

# Covenant of Love

Group Outlines from Schoenstatt

A Love That Satisfies # 11

## A Love That Satisfies

To appreciate what Covenant means, we have to look again and what love means. Pope Benedict's first encyclical is all about love *Deus Caritas Est*. There he writes that the term "love" has become one of the most frequently used and misused words. He stresses the love between a man and a woman, where body and soul are forever joined. Why is the love between man and woman so attractive and illusive, so demanding and rewarding, so painful sometimes and so fulfilling? Our world is saturated with sex but remains starved for love. Perhaps we are looking for love in too many faces, and in all the wrong places. Where is the right place and whose, then, is the right face to look for love? It is an amazing thing that our Catholic Church – despite all the supposed anti-sex sentiment – has a vision of sexual love far more glorious than anything Sigmund Freud or Britney Spears could dream of or imagine.

Why does the Vicar of Christ choose to discuss love between man and woman in his first encyclical? He is showing the answer to heal the world's ills by going to the root of all the world's problems: lack of love and, more specifically, the lack of a healthy understanding of the love between man and woman. Only by returning to the God who loves us in the Covenant can men and women learn again to love one another in the right way. Pope Benedict talks about two kinds of love: *Eros* and *agape*. The ancient Greeks called the love between the sexes *eros*. Today, that which is "erotic" has become almost synonymous with that which is "pornographic". As a result, many Christians think that the only way to deal with *eros* is to avoid it, repress it, don't talk about it, and stamp it out in favour of a more "proper" love. *Agape* is the Greek term to describe a love that is self-donating self-giving, self emptying, it is the sacrificial love that Christ revealed. The bottom line: *Agape*-love is loving like Jesus Christ. If we want to heal the world, if we want to heal human hearts, then we must unite *eros* with *agape*. *Eros* is good. We need *eros*. But *eros* alone (human, erotic love) has no possibility of granting the happiness it promises if we kick *agape* (sacrificial love) out of the picture.

Do we as Catholic frown on *eros*? No, not at all. Some people think, right when your mind, body and soul are crying yes, the Church walks in with her stifling, finger-waging no. Does Catholic morality really destroy the joy of erotic love? A Puritanism that often passes for Christianity does. Puritanism is fear-based and repressive. Authentic Catholic morality never comes from Puritanism. Sin separated erotic love, from self-giving love and left us not with love, but with lust. Love seeks to *give*, lust seeks to *get*. Once we understand that *eros* without *agape* can never satisfy, then we can see that indulging lust is akin to eating out of a rubbish bin to satisfy our hunger. Why would anyone want to eat out of a rubbish bin? God is inviting us to a wedding banquet.

Very often, in our attempts to unite the two in a healthy way, we lean towards two extremes: *angelism* or *animalism*. *Angelism* promotes a spiritual life at the expense of the body. It seems the body as an obstacle to spiritual fulfilment. It involves a rigorist approach, and judges that what the body needs or longs for is impure. *Angelism* leads to prudishness and a fearful repression of sexual feelings and desires. *Animalism*, on the other hand, stifles the spirit so that it can live a "carnal" life, unhampered by the voice of conscience or responsibility. Its moral code is permissiveness. *Animalism* promotes bodily pleasure as man's ultimate fulfilment. If it doesn't hurt anyone, or if consenting adults are involved, then it is ok. Just turn on the TV or watch a film or have a look at the internet to see how prevalent this distortion has become. Both *animalism* and *angelism* flow from the same failure to integrate body and soul, spirituality and sexuality in the way that God designed it to be in the beginning. When we love with body and soul, then we love well. We love in a way that sets people free. Remember the song from *Mick Jagger*, when he sings that he can get no "satisfaction"? Do we think for a moment that he's not getting enough sex? *Animalistic* love thus locks its victims in a futile and escalating cycle of more indulgence, and more empty promises. Our answer is to bring together *eros* and *agape*. Love like Christ loves.

The Covenant of Love with out MTA is a declaration of love. Mary helps us to love well. When we think of the love between Jesus and Mary, then we are given an example and an inspiration of how powerful love is and how powerful love needs to be if it is going to change our lives. The Symbolism in the Church has often shown this love in the image of the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Sometimes, you could go into a house and you will find these two pictures hanging on the wall. Mary and Jesus share a deep unity. She ensures that knowing Christ in an purely intellectual way, is transformed into knowing Christ in a life-changing way. What is the use of *knowing all about* Jesus, if we don't *know* Jesus? What is the point of having lots of information about the life and times of Jesus Christ, but are not touched by a vibrant love that actually transforms us into better people?

## Questions for Reflection

1. Do you think people today have a good understanding of love?
2. How do you think today's youth view love? Where are they getting their orientation from?

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