

“Love is...”



In the 1960s, when a New Zealand cartoonist called Kim Grove wanted to send her fiancé love letters she used her particular talent to do it in an original way. She drew a series a cartoons to illustrate aspects of what love means. They all began “Love is...” and pictured a cute little boy and girl who were in love. The captions included “Love is...staying calm when she takes ages to get ready”, “Love is...improving his mind”, “Love is...getting used to his designer stubble”, and so on. The cartoons were later published as booklets, syndicated in newspapers and made into valentine cards. Some of us in our teens in those days used them to advance our suit with the boy or girl of our dreams with mixed success, I have to say.

In 1970 the caption “Love is...being able to say you are sorry” first appeared in the cartoon strip. Sales of cards bearing this caption went viral as they provided a perfect first humble overture in bringing about reconciliation between couples separated by a quarrel both had come to regret.

Unfortunately it also happened to coincide with the release of the film *Love Story* whose most memorable and most quoted line is “Love means not ever having to say you’re sorry”. An unfortunate clash of contradictory views by the contemporary gurus of love. It is one of the many reasons why I prefer to trust St Paul’s take on love set out in today’s second reading. I believe this to rely on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit rather than mere human opinion and it is, for me, perhaps the most beautiful passage in the whole of sacred scripture.

Like Jesus in the Gospel, Paul speaks with authority and he makes clear that true love is not a fluffy, lovey-dovey thing. Love is tough and challenging. It is not easy to avoid jealousy where our loved ones are concerned. Love is not genuine where one party is controlling, domineering or possessive. Love is not genuine where one party enjoys belittling or humiliating the other or expects them to do all the work of the household and wait on them, slave for them. It is sadly not uncommon to find these sorts of

attitudes in a marriage. Such a marriage is not built on true love. True love is always kind and self-effacing, ready to excuse, to trust and to hope and to endure whatever comes.

True love is for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health and for life. In other words true love is selfless: true lovers would be ready to lay down their lives each other. This is the perfect, self-sacrificing love Jesus showed on the cross when he laid down his life for all of us. He said, “greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friend”. But Jesus went even further. He laid down his life for all, friends and enemies alike. St John says “anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God for God is love.” He goes on, “God is love and, wherever there is love and loving kindness, God is there”.

Whenever we experience authentic love, we are touching the very life of God. This is why true love turns our life on its head, makes us feel ten feet tall, helps us to see everything in a completely different light. This is why true love, God’s love, can completely transform us and make us turn our lives around. This is why St Paul’s words on love are so real, so true, so inspired. He met God in Jesus Christ in a vision that changed his life on the road to Damascus. God’s love of him transformed him from working tirelessly and single-mindedly, like Javert in *Les Mis*, to destroy Jesus and his followers, watching with satisfaction as they were stoned to death before his eyes, to being the greatest and bravest preacher and defender of Jesus and his followers the world has ever known.

Those of us enthusiastically following the serialisation of *Les Misérables* on television at the moment have not yet heard the famous line “to love another person is to see the face of God” which appears several times in the musical, and perhaps we may not, but the sentiment goes right to the heart of what I am saying and what love truly is. It is how we human beings participate most closely and intimately in the very life of God. So, then:

“Love is...to share the life of God”. That is the destiny God has prepared for each of us in Christ Jesus our Lord.