

Father John Catoir

The Art of Loving

In the cartoon "Peanuts" Charlie Brown tells us that love is a warm puppy. At times it can be just that, but there are also those times when love brings the cross, times when we discover that Dostoyevski was right, "love is a harsh and dreadful thing." Wherever you find love, eventually you find the cross, which is surely not a warm puppy.



Young people prior to marriage tend to look forward to marriage as a kind of fun-filled honeymoon. The emancipation from parental domination, and the freedom to be an adult creates a romantic fantasy that rarely stands up to the test of time.

But the older and wiser partners see marriage more as an alliance and a commitment on the part of two incompatible people who in spite of differences, temptations and disappointments, stay together by sheer will power. The constant effort of love involves commitment and serious responsibility.

The young of heart are inexperienced in the art of loving. Last June's newlyweds are just beginners in the arduous task of becoming true lovers. Those with an immature, simplistic view of life and love, see their happiness in terms of romantic emotions.

The truth is that pure love is in the will. Willing to be present to those whom you love is the first sign of mature love. Inspiring confidence, conveying the feeling that your love can be trusted, this is the great challenge of love. It takes time and effort to be present

to your spouse, your children, your parents and your friends. At times love, this kind of self-giving can be a crucifixion; there's nothing romantic about it.

Those who love well know that their commitment cannot be allowed to erode because of their own inconstant moods. The will to bear discomfort is a learned skill which does not come easy.

The most important thing you'll ever learn, and the most important thing you can ever teach children is that the art of loving well is in reality the art of dying to self.

Jesus said, "Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it cannot bear fruit." (John 12:24) In an age of quick relief and instant gratification, such skills are not easily learned by 30-year-old teenagers. Bearing discomfort gladly for the sake of one's beloved requires maturity and strength. There is a time for being young and a time for growing up.

Love is patient. Love helps you to be cheerful when you want to complain. Love is staying on when you want to leave. Love is offering to help when you want to stay glued to the TV set. Love is calmly accepting criticism when you know you deserve it. Love is being real enough to accept the truth about yourself. Love is kind.

Jesus said: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 14:13).

[For a free copy of the Christopher News Note, "Teach Them How to Love" send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St., New York, N.Y. 10017.]