

By Father Charles Bowes

2 Kings 4:8, 14-16a
Romans 6:3-4,8-11
Matthew 10:37-42

Because we love God, we can really love others.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me... whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me... whoever finds his life will lose it... whoever loses his life for my sake will find it,” says Jesus in Matthew 10.

And we hear this and quite rightly moan and groan, “Oh brother...another test I’m flunking...what’s the point of all this religion anyway if it flies so full in the face of the human?” ...In St. Luke’s gospel, Chapter 14 it is even worse: “If you come to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and your own life too, you cannot be my disciple.” Scripture scholars do somersaults over that passage – tell us that the word “hate” is closer to the original Aramaic even though what was actually meant is the phrase “love more than.” ...“If you come to me loving wife, children, etc., *more than me*, you cannot be my disciple.” What this all boils down to is that it’s really tough to hear this and make sense out of it – but maybe we can. Both St. Matthew and St. Luke’s passages suggest that there are two dangers in the claims human relations make upon us. First, the beloved can become more important than God. Second, such love can become possessive.

...And this can be said of stuff other than people – our work, our church, our hobbies – our whatever. Whoever loves (mother) church or (brother) work more than me is unworthy of me – to paraphrase the Lord Jesus.

If the totality of our love is exhausted by any created thing or person, then that “loved one” must become the anchor of our being...our purpose and fulfillment, our security and final hope. Sooner or later such a total object of our love becomes our idol, a false god.

But God must always be “more than” any creature of earth. If we turn a human person into a god, either that person will eventually possess us, or we will try to possess and use the fabricated god as an idol.

Psychologically this paradox makes sense, although not to the person under the spell of idolatry. If we say to another, “You’re my everything; you’re my meaning; I am nothing without you,” then what is left of us to give that person? Why would he or she even be bothered with us, if we are nothing without them? Plus our love shatters because we are shrunk by the idolized creature without whom we would be nothing. Oddly enough, we also shrink the beloved; for there is a strategy in counterfeit love, always doomed to failure, which seeks control by investing all our attention. Parents thus suffocate the child who becomes their

“everything”. Love-idols are functions of a craving inadequacy; because when they fail as our “rock” or “security,” we come to hate them for betraying our expectations.

The same paradox applies to the way we love ourselves. If we make ourselves the absolute goal of our seeking, we bring ruin upon ourselves. Only when we die to such narcissistic illusions can we be fulfilled. Only when we take up the cross of true love – “laying down our lives,” sharing ourselves freely with our family and friends, not demanding that they be our gods or we be theirs – do we find ourselves.

If neither you nor I are God, but only God is God, then we may love each other freely, non-possessively and without jealousy. There’s no question of domination or control. Then we know the greatest gift God has given us, the capacity to bestow our lives freely in covenants and promises to our dear ones, who even in eternity are loved in God.

“Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me and the one who sent me,” says Jesus in Matthew 10. In this life and the next, when we so welcome each other, we truly love the God who dwells in us and yet is not reduced to us.

It’s what we’re about here at Eucharist – we become what we receive – the Body of Christ larger than anyone of us – but made up of all of us.

There’s an old song, “You’re my everything, rolled up into one...” because we can say this of God, we can experience it in those whose lives we touch.

Because we love God,
we can really love others.