November

% Dorothy Day

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Summary: An essay and meditation about love in its many forms, human and divine. Quotes scripture, saints, secular writers, and especially Soloviev on love. Concludes that the Catholic Worker is " still trying to work out a theory of love, a study of the problem of love so that the revolution of love instead of that of hate may come about and we will have a new heaven and a new earth wherein justice dwelleth." Includes a poem whose theme is dying and rising. Deeply personal account of being with her dying mother.Includes prayers and meditations on death and dying. Prays to the Little Flower for her mother. Evidence of answered prayer came in a variety of roses from different sources. (DDLW #485).

THERE IS a character in *The Plague,*by Albert Camus, who says that he is tired of hearing about men dying for an idea. He would like to hear about a man dying for love for a change. He goes on to say that men have forgotten how to love, that all they seem to be thinking of these days is learning how to kill. Man, he says, seems to have lost the capacity for love.

What is God but Love? What is a religion without love? We read of the saints dying for love, and we wonder what they mean. There was a silly verse I used to hear long ago: "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." It comes from *As You Like It.*And nowadays in this time of war and preparing for war, we would agree, except for the saints. Yes, they have died for love of God. But Camus's character would say, "I mean for love of man." Our Lord did that, but most people no longer believe in Him. It is hard to talk to people about God if they do not believe in Him. So one can talk and write of love. People want to believe in that even when they are all but convinced that it is an illusion. (It would be better still to love rather than to write about it. It would be more convincing.)

In the Old and New Testaments there are various ways in which the relationship of God and men [is] mentioned. There is the shepherd and his sheep. "The Lord is my shepherd." "I am the Good Shepherd." The animal and the man. There is the servant and the master, there is the son and the father, and there is the bride and the bridegroom. "Behold, the bridegroom cometh." The Song of Songs, the Canticle of Canticles, is all about love. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth."

It is hard to believe in this love. In a book by Hugh of St. Victor, which I read once on the way from St. Paul to Chicago, there is a conversation between the soul and God about this love. The soul is petulant and wants to know what kind of a love is that which loves everyone indiscriminately, the thief and the Samaritan, the wife and the mother and the harlot? The soul complains that it wishes a *particular*love, a love for herself alone. And God replies fondly that, after all, since no two people are alike in this world, He has indeed a particular fondness for each one of us, an exclusive love to satisfy each one alone.

It is hard to believe in this love because it is a tremendous love. "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." If we do once catch a glimpse of it, we are afraid of it. Once we recognize that we are sons of God, that the seed of divine life has been planted in us at baptism, we are overcome by that obligation placed upon us of growing in the love of God. And what we do not do voluntarily, He will do for us. Father Roy, our dear Josephite friend who worked with us at Easton and who has been these past two years in a hospital in Montreal, learning what it is to be loved, used to tell a story of a leper he met at a hospital up on the Gaspé peninsula. The leper complained to him, How could he believe in the love of God?

Father Roy proceeded to tell his favorite story. First of all, there is dirt, the humus from which all things spring, and the flower says to the dirt, "How would you like to grow and wave in the breeze and praise God?" And the dirt says "Yes," and that necessitates its losing its own self as dirt and becoming something else. Then the chicken comes along and says to the flower, "How would you like to be a chicken and walk around like I do and praise God?" And the flower assures the chicken that it would like it indeed. But then it has to cease to be a flower. And the man comes to the chicken and says to it, "How would you like to be a man and praise God?" And of course the chicken would like it too, but it has to undergo a painful death to be assimilated to the man, in order to praise God.

When Father Roy told this story, he said with awe, "And the leper looked at me, and a light dawned in his eyes, and he clasped my hands and gasped, *'Father!'*And then we both cried together."

Father Roy is a childlike man, and the Russian leper up in the Canadian peninsula was a simple sufferer, and he saw the point that Father Roy was trying to make, and he began to believe in this love and to see some reason for his sufferings. He began to comprehend the heights and the depths and the strange mystery of this love. But it still takes the eyes of faith to see it.

The love of God and man becomes the love of equals, as the love of the bride and the bridegroom is the love of equals, and not the love of the sheep for the shepherd, or the servant for the master, or the son for the father. We may stand at times in the relationship of servant, and at other times in that of son, as far as our feelings go and in our present state. But the relationship we hope to attain to is that of the love of the Canticle of Canticles. If we cannot deny the

self in us, kill the self-love, as He has commanded, and put on the Christ life, then God will do it for us. We must become like Him. Love must go through these purgations.

Unfortunately, when we speak of the human love of man and woman, most people, though they hope against hope, still regard it as an illusion, a great and glowing experience, a magic which comes into their lives for the sake of the procreation of the race. They assume and accept the fact that it will die, that it will not last, and in their vain clutching at it, they will put off one partner and look for it in another, and so the sad game goes on, with our movie stars going from the fifth to the sixth bride and swearing the selfsame promises to each.

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The Best Years of Our Lives had a sad and cynical ending. While one young couple plighted their troth, exchanged their promises, another young couple disregarded promises already made and fell into each other's arms to try to regain, to recapture love once more. Illusive love!

Vladimir Solovyov writes in *The Meaning of Love* about the need to study this problem, to seek the growth of this love, so that the force of love may be set loose in the world today to combat the terrible force of hate and violence that we have unloosed. Father D'Arcy deals with the problem in *The Mind and Heart of Love.* De Rougemont, in *Love in the Western World,* writes also about this work of love. These books may be hard reading for those who seem to learn of love by reading best-sellers and seeing the prize movies. But the very fact that all best-sellers and prize movies deal with this very theme of love should make the man of today turn to such books as these and get down to a study of what is most vital in our lives.

That most people in America look upon love as an illusion would seem to be evidenced by the many divorces we see today – and the sensuality of despair that exists all around us. But all these divorces may too be an evidence about love. They hear very little of it in this war-torn world, and they are all seeking it. Pascal said of love, "You would not seek me if you had not already found me." Just so much faith is there, at any rate. A faith in love, a seeking for love. It is something, then, to build on, amongst the mass of people who have lost God, who do not know in what they believe, though they believe [in] and seek for love.

And where are the teachers to teach of this love, of the stages of this love, the purgations of this love, the sufferings entailed by this love, the stages through which natural love must pass to reach the supernatural?

We would all like to hear of men laying down their lives for love for their fellows, and we do not want to hear of it in the heroic tones of a statesman or a prince of the church. We all know that such phrases used in wartime mean nothing. Men are taught to kill, not to lay down their lives if they can possibly help it. Of course we do not talk of brothers in wartime. We talk of the enemy, and we forget the Beatitudes and the commandment to love our enemy, do good to them

that persecute us. “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.” One said that who did lay down His life for all men.

Youth demands the heroic, Claudel said, and youth likes to dream of heroic deeds and of firing squads, of martyrs and of high adventure. But bread means life too; and money, which buys bread, for which we work, also means life. Sharing and community living mean laying down your life for your fellows also, and it was of these things that Father Perrin, S.J., the workman priest in Germany, wrote in his moving book.

We have repeated so many times that those who have two cloaks should follow the early Fathers, who said, “The coat that hangs in your closet belongs to the poor.” And those who have a ten-room house can well share it with those who have none and who are forced to live in a municipal lodging house. How many large houses could be made into several apartments to take in others? Much hospitality could be given to relieve the grave suffering today. But people are afraid. They do not know where it all will end. They have all gone far enough in generosity to know that an ordeal is ahead, that the person taken in will turn into “the friend of the family,” most likely, or “the man who came to dinner.” No use starting something that you cannot finish, they say. Once bitten is twice shy. We have all had our experiences of ingratitude, of nursing a viper in our bosom, as the saying goes. So we forget about pruning in the natural order in order to attain much fruit. We don’t want to pay the cost of love. We do not want to exercise our capacity to love.

There are many stories one could tell about Catholic Worker life, but it is always better to wait until years have passed so that they become more impersonal, less apt to be identified with this one or that. There is the story of the sorcerer’s apprentice who took over the kitchen this last month at the farm. There is the story of a “friend of the family” who tried to stab a neighbor and was evicted by the neighbors. Too bad we cannot write these stories for the edification and instruction of those who are starting new houses of hospitality today.

There is a story now, however, about a reader of the paper – and this happened long enough ago so that we can tell it – who adopted a young girl and educated her, and the young girl proved to be a great joy and a comfort. Now she has entered a contemplative order to spend her life in prayer and work. The same reader then took in another young woman, who brought home a fatherless baby, and when that was forgiven her, went out and brought in still another, and there was apt to be a third, and our friend wrote and begged us for advice and help as to what to do. Was she contributing to the delinquency of this girl by forgiving seventy times seven, and was she perhaps going to have seventy times seven children to take care of ?

It is good to think of the prophet Hosea, whom I have mentioned before in writing on love. He was commanded by God to take a harlot to wife, and she had many children by other men. He was a dignified, respected teacher of his people, and he was shamed and humiliated by the wife of his bosom. Yet he

was to go down in history as [exemplifying] the love of God for His adulterous people.

Love must be tried and tested and proved. It must be tried as though by fire, and fire burns. "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of [the] living God."

In times of catastrophe we are all willing to share. In an earthquake, hurricane, war, or plague, people begin to love one another. Of course, the wife must consider her husband, but it is not so necessary for the husband to consider the wife. As head of the household, it is his job to lead the wife in hospitality, and if he is willing to support others in need, he should induce his wife to go along with him. He should share all but his intimate love with others, and that is for her alone. If he should withdraw that tenderness, that embrace, then he would be guilty indeed.

What kind of a love was that of Scobie, the Major in the current best-seller of Graham Greene, the love which had turned to indifference, if not to loathing at times, and which the author felt to be redeemed by the pity and compassion of Scobie for his nagging wife? How to love truly a woman after the *illusion*has passed and that woman becomes a climbing, snobbish, petty, self-conscious *inferior,*and not an equal, with whom there is no longer any possibility of the love of equals, which is the love of the Canticle of Canticles?

Here are some excerpts from Solovyov that perhaps are pertinent:

It is well known to everyone that in love there inevitably exists a special idealization of the beloved object, which presents itself to the lover in an entirely different light from that in which outsiders see it. I speak here of light not merely in a metaphorical sense; it is a matter here not only of a special moral and intellectual estimate, but moreover of a special sensuous reception; the lover actually sees, visually receives what others do not. And if for him too this light of love quickly fades away, yet does it follow from this that it was false, that it was only a subjective illusion?

. . . The true significance of love consists not in the simple experience of this feeling but what is accomplished by means of it, in the work of love.

For love it is not enough to feel for itself the unconditional significance of the beloved object, but it is necessary effectively to impart or communicate this significance to this object. . . .

. . . Each man comprises in himself the image of God. Theoretically and in the abstract, this Divine image is known to us in mind and through mind, but in love it is known in the concrete and in life. And if this revelation of the ideal nature, ordinarily concealed by its material manifestation, is not confined in love to an inward feeling, but at times becomes noticeable also in the sphere of external feelings, then so much greater is the significance we are bound to acknowledge for love as being from the very first the visible restoration of the Divine image in the world of matter. . . .

A woman wants compassion, not pity, and Major Scobie did not work very hard at communicating the significance of his love to his wife. Even two of the characters in *The Best Years of Our Lives*had gone a bit farther along the path of love when they told their daughter, who was falling in love with a married man, "How often have we hated one another!" In other words, what a purgation, what a working out we have been through together!

(I am consciously and purposely writing with these allusions so that those who are not able to read Solovyov but who do go to the movies will also know what I am writing about.)

True love is delicate and kind, full of gentle perception and understanding, full of beauty and grace, full of joy unutterable. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, what God hath prepared for those who love Him.

And there should be some flavor of this in all our love for others. We are all one. We are *one flesh*in the Mystical Body, as man and woman are said to be one flesh in marriage. With such a love one would see all things new; we would begin to see people as they really are, as God sees them.

We may be living in a desert when it comes to such perceptions now, and that desert may stretch out before us for years. But a thousand years are as one day in the sight of God, and soon we will know as we are known. Until then, we will have glimpses of brotherhood in play, in suffering, in serving, and we will begin to train for that community, that communion, that Father Perrin talked so much about in his story of the workman priest in Germany.

This last month there was an article by John Cogley in *America*about his experiences in the Chicago House of Hospitality. He writes of it as in the dim and distant past, and tells of the "mushroom growth" of such houses back in the thirties. In the present there are a few still struggling along, he writes, and a few farms existing in dire poverty.

Yes, the problems have become intensified; a great many have left the running. Where there were thirty-two houses of hospitality and farms, there are now eleven. But in those eleven we are still trying to work out a theory of love, a study of the problem of love so that the revolution of love, instead of that of hate, may come about, and we will have a new heaven and a new earth wherein justice dwelleth.

POEM FOR FALL

All around are the irregular fields.
Irregular because woodlots space the scene.
The fields are colorful with red and purple cabbages, pale
carrots, green turnips, feathery dill, and dark red beets.
The harvest is not yet in, and far in the hundred-acre field are

the bent figures of a dozen workers dressed in denim.
The trees – the oak, the maple, the elm and sassafras –
Are decked out brilliantly,
Dying gloriously
With joy,
With thankfulness.

Hope springs in my heart like a refreshing fountain.
This is the season of hope,
This, the month when we pray for the dead.
And I, whom "the certainty of dying afflicteth,
Am consoled by the promise of future immortality."
"Life is changed, not taken away."
Life is still there.

And as I walk these wagon tracks between fields,
Through the bright November air, sharp with impending frost,
But with the caress of the sun still on it,
Still as only November days can be still, expectant, breathless,
It is easy to think on death and life and their embrace.

For it is long since that my dying has begun.
So long that one gets used to it.
And long since, and yet how short a time
That I began to live.
The life increases with my dying.
That life becomes the more abundant life.
Life that is the beginning of our heaven here and now.

Some fields are bare and brown amid the green,
And striding through the harrowed field
Comes the sower.
His arm swings with long rhythms;
He strides freely.
He flings the seed.
Overhead wheel the swallows,
Swooping and dancing in the sun.
Another field far distant
Already shows its cover crop
Of tender rye,
And as I watch, I think of St. Paul's words:

But some man will say:
"How do the dead rise again?
Or with what manner of body shall they come?"

Senseless man! That which thou sowest is not quickened,
Except it die first.

And that which thou sowest,
Thou sowest not the body that shall be,
But bare grain,
As of wheat, or of some of the rest.
But God giveth it a body as He will,
And to every seed its proper body.
All flesh is not the same flesh;
But one is the flesh of man,
Another of beasts,
Another of birds,
Another of fishes.
And there are bodies celestial
And bodies terrestrial;
But one is the glory of the celestial
And another of the terrestrial.
One is the glory of the sun,
Another the glory of the moon,
And another the glory of the stars.
For star differeth from star in glory.
So also is the resurrection of the dead.

It is sown in corruption;
It shall rise in incorruption.
It is sown in dishonor;
It shall rise in glory.
It is sown in weakness;
It shall rise in power.

It is sown a natural body;
It shall rise a spiritual body.

Behold, I tell you a mystery.
We shall all indeed rise again.

Deo gratias.

THIS MONTH I think of my mother, who died a few years ago on the feast of St. Raphael, the patron of travelers.

"My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?"

But the psalmist also says, "In death there is no one that is mindful of thee." So it made me happy that I could be with my mother the last few weeks of her life, and for the last ten days at her bedside daily and hourly. Sometimes I thought to myself that it was like being present at a birth to sit by a dying person and

see their intentness on what is happening to them. It almost seems that one is absorbed in a struggle, a fearful, grim, physical struggle, to breathe, to swallow, to live. And so, I kept thinking to myself, how necessary it is for one of their loved ones to be beside them, to pray for them, to offer up prayers for them unceasingly, as well as to do all those little offices one can. When my daughter was a little tiny girl, she said to me once, "When I get to be a great big woman and you are a little tiny girl, I'll take care of you," and I thought of that when I had to feed my mother by the spoonful and urge her to eat her custard. How good God was to me, to let me be there. I had prayed so constantly that I would be beside her when she died; for years I had offered up that prayer. And God granted it quite literally. I was there, holding her hand, and she just turned her head and sighed. That was her last breath, that little sigh; and her hand was warm in mine for a long time after.

It was hard to talk about dying, but every now and then we did. But I told her that we could no more imagine the life beyond the grave than a blind man could imagine colors. We talked about faith, and how we could go just so far in our reasoned belief, and that our knowledge was like a bridge which came to an end, so that it did not reach the other shore. A wonderful prayer, that one. "I believe, O God. Help Thou mine unbelief."

The beautiful flowers around her bedside were like a gorgeous promise of the new life to come. In winter everything seems so dead – the ground, the trees, and all the shrubbery around the house – and then in a few short months things begin to stir, palpably, and life bursts forth again. Mother had seen seventy-five autumns. Seventy-five times had she seen those promises fulfilled.

Life is changed, not taken away.

In Him there hath shone forth upon us the hope of a happy resurrection, so that we, saddened by knowing that we must one day die, are comforted by the promise of immortal life to come. From Thy faithful, O Lord, life is not taken away; it is but changed, for when their dwelling place in this earthly exile shall have been destroyed, there awaiteth them an everlasting home in heaven.

But some man will say: "How do the dead rise again? Or with what manner of body shall they come?" Senseless man! That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die first. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but bare grain, as of wheat.

These were comforting things to talk about and to think about, those all-too-short afternoons by mother's bedside. Outside, the maple trees blazed, cast their leaves about them, and stood gaunt and clean against the sky. Asters and chrysanthemums still bloomed in the garden.

One morning I prayed to the Little Flower, whose picture is over the foot of my bed, that she would especially look after my mother. I reminded her of her own grief at her father's long dying. That night Julia Porcelli brought me in some dried blessed roses. The next day, a friend brought a tiny bouquet with lace

paper about it made up of roses and carnations, and my mother greeted it with a smile and held it in her hands a few times that afternoon. And it was that evening that she died, so quietly, so gently, saying but a few moments before to my brother, "Kiss me goodnight and run along, because I want to go to sleep."

A week later, when I went to Poughkeepsie to visit my three aunts, one of whom is a Catholic, and to go with them to offer up a Mass of thanksgiving for my mother's most peaceful death, we came out of St. Peter's Church that misty morning to be greeted by a brilliant rose in the garden next to the church. And when we arrived home for breakfast, there was a bouquet telegraphed to us from Florida, and in the center of the fall flowers were two lovely roses. The Little Flower was prompt and generous indeed in her message.

I wrote the account because I like to show my gratitude by telling others of such favors. Perhaps, too, it may comfort others who have sore and lonely hearts over the approaching death of a near one. "Life is changed, not taken away," and what a glorious change in these sad times, after a long and valiant life.

Look down with favor, we beseech Thee, O Lord, upon the offering we make for the soul of Grace, thy servant; from heaven send healing to it, and bid it rest in the certainty of Thy love.

O Lord, the God of mercies, grant to the soul of Thy handmaid a place of solace, of peaceful rest and of glorious light.

This selection is from the new edition of *On Pilgrimage* by Dorothy Day with a foreword by Michael O. Garvey and an introduction by Mark and Louise Zwick, published in 1999 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. *On Pilgrimage* is available for purchase at your local bookstore or directly from Eerdmans (800-253-7521 or sales@eerdmans.com.) Outside of the USA contact T&T Clark, LTD http://www.tandtclark.co.uk.