

Teaching the Faith with
CURRENT EVENTS

Christ's Love and Valentine's Day

Overview:

The custom on Valentine's Day is to remember those we love in our lives by giving them gifts, flowers, cards, or similar tokens of our affection. These little expressions of love and sentiment are shared by relatives, sweethearts, and spouses the world over, and this is good. But amidst the cute commercial sea of chocolates, hearts, and balloons it is easy to lose sight of the love that we are called to as members of Christ's Body: the love that embraces suffering and even death for the sake of the beloved.

Valentine's Day provides an opportunity for us to reflect on the love of Jesus Christ, which, through the grace of the Sacraments, nurtures and cultivates all other loves and relationships. St. Valentine himself was a priest who was martyred for his love of Christ. As members of the Church, we are loved by Jesus, individually and personally, and He wants us to reflect His love into the world so all people may come to know Him.

The Church, the Scriptures, and the saints reveal to us what love is—or more accurately, Who love is—and how we can truly love others as we are meant to in this life.

In this lesson your students will:

- Explore what the *Catechism* teaches about true love (charity).
- Learn how we can recognize and practice charity in imitation of Christ.
- Examine the distinction between *feeling* God's presence and *being in* God's presence, and how this distinction also applies to love.
- Consider how, in our wayward culture, Valentine's Day invites us both to consider what love really is and to share it with others.
- Discuss the ways Christ is calling us to love others each and every day.

Resources:

- Excerpt from *The Art of Loving God* by St. Francis de Sales (Sophia Institute Press, 1998), pp. 91-93.

Warm up Activity:

John 15:9-17:

“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-13:

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Reflection Question:

Do you see the love described in the Scripture passages above displayed in our society and in popular culture? If you do, how is it displayed? If you do not, how is it neglected?

Simply Love God

- First, have your students read over the Gospel passages in the warm-up activity and either silently or in small groups consider the reflection question.
- Then, give the class *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 459, 1823, 1825 & 1828, along with the excerpt “Simply Love God” from *The Art of Loving God* by St. Francis de Sales (Sophia Institute Press, 1998).
- Arrange your students into groups of three or four. Have them discuss what they read in the *Catechism* and compare it with what they read in the book excerpt using the discussion questions.
- When each group has finished discussing, call on groups to share with the class some key points from their conversations. Lead a discussion on what it means to love others as Christ has loved us.

Answer Key

Focus and Reflection Questions

1. *It is implied that we make an effective offering of ourselves, out of love, after Christ’s perfect example.*
2. *“Jesus makes charity the new commandment. By loving his own ‘to the end,’ he makes manifest the Father’s love which he receives. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive” (CCC 1823).*
3. *“The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: ‘charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’” (CCC 1825). Accept reasoned answers.*
4. *Our relationship with God becomes that of a child to his or her father. “The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son responding to the love of him who ‘first loved us’” (CCC 1828).*
5. *“If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves” (CCC 1828). “[I]f we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands . . . we are in the position of children” (CCC 1828). Accept reasoned answers.*
6. *Accept reasoned answers.*
7. *Accept reasoned answers.*
8. *Accept reasoned answers. Through leading questions such as “Can you feel feelings on command?” or “Should our feelings direct our wills?” Help students to understand that*

Jesus would not command us to feel a feeling, as such a thing would be impossible and God never commands the impossible. Rather, Jesus is telling us that love must be a free choice—an act of will, not an experience of feelings alone—to will the good of others. Of course love does not exclude feelings, but it is important to note that love is an action and a choice we make—it is not totally directed by our feelings.

9. *Accept reasoned answers. “By willing to love Him.’ And instead of setting to work to try to find out how you can unite your soul to God, put the thing in practice by a continual application of your mind to Him, and I assure you that you will arrive much more quickly at your object by this means than by any other.” “[T]here is no question of knowing much, but of doing. ...we must just go on putting one foot before the other, and that by this means, we shall arrive where we desire. Keep walking, we say to these souls so desirous of their perfection, walking the way of your vocation with simplicity, more intent on doing than on desiring; that is the shortest road.”*
10. *Accept reasoned answers.*
11. *Accept reasoned answers.*
12. *Accept reasoned answers.*

Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 459, 1823, 1825 & 1828

Directions: First, read the paragraphs from the *Catechism*, followed by the excerpt, “**Simply Love God**” from *The Art of Loving God* by St. Francis de Sales. Then, with your group, discuss and answer the focus and reflection questions.

CCC 459 The Word became flesh *to be our model of holiness*: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." On the mountain of the Transfiguration, the Father commands: "Listen to him!" Jesus is the model for the Beatitudes and the norm of the new law: "Love one another as I have loved you." This love implies an effective offering of oneself, after his example.

CCC 1823 Jesus makes charity the *new commandment*. By loving his own "to the end," he makes manifest the Father's love which he receives. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love." And again: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

CCC 1825 Christ died out of love for us, while we were still "enemies." The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our *enemies*, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself.

The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: "charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

CCC 1828 The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son responding to the love of him who "first loved us":

If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves. If we pursue the enticement of wages, . . . we resemble mercenaries. Finally if we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands . . . we are in the position of children.

Simply Love God
(From *The Art of Loving God*, by St. Francis de Sales)

If I am not mistaken, when we say that we cannot find God and that He seems far away, we mean only that we cannot feel His presence. I have before observed that many people do not distinguish between God and the *feeling* of God, between faith and the *feeling* of faith, which is a very great defect. It seems to them that when they do not feel God, they are not in His presence, which is a mistake.

A person who was about to suffer martyrdom for God and yet did not actually think of Him, but rather of his pain, although the feeling of faith may be wanting, yet does not fail to merit because of his first resolution, and makes an act of great love. There is a difference between being in the presence of God and having the feeling of His presence. God alone can give us the latter; as to my giving you the means of acquiring this sentiment, it is an impossibility. ...

In short, if you ask me “What can I do to acquire the Love of God?” I answer, “By willing to love Him.” And instead of setting to work to try to find out how you can unite your soul to God, put the thing in practice by a continual application of your mind to Him, and I assure you that you will arrive much more quickly at your object by this means than by any other.

For the more we pour ourselves out, the less recollected we shall be, and the less capable of union with the divine Majesty, who wishes to have all we are without reserve. One actually finds souls who are so busy in thinking how they shall do a thing that they have no time to do it; and yet, in what concerns our perfection, which consists in the union of our soul with the divine Goodness, there is no question of knowing much, but of doing. It seems to me that those of whom we ask the road to Heaven are very right in answering us like those who tell us that, in order to reach such a place, we must just go on putting one foot before the other, and that by this means, we shall arrive where we desire. Keep walking, we say to these souls so desirous of their perfection, walking the way of your vocation with simplicity, more intent on doing than on desiring; that is the shortest road.

Focus and Reflection Questions

1. According to the *Catechism*, what is implied when Jesus commands us to “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12)?
2. What did Jesus reveal the new commandment to be? How did He do this?
3. How does St. Paul describe love (charity)? Have you encountered love like this in your life? When?
4. How is our relationship with God affected when our life is animated by love?
5. According to the *Catechism*, what action puts us in the position of slaves in relation to God? What action puts us in the position of children in relation to God? Which do you think is more fruitful? Why?
6. St. Francis de Sales wrote “There is a difference between being in the presence of God and having the feeling of His presence.” Can you connect this to what the Church teaches about loving others, particularly our enemies?
7. Do you think our culture tends to suggest that the only way we can experience love is through our feelings? Is this consistent with the truth that the Church teaches? Why or why not?
8. When Jesus said “Remain in my love” (John 15:9) do you think He meant that we must always be experiencing the *feeling* of love? Why or why not?
9. What does St. Francis de Sales suggest is the best way to acquire the love of God?
10. Based on what you read, what does the Catholic Church reveal about true love? How is the love that Christ reveals to us different from our culture’s understanding of love?
11. Do you think something is missing in the way our culture celebrates Valentine’s Day? What would you change about it if you could?
12. Jesus said “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). To lay down your life for another is ultimately to put their good before your own good. Can you give three examples of this?
13. What can you do to imitate Christ and share His true love this Valentine’s Day?