

Why I wrote this book... (don't skip this section!)

I wrote this book to because I have been a Disciple of the Love of Jesus for over 35 years and I want share what He has taught me about THE most important question we can ask: **What is Love?**

Our world feels like it's coming apart at the seams, doesn't it? We hear constant cries for justice, for equity, for inclusion, for a solution to income inequality. People are desperately searching for something, often calling it "love," but like the old song says, they're often "looking for love in all the wrong places." It's a deep ache in the heart of humanity, a longing for connection, meaning, purpose and peace that seems increasingly elusive.

I have been walking with the Lord for over 35 years and deeply thinking about "God is Love" and what that means. I have observed the seismic shifts in our culture. I'm absolutely convinced of one thing: the chaos we see, the confusion, the division, the deep wounds both today and throughout history, boil down to a fundamental misunderstanding of the most important question we could ever ask:

What is Love?

For the Love of Children: Why This Can't Wait

Let me tell you why this question has become so urgent for me, and why I believe it should be urgent for you too.

Years ago, when I was serving as a youth pastor, I had an experience that changed everything for me. I was working with teenagers—beautiful, energetic, hopeful young people who were asking the deepest questions about life, love, and meaning. But I began to notice something heartbreaking: these kids were being fed a steady diet of counterfeits.

They were being told that love was just a feeling, that truth was relative, that justice meant getting what you want, and that mercy meant never having to face consequences. They were being taught that their bodies were just biological machines, that their sexuality was just recreation, and that marriage was just a temporary contract based on mutual satisfaction.

And I watched—with growing alarm—as these lies destroyed them from the inside out.

I saw beautiful young women believing they had to give their bodies away to be loved, only to be used and discarded. I saw young men taught that strength meant domination, that vulnerability was weakness, and that commitment was optional. I saw kids from broken homes concluding that marriage was a joke, that children were burdens, and that the only person you could really count on was yourself.

The most heartbreaking part? **These young people were hungry for authentic love.** They could sense that what they were being offered was counterfeit, but they had no vocabulary for the real thing. They had never seen a marriage where spouses actually laid down their lives for each other. They had never witnessed justice and mercy working together in harmony. They had never experienced the security of covenant love that says, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

That's when I realized: **We are failing our children.** Not just as individual parents or teachers, but as a Church, as a society, as a civilization. We are handing them counterfeits and wondering why they're spiritually malnourished. We are giving them broken definitions of love and then acting surprised when their relationships break.

This book is for them. For the teenagers I worked with who deserved better. For the children being raised today who need adults who know what love actually is. For the young adults trying to build marriages and families without a roadmap. For the parents who want to pass on something real and lasting to their children.

But here's the thing: **You can't give what you don't have.** If we want to teach our children about authentic love, we have to understand it ourselves. If we want to protect them from counterfeits, we have to be able to recognize and articulate the real thing. If we want to raise a generation that can heal our broken world, we have to give them the tools to do it.

This is why this book matters. Not just for your own spiritual growth—though that's important—but for the children who are counting on us to get this right. The children in your family, your parish, your community. The children who will inherit the world we leave behind.

They deserve adults who can answer the question "What is love?" with clarity, conviction, and truth. They deserve to see marriages that image God's covenant love. They deserve to experience justice and mercy working together in their families. They deserve to grow up knowing that they are created in the image of God, that their lives have infinite dignity and purpose, and that authentic love is not only possible but is their birthright as children of God.

The next generation is depending on us. Let's not fail them.

It sounds so simple, doesn't it? Yet, getting this wrong has devastating consequences for individuals, families, and entire societies. Getting it right? That changes *everything*. It's the key that unlocks the meaning of our existence and the path to true freedom, true justice and meaning.

The shortest, most profound answer comes straight from the heart of Divine Revelation, penned by the Apostle John:

God is Love. (1 John 4:8)

Wow. Let's just pause and let that sink in for a moment. *God. Is. Love.* If we truly believe that, if we take that statement seriously as Catholics, then understanding love means understanding God Himself – not that we can know everything about His infinite, unknowable essence, but we can know things about God from what he has revealed to us – from fundamental truths of who we are as human beings – from the reality we find ourselves in. This book is my humble attempt, guided by the immense wisdom of His Church, to help us, as fellow Catholics journeying together, grasp the incredible depth, beauty, and transformative power packed into that three-word sentence – **God is Love.**

So, what *is* this love that God *is*? How do we begin to comprehend it? Drawing from 2,000 years of Catholic teaching, the depths of prayer, and the lived experience of countless saints who have walked this road before us, here's what I have perceived as the heart of it, a definition we will explore together:

Perfect Love is the sacred, sacrificial gift of covenant which binds true justice and true mercy into life-giving communion.

That's a mouthful, I know! It's dense, and each word carries significant weight. We'll unpack every piece of that definition – sacred, sacrificial, covenant, justice, mercy, communion – throughout this book. But the core idea, the essential takeaway, is this: **Real love, God's love, the love we are all searching for, is the perfect, inseparable unity of Truth, Justice, and Mercy.**

Or even shorter: Love is TRUE Justice AND TRUE Mercy. It requires Truth, it requires BOTH Justice and Mercy and without God, these words become meaningless.

Think about it in your own life, in the relationships and situations you navigate every day:

- Justice without mercy? That quickly becomes harsh, cold, legalistic, even cruel. It can crush the spirit rather than heal it.
- Mercy without justice? That becomes enabling, permissive, sentimental, and ultimately unloving because it doesn't uphold the truth or call us to conversion and genuine flourishing. It papers over wounds instead of truly healing them.
- Trying for either justice or mercy without grounding them firmly in objective Truth – the Truth revealed by God? That leads inevitably to confusion, chaos, and the terrible suffering we see when "good intentions," detached from reality, pave roads we never intended to travel.

Only when we strive, empowered by God's grace, to bring His truth, His justice, and His mercy together in our minds and hearts and actions (mind, soul and strength) can we begin to experience the kind of love, the deep peace of acceptance, and the lasting joy our hearts were created for. And even better, we will avoid much of the suffering that comes from misunderstanding or misapplying these concepts.

Separating them is like trying to separate heat, light, and energy from the sun – you end up with a distortion, something less than the real thing.

And here is the incredible gift, the breathtaking reality of our Catholic Faith: it doesn't just *talk* about this integrated love; it *gives* it to us and helps us live it! It provides the concrete means to encounter and live this love. Through:

- **UNITY** in the one Church Jesus Himself founded upon Peter.
- **COMMUNION** with Christ Himself, most especially in the Holy Eucharist, where He gives Himself to us entirely.
- **WORSHIP** in the Sacred Liturgy, the Mass, that forms and shapes our hearts according to His.
- **TRUTH** revealed definitively in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, authentically interpreted by the Magisterium.
- **JUSTICE** taught clearly through centuries of Catholic Social Teaching, guiding how we build a society that reflects God's design.
- **MERCY** poured out infinitely from the Cross and offered freely in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- **GRACE** given abundantly through all the Sacraments, empowering us to actually *live* this demanding but beautiful love.

The Catholic Faith isn't just about "following rules" or checking boxes to "get to heaven." or "mindless ritual". It's about entering into a life-transforming, dynamic *relationship* with God who IS Love, right here, right now. It's about allowing that divine love to permeate our being and overflow into how we think, speak, and act – how we treat our families, our neighbors, our colleagues, and even our enemies. It's about becoming living proof that the Catholic Faith isn't just a collection of ancient beliefs, but a beautiful, true, and powerful way to live fully alive in the 21st century. And when Catholics live out their Faith in this way, when we truly live as the Body of Christ, we bring true LOVE into the world and offer the only real answer to the world's desperate search for justice, mercy, meaning, connection, and peace – LOVE. He doesn't just want "equity" or "inclusion" or "racial justice" or "income equality" or "climate justice" -- he wants TRUE Justice and TRUE Mercy -- he wants TRUE LOVE for us. This sounds esoteric, but in this book I am going to show you what love is in a VERY CONCRETE way, and how it applies to our everyday lives. Is it simple? No. That is why it has always been a struggle for people to define it. It is multi-faceted, like a diamond, and it requires us to look at it from many angles to see its full beauty. But I promise you, once you see it, you will realize that you have always known it deep down in your heart.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

He didn't say He *showed* the way, or *taught* the truth, or *gave* life – He said He *IS* the Way, *IS* the Truth, *IS* the Life. He is the perfect embodiment of the integrated love we seek. My deepest prayer for this book is that it helps all of us know Jesus more intimately in this way. And that through us, His Body, the Church, will shine ever brighter as the light of the world and the salt of the earth, offering the true answer to the world's desperate search for love.

(A Note on Humility: While we embark on this journey to explore what it means that "God is Love," we must always do so with profound humility. As the Catechism reminds us (CCC 271), God's very mystery infinitely surpasses our limited human understanding. This book focuses specifically on the Catholic understanding of His love as He has revealed it and how we, His children, are called to participate in that divine life, we are not presuming to fully define the infinite God Himself. And I also don't claim that this book will be 100% correct, but I have done my best to make sure all of it is in line with all of the Catholic Faith as it has been handed down to us in the 21st Century.)

Your Roadmap for This Journey

I feel so blessed that you're joining me on this exploration of the most vital topic imaginable: Love. This isn't a self-help book; it's a deep dive into the heart of the Christian Faith, but not to make us feel warm and fuzzy, but rather to challenge us to join Him on His mission FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD! If you have a heart like I do for helping explain the Faith in plain english and in a way that makes sense to the modern world, then I hope you will "love" this book :)

My own journey into the heart of this mystery began when I was 19, on a Catholic retreat at the "Emmaus" retreat center in Panama. It was there God taught me His first lesson, one I have never stopped thinking about, rooted in the words of St. John:

"God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him." (1 John 4:16).

"God is Love." Wow—amazing... That one statement changed my entire life. I knew this was deep, but I had no idea! It ignited in me a lifelong quest, to figure out: "What does it *mean* that 'God is Love'?" I felt this truth deep within my bones, yet I knew my understanding was incomplete. Now, decades later, through countless hours of learning, studying, thinking, teaching, and talking – God, through His Church and most especially watching our society suffer (needlessly) with so much un-truth, it all helped bring it all together for me into a clear, concise, and simple understanding of what love truly is. And that's what I hope to share with you in this book.

I had a simple prayer back then. Lord, help me to learn how to explain your love in a way that doesn't sound like a bunch of theological jargon, or "church speak," but rather in a way that people can just see you clearly.

And every year since then, God has led me closer and closer. And now he has given me the grace of being able to understand His love in a way that I can share it with you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, in a way that is simple, clear, and practical.

Once you hear me say it, it will seem like something you always knew. This is not a new definition of love, just a clear but deep way to explain what the Church has been teaching for 2,000 years. Note also that this or any definition of love is a weak attempt to put into words the infinite mystery of God's love. But anyway, without further ado, here it is:

Perfect love is the sacred, sacrificial gift of covenant which binds true justice and true mercy into life-giving communion.

Think of this definition as a multi-faceted diamond. Each chapter will illuminate another facet, showing

how every aspect of our faith fits perfectly together in God's amazing plan for His desire for Communion with US! I wrote this book to be both a plain english, starting from the ground up, explanation of what Christianity truly calls us to, but also a devotional that will help you grow in your relationship with the LORD and with those you love. And more importantly, I hope it will help you join God on His mission for the Salvation of the World.

We'll journey together through these main sections of the book:

- **Part 1: Introduction - What is Love?**
- **Part 2A: Pillars of Love — The Essential Tenets**
- **Part 2B: Instinctive Responses of the Heart**
- **Part 3: Disciplines of a Loving Heart**
- **Part 4: Fruits of a Love Made Mature**
- **Part 5: Communion — Love's Sacred Fulfillment**