

December 23, 2022

Dear CRE student,

We missed you at CRE on December 12th! So that you keep up with the other people in your group, we ask that you complete the following:

1. Opening Prayer

Read Exodus 3:7-8.

But the LORD said: I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey,

This passage is taken from the scene at the burning bush. This is where God reveals himself to Moses and reveals himself as one who 1) sees 2) hears 3) knows and 4) rescues. The story of our faith is the story of God coming into a volatile world to rescue the ones whom He loves, from the grip of destruction, and take them to a place of love. This selfless act, where God freely sacrifices Himself for his beloved, is an example of His Love. The word “love” in our culture is often overused. Love is not just positive feelings for someone, though God certainly looks at us with great affection. More than that, the Love of God is an act of total self-giving and a willingness to anything for the good of another. This is also the love we strive for as Catholics.

2. The Four Loves

Answer the following questions and read below:

- Write down the name of a food that you love.
- Write down either movies, songs or pieces of music that you love.
- Write down the names of the friends that you would say that you love
- Now think about the members of your family that you love. This could be parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. Write down the names of family members that you would say that you love

It is not very helpful that we use the word “love” to describe our feelings about both pizza and our grandparents. English uses just the one word, “love”. Greek, the language that the New Testament is written in, uses four different words. Understanding these Greek words can give us a proper understanding of love. The four words are 1) eros 2) storge 3) philia 4) agape.

“Eros” (EHR-ohs) is possessive love. It is the love that describes things that give us pleasure and is just for one's own benefit. Food, books, movies, songs: all of these are things we enjoy, but they don't demand any kind of relationship. “Eros” is the root of the word “erotic”. It is just the love of desire.

“Storge” (STORE-geh) refers to familial love. It is a deep and caring bond that develops naturally between parent and children, husbands and wives, siblings and also others who are close enough to be called “family.” Storge love is a protective love that can withstand hardships and trials.

“Philia” (FEEL-ee-ah) means close friendship or brotherly love in Greek. It encompasses love for fellow humans, care, respect, and compassion for people in need. The relationship you have with your closest friends would be “Philia”. That is why Philadelphia is called “the city of brotherly love”.

The final word for love in Greek was actually rarely used when the New Testament was being written. Despite it being rarely used in common language, the New Testament writers use it more than any other three words for love. “Eros” is not used at all and “storge” is used in very few cases. A form of “philia” is used around 25 times, but the word “agape” (AH-gah-peh) is used over 140 times. That makes “agape” the most distinctive Christian word for love.

It is used by Christ to describe the love between the Father and him. It is also the love that he commanded his followers to have for one another. It is a totally selfless love. Agape is a bond that cannot be broken. Early in Equipped for Life, we made covenant promises with each other. Those promises are expression of “agape”. The person who has this kind of love does not seek its own advantage. Instead, it tries to have the other person to thrive. This is the love of a rescuer. “Agape” leads the Father to offer his Son to us and for the Son to offer Himself to the Father as a sacrifice. With that there are three things to say about “agape” that help us understand the Love of God.

- 1) It is unconditional. There is nothing that will keep God from loving us.
- 2) It is unbreakable. God is always one step away from us. We cannot outrun God.
- 3) It is selfless. God is seeking for us to thrive and flourish because he wants the best for us.
- 4) We are God’s preference. “Agape” is also used to describe preference. This means that God doesn’t coldly wish for our best. It means that he likes us, too. He enjoys our company.

We read in 1 John 3:1-2:

See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

God is Love. When God revealed himself to Moses he described himself as Love. He sees us. He hears us. He knows us. He comes to rescue us. Now in Jesus we see that God is a unity of love. God is an act of total self-giving. The Father gives himself fully to the Son. He holds nothing back. In return, the Son gives himself fully to the Father, holding nothing back. The bond of Love that unites the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit.

The totality of the scriptures, from creation to revelation, is a love story between God and the human soul. It is a story of the lengths that the Father will go to regain the hearts of His lost

children. Creation itself is an act of selfless love on the part of God. Divine Revelation, God revealing himself to humanity, is an act of love. The act of sustaining humanity is an act of selfless love on the part of God. The continued acts of forgiveness seen throughout the scriptures are all acts of love. The life, preaching, death, and resurrection of Christ express the Love of God.

The biggest hurdle that we face is our ability to accept the love that the Lord is presenting. Our experiences tell another story about our loveliness. Our inclination to judge ourselves based on what we do, or what we have been told, instead of who we are can hinder our acceptance. Regardless of our recognition of God and God's attributes, we wrestle with the desire to be in control. We want to be in control of God's ability to love us, or see something lovable within us. Perhaps we think, "For it to be true that God loves me, it has to measure up to my reasoning."

There is an internal narrative that we tell ourselves about ourselves, that has the foundation of condemnation. God, instead extends an invitation to faith and humility to accept God's Love regardless of our understanding.

3. The Color of Love

Answer the following questions:

1. Which love best describes your relationship with your closest circle of friends?
2. Which love best describes your relationship with your parents or closest guardian?
3. Which love best describes how you approach God?
4. Which love best describes the love that you have experienced from God?

Answer the following questions as you are comfortable doing so:

5. Do you believe that you are lovable? Why or why not?
6. Do you believe that you must prove yourself in order to be loved?
7. Why is it difficult for some people to believe that God loves you?
8. How would your life be different if people actually believed that God loved you?
9. Is it difficult to accept the love of others?

4. Closing prayer

A Reading from John 8:3-11

Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone

with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin anymore."

Think about a moment when you felt particularly alone, misunderstood, or even unloved. It could be a past situation or it may be something that is you're going through now. Try to remember what that felt like. Would you describe it as a dark place? Was it so dark that you couldn't see anyone or anything around you?

Offer a prayer for those in your CRE class.

Finally, offer a prayer for yourself. What are your needs? What do you hope for? Do you have any fears? Tell all of these to God.

Know it is no by accident that the people that love you are there. Their hands represent the hand of Jesus that has been there through all the rough times. They also represent the covenant promise that Jesus will be there in your future. The agape of God refuses to let you go through this world alone. It is a hand of encouragement, love, and strength.

Listen to the song: *Reckless Love* which can be found at <https://open.spotify.com/track/OrH0mprtecH3grD9HFM5AD?si=107f37072cf84e27>

God, our loving Father, you do not use without regard for our well-being. You are not a God of "eros". You are our Father, but you are more than a God of "storge". You invite us into a friendship, but you are more than a God of "philia". You are a God of "agape". Your love is unconditional. It is unstoppable. It is forever because you are love and you are forever. Let us this truth go from our head and move into our heart. We pray this through Christ the Lord. Amen.

Please complete and submit by our next class. You may email it to rotramelm@stjohn23rd.org or turn it in to your catechist/small group leader.

Peace and Blessings,

Maureen Rotramel
Director of Faith Formation