

*During “lockdown” many people have learned how to make an act of “spiritual communion” while unable to receive Christ sacramentally. In live-streamed eucharists from St Faith’s and many other parishes, this has been accompanied by a prayer by St Alphonsus Liguori, a great eighteenth century moral theologian and teacher of prayer. This month’s reflection come from one of his writings, The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ.*

All the holiness and perfection of a soul consists in loving Jesus Christ, our highest good and our Saviour. Anyone who loves me, said Jesus, will be loved by my eternal Father; “The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me.” (*John 16.27*) “Some, says St. Francis de Sales, consider perfection to lie in austerity of life, others in prayer, others in frequenting the sacraments, others in almsgiving; but they deceive themselves: perfection lies in loving God wholeheartedly.” St Paul wrote, “Above all, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (*Colossians 3.14*) Love is what unites and preserves every virtue that makes a person perfect. Therefore, St Augustine used to say, “Love God, and do what you will.” This is because by loving God we learn never to do anything that displeases him and to do everything that delights him.

Doesn’t God in fact deserve all our love? He has loved us from eternity: “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” (*Jeremiah 31.3*)

“Remember, O man, says the Lord, that I was the first to love you. You were not yet in the world, the world was not there, and I already loved you. Since I am God, I love you; because I have loved myself, I have also loved you.” It is only right, then, for us to give him all our affections, and to love none other but him.

Seeing that people are drawn by acts of kindness, God determined to win their hearts by means of his gifts. So he said, “For this reason he said, I shall draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love” (*Hosea 11.4*) I want to draw people to love me by what usually ensnares them, that is, the bands of love. And all God’s gifts to humankind are just like this. He gave us a soul, made in his likeness, and endowed us with memory, intellect and will; he gave us a body equipped with the senses; it was for us that he created heaven and earth and everything else. He made all these things out of love for humankind, so that all creation might serve us, and we in turn might love God out of gratitude for so many gifts.

But God was not content to give us all these beautiful creatures. To win our love for himself, he went so far as to give us the fullness of himself. The eternal Father went so far as to give us his only Son. Seeing that we were all dead through sin and deprived of his grace, what did he do? Out of his immense and overflowing love he sent his beloved Son to pay our debt and to return to us the life which sin had taken away.

By giving us his Son, whom he did not spare precisely so that he might spare us, he bestowed on us at once every good: his grace, his love and heaven; for all these gifts, good as they are, are less than his Son. “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not also give us all good things with him?” (*Romans 8.32*)