions*. Period.

If the “feeling” is gone, then the “love,” we reason, has gone with it, too. If our *senses*... our emotional experiences, are no longer stimulated by the other, we speak of the love “withering.” We can no longer “*feel*” it. It no longer “excites” us. We, then come to the conclusion that the love has ceased.

And in a sense, it has. That is, it has ceased to be *sensuous*. In other words, ***one*** facet of the *many* facets of a gem ... has become less clear, less lustrous.

The problem, however, is that it is precisely *this* facet of the jewel, and ***this facet alone*** ... into which we have peered! ... and the surface light that had dazzled us — *in which we had found our own reflection* — is no longer refracted off the stone.

That is, we have looked ***at*** the stone — but not ***into*** it! We have seen ... as it were been blinded by ... fixated upon ... the *surface* light — without ever exploring the *other* facets which reveal another and very different world within the one we claim to love; a world of extraordinary complexity and breath-taking beauty!

It is, in short, the difference between holding a diamond at arm’s length and admiring its beauty... and placing one’s eye to the diamond, where, in crystalline light, we

stand in awe of the deep beauty *within* that surpasses, in every measure, the superficial beauty we had seen from afar.

It is the difference between peering *at* the beauty of another— and peering *into* the beauty of another.

To carry this analogy further, we may say that the bringing of the diamond to the eye is an act of the *will* — not an *instinctive response* to some emotional or sensuous impulse. We approach it with *purpose*, rather than colliding with it serendipitously. It is a conscious attempt to *penetrate*, rather than to *reflect* upon, the deep mystery sequestered within it; to go beyond the appearances, however magnificent, to deeper and vastly more expansive realities — realities that ultimately touch upon the very image of God, in which the other is created.

This, I think, is the most appropriate metaphor for the true nature of love.

What is Love ... after all?

To begin with, it is crucial to understand that love is not *simply* a *feeling* ... love is preeminently an *act of the will*.

In essence, *to love* is to have the other person's *total welfare* at heart: it is to *will* them *every* good in all things, ... and evil in none.

Pause for a moment and think of someone you genuinely love.

There is affection in that love, surely. But how does your love for that person *express itself, manifest itself*— *apart* from the *affection* that is uniquely experienced toward that individual?

When we think upon it, we soon find that *affective* expressions of love, expressions simply involving our *emotions*, are only *one part* of our *expression* of our love for them.

If our love is our *affection only* ... if it is solely a matter of *feelings* and *emotions* ... that is to say, *if* it is merely so many “impulses” over which we exercise little or no control impulses which *compel* us ... toward the one that we say we love, how can we fail to see that it is little more than a *compulsive act* — and not real love at all!

Can we truly say that we are loving them *freely* — whom we love *compulsively*? If we do not give them our love *freely* if we find ourselves *compelled* to love them it is no love at all. It is *concupiscence*, mere *desire* ... masquerading as love; a seeking of selfish satisfaction that is much more invested in “me” than “her.”

Love of this sort can only be understood in terms of a pathology. It is not what we understand when we entertain the notion of love.

The point is this: Christ does not *command* us to have an *emotion* or a *feeling* toward a person. He cannot. Love of this sort *cannot* be ***commanded***.

It is simply the case, and for too many reasons to enumerate, that we dislike some individuals and find others simply intolerable. If we look at the matter carefully, we find that while we can *restrain* our emotions, we cannot *compel* them.

We can restrain our anger, but we cannot spontaneously invoke it. We can no sooner be commanded to *anger* than to affective love.

However, everything else, apart from what is *affective*, that is, apart from what pertains to *feelings* or *emotions*, *can* in fact be commanded— ***and is*** by Christ Himself!

Once we remove the *affective* element of love (understood as a palpable “feeling,” as something “felt,” and expressed in purely emotional terms) ... everything *else* that pertains to loving another person *is*, in fact, subject to our will.

We can *will* to do good to others, even while we cannot *will* to experience affection for them. It *is* within our power to say, and to do, everything that genuine love entails — everything by which we coherently understand one person as loving another — even if we do not have an *emotional* investment in that person!

We can summarize this in Twelve Words:

“To love another is to *will* them *every* good, and *no* evil.”

This statement is nothing new, but in twelve words, it succinctly describes all that is authentic in love.

Yes, we can love those who vex us terribly and who would even bring us to injury. Yes, we *can* love whom we dislike! The love of which Christ speaks, the love that He *commands* has nothing *whatever* to do with sensory gratification or emotional fulfillment.

The sensory and emotional component of love between a man and a woman is a uniquely affectionate dimension of love that *spontaneously* arises between two people ... *in addition to* their obligation to love one another in ways not pertaining to, or expressive of, emotional attachment.

Understood in these terms, it is not the case of one love being superior to another.

It is that *affective* love possesses a *spontaneous* dimension *beyond* the same *obligations* of love incumbent upon all of us.

It fulfils the precepts within this one individual — and then exceeds them in the way of superabundance through an *emotional investment* that spontaneously emerges between two individuals in a way that does not characterize, but also does not diminish, their love for all others.

Once we understand this, we realize that we are not called, still less compelled, to *intimacy* with others at large. That is *absurd*.

Much of the *touching and feeling* that occurs with disturbing frequency at the *Novus Ordo Mass* is very likely the result of a confusion between love and intimacy. We tend to equate the one with the other, and when, with good reason, we feel uncomfortable with the intimate gestures of others in the pews with whom we are not on intimate terms, we are simply realizing this mistaken conflation of love *and* intimacy that is being forced upon us.

It is essentially the difference between love as charity and love as intimacy. After all God does not command us to be *intimate* with our neighbors. *Right?*

To bless others, *genuinely* asking God — *ex corde* — from our hearts, to bestow on them favor, mercy, and goodness, is an act of reciprocal beneficence, for in blessing our enemies, those who hate us, those who do us harm, and who wish us evil, we bring upon *ourselves* an unspeakable blessing also:

“Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: That you may be the children of your Father Who is in Heaven.” (St. Matthew 5.44)

Bless friend and enemy alike; it is no more than our *duty* and lest we think ourselves good and holy for doing this, Christ immediately calls us to humility ... for He *also* tells us that:

“When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants; we have only done our duty.” (St. Luke 17.10)

And so we are.

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