

The Spirit's Fruit Is Love

"When the evening of this life comes," says John of the Cross, "you will be judged on love." The only question asked about the soul's use of its house and the gifts that were made to it will be: "Have you loved well?" All else will be resumed in this—all thoughts, beliefs, desires, struggles and achievements, all complex activities, for faith is nothing unless it is the obscure vision of a loved Reality, and hope is nothing unless it is the confidence of perfect love.

So, too, with all the persons, events, opportunities, conflicts and choices proposed for the soul's purification and growth. Was everything that was done, done for love's sake? Were all the doors opened that the warmth of love might fill the whole house; the windows cleaned that they might more and more radiate from within its mysterious divine light?

For this is love: the immense expansion of personality effected by the love of God, weaving together the natural and the supernatural powers of the soul and filling them with its abundant life. Overflowing the barriers of preference, passing through all contrary appearance, it mediates the divine pity and generosity to every mesh and corner of creation and rests at

last in
God, who is the life and love of every soul.

What Is Love?

Love: that overworked and
ill-used word, often confused on the one hand with passion and
on the
other with amiability. If we ask those who have known and
taught the
life of the Spirit, they say that love is a passionate
tendency, an
inward vital urge of the soul toward its Source, which impels
every
living thing to pursue the most profound trend of its being,
reaches
consciousness in the form of self-giving and of desire, and
has its only
satisfying goal in God.

Pure love or charity—utter
self-giving which is our reply to the love of God—is the same
as
sanctity. It is that which gives and gives and never demands.

To remain constant, we try to
respond to the love of God by seeking and serving Christ in
our fellow
men. If we do that faithfully, giving ourselves to God's
purposes, we
will develop a depth of peaceful, devoted love that passes
beyond the
need of being fed by feeling or the consolations of religion.

The Will Transformed

To love God, without demand
or measure, in and for Himself—this is charity, and charity is
the
spiritual life. Only this most gently powerful of all

attractions and
all pressures can capture and purify the will of man and
subordinate it
to the great purpose of God; for as His love and will are one,
so the
love and will of man must become one.

Therefore all other
purifications, disciplines and practices have meaning because
they
prepare and contribute to the invasion and transformation of
the heart
by the uncreated charity of God. "Thou art the Love wherewith
the heart
loves Thee."

For it is only when the
secret thrust of our whole being is thus reordered by God and
set toward
God that peace is established in the house of life. Then the
disorderly
energies of emotion and will are rectified and harmonized, and
all the
various and wide-spreading love that we pour out toward other
souls and
things is deepened, unselfed and made safe; because that which
is now
sought and loved in them is the immanent divine thought and
love.

Thus the will transformed in
charity everywhere discovers God. It sees behind and within
even the
most unpleasing creatures the all-pleasing Creator, and loves
and
cherishes in and for Him, that which in itself, never could be
loved. It
discerns and adores His mysterious action within the most

homely
activities and most disconcerting frustrations of the common
life. And
by this glad recognition of that secret Presence, all the
apprehensions
of the senses, all the conceivings of the mind, all the
hoarded
treasures and experiences of the past, are cleansed and
sanctified.

Love As the First Fruit

"The fruit of the Spirit,"
says the apostle Paul, "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering,
gentleness,
goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance"—all the things
the world
most needs. I do not think Paul arranged his list of the
fruits of the
Spirit in a casual order. They represent a progressive series
from one
point, and that point is love, the living, eternal seed from
which all
grow.

We all know that Christians
are baptized "into a life summed up in love," even though we
have to
spend the rest of our own lives learning how to do it. Love,
therefore,
is the budding-point from which all the rest come: that
tender,
cherishing attitude; that unlimited self-forgetfulness,
generosity and
kindness which is the attitude of God to all His creatures;
and so must
be the attitude toward them that His Spirit brings forth in
us.

To be unloving is to be out
of touch with God. So the generous, cherishing divine love,
the
indiscriminate delight in others, just or unjust, must be our
model too.

To come down to brass tacks, God loves the horrid man at the
fish shop
and the tiresome woman in the next flat and the disappointing
Vicar and
the contractor who has cut down the row of trees we loved to
build a row
of revolting bungalows.

God loves, not tolerates,
these wayward, half-grown, self-centered spirits and seeks
without
ceasing to draw them into His love. And the first-fruit of His
indwelling presence, the first sign that we are on His side
and He on
ours, must be at least a tiny bud of this love breaking the
hard and
rigid outline of our lives.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) *was one of the greatest mystical
and devotional writers of the Anglican Church.*