



Love ONE Another

BY JOANNA DAILEY

We talk a lot about love and the need to be loving people, but what is love? This is a question that Paul's converts in Corinth must have been asking as well. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul replied with a famous paragraph that has provided a definition for love—even an examination of conscience for love—ever since Paul's scroll was first opened over two thousand years ago.

Before we take a look at Saint Paul's answer, let's remind ourselves that if Paul was an expert in love, he was also an expert in not loving well. He considered himself the worst sinner of all (see 1 Timothy 1:15) because he persecuted the first followers of Christ. He tried to haul them off to jail, where they would be tried as blasphemers and perhaps crucified as Jesus was. That was his résumé before the Risen Christ literally stopped him in his tracks and turned him around. (We celebrate this "turning" every year on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul on January 25.)

So Paul is not presenting himself here as someone who has always acted out of love. Even after his conversion, he probably had to work at it, as we all do. What is love? Here is Paul's answer:

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail. Love is eternal. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

And later in this paragraph, Paul adds:

Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love. (Verse 13)



These verses of Scripture should be written in our hearts and in our bones. It is also our mission to “teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their life” (Proverbs 22:6). How do we teach children to love? Here are some ideas:

- **Be loving toward children.** Saint Mother Théodore Guérin, an American saint who, before emigrating to the United States, won a Certificate of Excellence in Teaching from the French government, once said, “Love the children first, and then teach them.” By love, Mother Théodore did not mean excusing bad behavior or allowing disorder. But she did mean appreciating someone from the heart. One of the saddest things a child can say is, “I know my teacher doesn’t like me.”
- **Be a good example.** Children are watching! They see how you treat colleagues, other children, and your supervisor. And they hear your remarks. Be a loving person at all times.
- **Accentuate the positive.** “Catch” the children in loving actions, and remark on them to all. “Jessica, I liked that you helped Roberto pick up his books when they fell. That was a very loving thing to do.” Or have an end-of-session wrap-up: “What good things happened in our lesson today? What good things did we learn? What loving actions did we do?” You might find that the children begin to report on one another’s loving actions! This might be a time to thank the group for cooperating and listening to one another.



Saint Mother Théodore Guérin

- **Set aside time to ask the children to turn to Saint Paul’s verses on love quoted on page 7.** Go through the passage with them, exploring the meaning of each phrase. Give examples at a child’s level: *Are you ever ill-mannered? Do you interrupt when someone else is talking? Do you throw your things around at home and not put them away? Why is this unloving?* Be sure to explain that these little actions that we do out of love—waiting to speak, putting our things away—prepare us to do even bigger loving actions. As Jesus said, “Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones” (Luke 16:10).
- **Emphasize that love is a verb.** Love is not just feelings in your heart. Love is action. Make a “Love in Action” bulletin board. Post pictures or short descriptions of loving actions done by an individual child or even by the whole group. Just writing a name may be a simple way to acknowledge the love in your group: “Thank you, Jason, for helping Bennett find the Scripture passage. Your name is going up on the ‘Love in Action’ bulletin board!”
- **Introduce the children, in an age-appropriate way, to the seven principles of Catholic social teaching.** These principles describe love in action as a goal for society as a whole. They mandate us to look outward, for, as Saint John of the Cross wrote, “Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love.” In the Epistle of Saint James, we read that faith without actions (or, as Saint Paul wrote, without love), is dead: “What good is there in your saying to them, ‘God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!’—if you don’t give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead” (James 2:16-17). Catholic social teaching is love in action within the larger society in which we live.

Yes, “the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is not something vague and ethereal. As Dorothy Day once said, love can be “a harsh and dreadful thing,” requiring much sacrifice. But without love, there is no joy in life. So let us introduce children, little by little, to both the sacrifice and the joy of love. Let us prepare them, little by little, to be sons and daughters of our loving Father, true disciples of Jesus Christ, and faithful listeners to the Holy Spirit, who secretly whispers to each of us as we seek the way of love: “Here is the road. Follow it” (Isaiah 30:21).