

On October 17 the Centering discussion period talked about the Great Commandment. John 15: 12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” This morning the topic will continue in a discussion of the nature of Christ-like love.

[The following has been edited for this presentation. These few pages are an adaptation of Emmanuel Charles McCarthy’s transcript of one of his video presentations. The link to that transcript is below. <http://www.emmanuelcharlesmccarthy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Behold-the-Lamb-FINAL-Transcript.pdf>]

BEHOLD THE LAMB by (Rev.) Emmanuel Charles McCarthy -- The Lamb of Forgiving Love

Eros: Reciprocal Love

The original New Testament was written in Greek, all 27 books. Specifically, it was written in a form of Greek called Koine Greek. In that Greek, the common word for love is eros. Eros means love. In Plato’s dialogues (Plato ~428-348 BC), eros is used hundreds and hundreds of times. It doesn’t just mean as we think of it today in English - erotic love, sexual love. It does mean that kind of love, love between a man and a woman sexually, but it means far more than that. It’s basically the love of mutual reciprocation. So indeed, you could say about your husband or wife or girlfriend or boyfriend “I love you” and you use eros. But you also use eros when you say I love God. I pray to God. God hears my prayers. God answers me. I pray to God and we have this mutual relationship. You’d use eros. But you could also use it analogically. For example, in English, you’d say, “I love a McDonald’s hamburger,” eros would be the word. It’s the common ordinary word that’s used, without exception, in Greek for love.

If you were translating the Greek version of the New Testament, you would supply the one English word “love” to cover several words that might be used for love in the Greek. This is similar to using the single English word “snow” to express the 50 or so Inuit words used by Eskimos for types of snow and ice.

In the English translation of the New Testament. the word love, L O V E, occurs 338 times. Of the 338 times in the English New Testament that love appears, the original Greek word being translated is NOT eros. Eros does not appear on a single occasion in the Greek New Testament! This is extraordinary! There is no way that eros could not appear unless those people doing the writing over a period of anywhere from 20 to 80 years after Jesus were totally conscious that this word *eros* did not describe the love that was salvific.

The word that DOES occur in the Greek Bible is agape. 318 times of the 338 times that the word love appears in the English New Testament, the word being translated is agape. The other 20 times the word that is in the Greek is philia, which means brotherly or sisterly love, like Philadelphia. Philia, a brotherly/sisterly kind of affection. Agape is the word in all the great sayings that we know of Jesus about love starting with “Love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, and whole strength. Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 23:37-40; Lk 10:27). The word is agape. Love of enemies, the word is agape. In Paul’s great love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, he writes “If I have all the eloquence of men and of angels but am without love I am nothing at all, etc.” In that chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, every time the word love is used it’s agape. Every time it’s agape.

Eros Lasts Only As Long As the Reciprocation

So, what does agape mean? Agape means *unconditional* care or love. So, we see the difference immediately between eros and agape. To the Greek, eros is a love of *mutual reciprocation*. In erotic love,

there is always something I am getting back and that something must be there or else I can't even use the word. So, for example, you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend and let's say your girlfriend. You're in love with this girl and you're calling her up on the phone and you're on the phone talking to her and you want to go out with her, seven nights a week! Every time the phone rings — "Is that her?" A good feeling comes whenever she calls. Then after some disagreement, and that feeling leaves, and the phone rings. and before someone grabs the phone, you say "Geez, tell her I'm not here. Tell her I'm not here." You can't even use the word eros here; there's not any *mutual reciprocation* [any longer.] [While this is no longer eros, it certainly is not agape!] So, that is what the eros is.

You love God. You pray to God. God answers your prayers. Everything goes well. Then suddenly you pray to God, God *doesn't* answer your prayers. As a matter of fact, things go terrible. Then suddenly, you don't even know if God exists. You don't pray to God anymore. It meant the love was erotic and you were in a situation of mutual reciprocation. It's love, but it is eros. The important thing here is that eros *never* appears once in the New Testament.

In the meaning of the word agape, there's no concern for reciprocation. The only concern is there's a *need* there. Period. [Note that McCarthy, from here on, brings up the idea of a "need" with seems to be a trigger for extending one's agape to others. This current discussion is intended to clarify our notion of "love" with respect to the notions of agape and eros. Another study could delve into the many "needs" which might elicit an agape response. McCarthy does not expand on the word "need."] Nothing more than that there's a *need* there. It doesn't mean the reciprocation has to be bad. **What it means is you love on the basis of the need, not on the basis of what you're getting back.** You love not because you're going to convert someone to Christianity. You love because the person is hurting. It's that simple.

Now you should recognize how you could never "Love your enemies" with eros. Eros could never be the word for that type of love because the enemy is the one that gives you negative reciprocation. Love your enemies can only be implemented using agape because it requires unconditional love. The enemy is a human being. The enemy is in *need* and therefore you love him or her.

Now if to this moment in time in your life no one has ever told you that the English language translates three, **actually four** Greek words by the word love, L O V E, can you imagine the chaos that results in people's minds when they don't know the distinction? **The chaos is that they read the New Testament and all this talk about love and they read it in terms of eros.** They read it in terms of eros. I believe in matters of spiritual direction it would be common to encounter persons with misunderstandings in this arena. For example, someone seeking direction may be involved in an illicit romantic sexual affair of some kind, and they come in to discuss their concerns. They quote St. Augustine. St. Augustine said, "Love and do as you will." Well, yeah, love and do as you will -- if it's agape. "Love and do as you will" when it's eros and you've got total destruction on your hands; you have chaos going. So, if you haven't thought to this moment in your spiritual life about the distinction in these words it certainly is something to, from here on out, just to reflect upon.

What is the symbol for eros that we use universally? The symbol for eros is that little chubby cherub with the bow and arrow, remember? He shoots the arrow into someone's heart and as they say the person is smitten or something like that. They're in love. But you know the only problem with that little myth is that little myth contains the warning that the point of the arrow only has a finite amount of that liquid that causes that feeling. So, when the liquid wears off all of a sudden you don't love any more. Eros is fundamentally based in the emotions.

Agape: The Cross

Now what's the symbol for agape? The symbol for agape of course is the cross. There is nothing that could be so contradictory emotionally, nothing could be more negative and repulsive emotionally in terms of loving, then being crucified and then still loving by the act of praying for those who are destroying you. You see agape does not reside in the emotion. It resides in the faculty of will. I choose to love as Christ loved whether I get back a *positive or negative* emotional response.

- Loving that produced a **positive** emotional response: When Jesus performed changing the water into wine at Cana, there was positive emotional feedback. The host needed wine, Jesus performed the miracle, and the host was grateful. He probably even came and said thank you.
- Loving that produced a **negative** emotional response: Humanity needed the message of God's love embodied in Jesus. So, Jesus came and taught us "the good news." But on Calvary, Jesus suffered and died, and no one said thank you. Jesus's love through his life, his sacrifice and his death were manifestations of agape. A symbol of agape is the cross.

To use St. John of the Cross's language, this crucifixion, so common in the brutal customs of Rome, was as if nothing had happened. Just another person put on a cross. Yet Jesus said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Who heard it? Who knew about it? It was just another minor event in history and yet it was more precious to God and more profitable to the soul and humanity than everything else that was going on.

God is love. The Greek translation written phonetically is "Ho Theos Agape Estin." [ο Θεός είναι αγάπη] God is unconditional love and care. It's when we live in that spirit that we live in God. How many of us condition our love -- condition our love on getting what we want, or use our love to make conditions on other people's lives? If you love me, you will do this. That's not God. God loves. God forgives. God doesn't manipulate. God loves just because there's a need for love.

Now this really does represent a critical difference in terms of what we mean by love. To love as Christ loved—the New Commandment*—is the essence of St. Thérèse of Lisieux's Little Way. (*John 15: 12-13 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.") That is what she did moment to moment. But when you read the *Story of a Soul* and still more, when you read the different biographies about her that have been written, it is very, very clear, in the Thérèse's life in the convent, to love, to use her phrase, "cost her much." Cost her much. It wasn't a matter of a positive emotional response coming back. It was a matter of will. This was the will of God and I conform my will to the will of God. It's that simple, even though a lot of times what comes is a negative reality.

So, we are confronted here with something new, perhaps, something new that we really have to think about because this is really different. I assure you there is no way in the world that the term agape could wind up being used exclusively in the New Testament as what Jesus is teaching and yet the common Greek word eros is totally missing. I think in all of Plato's dialogues (Plato ~428-348 BC), Plato uses the word eros approximately, 400 times and he only uses the word agape twice. Agape in ancient Greek was a non-used word. To the Greeks, it meant something that was somewhat foolish.

As St. Paul says, “The cross is a scandal to Jews and foolish to the Greeks” (1 Cor 1:23). It doesn’t fit. To love just because there is *need* without worrying about reciprocation was foolish. But this is our God. “Ho Theos Agape Estin”, this is our God. Wouldn’t it be a terrible, terrible universe if it were “Ho Theos Eros?” Because then God’s love for us would depend upon—ourselves! How were we responding to God’s love? Reciprocating. Were we making him happy? That is in fact the way people, most of the time, perceive God over the whole history of the world. They cringe in terror. Yet Jesus comes along and says, “No, God is Father, Abba”. “Ho Theos Agape Estin.”

You’re a parent. You know darn right well that just because a child goes bad, just because he goes on drugs, just because she goes out doing things that you find just terrible, that you don’t agree with the things—you don’t tell them they’re right, you tell them they’re wrong—but as you see the pain that the child is going through you don’t love the child any less. In fact, you may love the child even more because they are trapped and caught in something terrible. So, also, with the Father who does not withdraw love, but who loves unconditionally.

So, this is the beginning of trying to understand what it means to love as Christ loved. Of course, once again, if you have never thought of the difference between the two words and you’ve just been interjecting the English L O V E thinking of eros and never thinking of agape, then you’ve got spiritual chaos on your hands. St. John of the Cross was a scripture scholar. He knew what was going on. He could read the Greek.

Next, I want to talk about what are those two dimensions of agape that exist in the New Testament that absolutely everyone agrees are there, of which there is no agape without them. Other people add other dimensions. In fact, **I would even add one myself**, but these two dimensions everyone universally agrees are there in the New Testament as the manifestations of agape, Christ-like love.

Two Facets of Agape

The two dimensions of agape that are incontestably there in the New Testament, in the Gospels, are first of all: agape means the **willingness to serve without the desire for reciprocation**. This is summed up in the New Testament in the theme of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

The second dimension of agape that’s there is the **willingness to suffer without the desire for retaliation**. This is summed up in the theme of Forgiveness 70 times 7 times (Mt 18:22).

[A third dimension of agape – a dimension McCarthy added in 2012 – is that there is a **willingness to reconcile without the desire to dominate**. (Mt 5:24) Note that in governments, the willingness to reconcile is always based on a desire to get the most out of a situation.]

The willingness to serve without the desire for reciprocation, the willingness to suffer without the desire for retaliation. It is by participating in these dynamics that we create reconciliation between ourselves and others, reconciliation between ourselves and God and, hence, peace.