

3rd SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - A
“The Love Between You”

I recently heard of a young man who was pretty much down on life, well, actually, he was down on God. He had few friends, and all this talk about God being there when you needed him, just wasn't his experience. There was a darkness about him, like a cloud was hovering over his head. He was a good person, but he was sullen, sad, distant, difficult to reach, like he was living in another world altogether.

I believe Isaiah describes such persons as *“people walking in darkness.”* To try to convince them that there is a God, let alone a God who loves them, just won't work. For them to see the light, as it were, something has to happen. They must experience light coming into their lives. But as long as they remain isolated from others, it simply won't happen. They will experience God-with-us only when there are people who live in the Spirit of God who are there for them. But even then, they must be open to them, or nothing will happen.

The story of Jesus is the story of a man who was there for us. Jesus' life was about the people in his life. He spoke to them, touched them, lifted them up. By his reaching out to them in compassion, mercy and love, they experienced God's love. They felt their innate dignity, perhaps for the first time. Those open to Jesus experienced the love of God, and it changed everything. It is as if they saw a great light, a light that brought hope to them, joy to their hearts, meaning to their lives. But those who resisted Jesus only became bitter. I would say the most common way we today sense this light, this joy, this kind of transformation, is when we go through the experience of falling in love. The world changes. Everything changes. Remember?

I firmly believe that, while God is everywhere, God is above all found in our relationships. God's energy is found in what goes on between us. Or to be more specific, in the relationships of love that we have with the people in our lives. *"Where love is God is."* It seems to me that the transformation that Jesus wanted to bring to his followers was to make them into people whose hallmark was love for each other. No one was to be excluded from that love; no one. As I said in my Christmas homily, *"Jesus came to show us a new way to be human,"* well, this is that new way.

When Jesus told the people to repent, he was asking for more than their sorrow for sin. He was asking them to turn their lives around, as if to say, *"If you are going north, turn south; if east, turn to the west."* He was asking them to radically reorient their lives. And nothing could be more radical than for them than to become people of love. It would change everything. When we choose to look at people with love rather than disdain, things turn upside down. I remember a couple who didn't like me who made a Marriage Encounter. When they saw me afterwards, they said to me, *"My, Father, you've changed."* No I hadn't. They had.

What a difference the love between us makes when we choose to live it. A few years ago I wrote a poem for our lover's celebration in an attempt to make this point. Let me share it with you now. While written with married couples in mind, you can easily adapt it to the relationships in your life if you are not married; parent to child, teen to parent; student to teacher.

THE LOVE BETWEEN YOU

It is time we honor what goes on between you,
Not you as bride,
Nor you as groom,
Not even you as husband and wife,
Not you at all.

We honor your love,
Which comes, in part, from each of you;
Your gift to each other,
That creates you anew.

We take this time to honor the sacred,
The love between you,
That is nothing less than a sign
Of God's love made visible,
For all the world to see;
And in the seeing,
To be drawn into the ways of love.

It is between you
That God's power does its creative work;
Not in the man alone,
Nor in the woman by herself,
But in that wonderful space between you,
That you fill with your love.

Love must be between you,
Or there is nothing between you.
Only emptiness,
And your marriage is a wasteland.

But when love is between you,
Your differences are blessed,
Opposites attract,
Creation continues,
And God says, "*It is very good!*"

When love is between you,
The meaning of a sunset changes,
As does the meaning of a meal,
A song,
A glance,
A touch.

Even the atmosphere in a room changes,
Children can feel it,
It has warmth,
The blush of joy,
A feeling of security.

When love is between you,
You have a channel to see clearly
The beauty of the other,
The stupidity of clinging to a hurt,
The foolishness of refusing to listen,
The wisdom of forgiving.

When love is between you,
You understand the wise man who said,
*“God will hold us accountable
for every pleasure
that is not enjoyed.”*

When love is between you,
You continue to create the beauty of your spouse,
And begin to wonder deep in your heart,
How beautiful God must be
Who first created her and molded him
In the Divine Image.

When love is between you,
You take time to notice,
You take time to say it,
You take time to remember it.
You take the time . . . to be.

When love is between you,
You think of the wall hanging that says,
 *“Peace is seeing a beautiful sunset ...
 and knowing who to thank.”*
Your love invites you to look beyond its beauty
 To the Mystery it makes real.

When love is between you,
The intensity of your desire
 Unites the physical with the spiritual,
 The sensual with the mystical,
 The human with the divine.

When love is between you,
Your two stories become one,
 Your distinctiveness makes room for union,
 And you are in awe by the wonder of it all.

When love is between you,
There is no room for manipulation,
 No place for self-seeking,
 And no need for worry.

You become aware that life is a gift,
That creation is unfinished,
 And that, somehow, God trusts you
 To help finish it
 With your love.

When love is between you,
You look at yourself in the mirror,
 And may doubt your worthiness;
 You may question your readiness,
 You may wonder what you know,
 Knowing only that you love,
 And trust it is enough.

When love is between you,
 You are caught up in a mystery,
 Not to be solved,
 But to be lived.
You see how wonderful life really is,
 And you hold on to it,
 You taste it,
 You savor it as on your tongue,
 Lest it slip away too fast.

When love is between you,
 You dread the day it will come to an end,
 For something this wonderful
 Couldn't last forever,
 Could it?

Then you remember:
 God is Love!
 Where love is, God is!
 Love never ends!
 Love is stronger than death,
 Even for a man and a woman!

When love is between you,
 The goal of your journey together
 Is no more important
 Than the journey you share,
 Day by day,
 Week by week,
 Year by year,
 When love is between you.

What is happening between you and the people in your life? ... May
the Eucharist we now celebrate continue the transformation of our hearts.