

SISTERS OF JESUS WAY SPRING NEWSLETTER

Easter 2006.



Our dear friends,

We are writing this in the last days of winter but in the garden there are signs of spring in bulging daffodil buds, crocuses braving the snow and sisters chasing the heron. For those of you who have struggled through long winter days either physically or spiritually, may the beauty and new life of spring bring the joyful hope of resurrection and the living Christ.

We wrote at Advent of the way through to love and forgiveness. The overwhelming impression that came to us, however, was that many of our dear readers accepted difficult days when relationships were strained as one of the unfortunate necessities of life that have to be either ignored or endured depending on how sensitive you are.

To go back to our question: what does God say? There are some clear guidelines in Scripture. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount ¹that we were not to judge others, not to harbour resentful or lustful thoughts and not to worry about anything! He said that we must love our enemies. If we are honest we sometimes have difficulty loving friends or family before we even begin on our enemies. He warned against lying. He even says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect".² There are two paths we can take. The first one is to say that it is an impossible ideal and settle back into our comfortable lacklustre profession of being Christians; or we can admit that we are pitiful sinners and seek the grace of the Lord Jesus to mould us into his image.

We are all probably familiar with the words in 1 Corinthians 13. We can buy pretty little cards in Christian bookshops with these words on them. There is one stuck onto the computer on which this is being written. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth (i.e. no gossiping, talking about others behind their back). It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."³ It is transferring these words from the pretty little cards on our desks (or computers) or tucked away in our Bibles to the circumstances that are peculiarly ours that is the problem.

One of life's greatest disappointments is having our dreams shattered. It happens all the time, in marriage, in communities, in churches and fellowships and team ministries. We have high expectations of others giving us love and understanding but are often more shaky the other side of it, us giving others love and understanding. In the early days of our community we were influenced by the life of Florence Allshorn. At the age of thirty-two she sailed for Uganda to work as a missionary. Her most acute struggle was with her fellow-missionaries and one in particular, her senior colleague. "When Florence arrived (in Uganda) she found the one and only sitting-room divided into two halves. In the one was cramped together all the senior's furniture; the other half was entirely bare, 'that's your half,' she was informed."⁴

Many of us would have collapsed into a paroxysm of self-pity followed hard and fast by resentment. Florence Allshorn despaired, she lost weight and became depressed. She writes herself, "One day the old African matron came to me where I was sitting on the veranda crying my eyes out. She sat at my feet and after a time she said, 'I have been on this station for fifteen years and I have seen you come out (there had been seven other young missionaries before her), all of you saying you have brought to us a Saviour, but I have never seen this situation saved yet.'⁵

It was a defining moment. For a whole year she read 1 Corinthians 13 every day, "love is patient, love is kind" and so on. And she prayed as she had never prayed before that the love that was in Jesus might live in her own heart. The Lord answered her prayer. "I stopped bothering about myself," she wrote to a friend, "the only thing that mattered was what happened to God and the other person."⁶

Our circumstances may not be so dramatic as those of Florence Allshorn but in all the little upsets, that perhaps are not as little in God's eyes as we try to make them in our own, he calls us to forget ourselves, our wounded egos, our self-interest and to love and love and love. Love begins with acceptance of others as they are, not as we would like them to be. It passionately wants for them a better way for their own sakes

not for ours. So we pray. As we pray for them we pray for ourselves, “Lord, only you can keep me loving but in faith I believe that you will do it.”

The world rightly or wrongly judges Christ by his followers. We are aware of this here. Visitors notice whether we smile at each other, laugh together or if there is “an atmosphere!” Even children can sense when there are undercurrents of resentment, irritability and jealousy. Sometimes, immeasurable harm is done to them. Throughout life they have a built-in resistance to the Lord who loves them dearly. They cannot see him because they have first seen his followers.

There is no way out for us but repentance. In Holy Week we remember Peter’s betrayal. As the realisation of what he had done swept over him, “he broke down and wept bitterly.”⁷ We too have betrayed our Lord. Our betrayal is taking the name of Christian upon ourselves and at the same time denying in our lives both the truth and the power of the gospel. “Dear friends”, writes St John, “let us love one another, for love comes from God. ... Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”⁸

St John knew that only those who are secure in the love of God are free to love others. God does not expect us to love others from the basis of cold legalism or an impossible ideal. A theologian who had struggled to follow the way of love wrote, “It pleased God by the revelation of his holiness and grace.... to bring home to me my sin in a way which submerged all the school questions in weight urgency and poignancy. I was turned from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace.”⁹

John writes, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us.”¹⁰ “Dear friends since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”¹¹ We all need to be loved. God made us that way. But he also supplied the answer; he loves us dearly. Once we grasp or are grasped by that then we are free to love others. We are no longer expecting them to satisfy our need to be loved.

In the parable of the Lost Son¹² we read, “while he (the son) was a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”¹³ St Augustine wrote very beautifully about God’s embrace and our love for him. “What do I love when I love my God? - a voice, a perfume, a food, an embrace; but they are of the kind that I love in my inner self, when my soul is bathed in light that is not bound by space; when it listens to sound that never dies away; when it breathes fragrance that is not borne away on the wind; when it tastes food that is never consumed by the eating; when it clings to an embrace from which it is never severed. This is what I love when I love my God.”¹⁴

A blessed Holy Week and Easter,

Sisters of Jesus Way

¹ Matt 5 - 7

² Matt 5:48

³ 1 Cor. 13:4-7

⁴ Florence Allshorn J. H. Oldham pg. 23

⁵ Ibid. pg. 28

⁶ Ibid pg 28

⁷ Mark 14:72 and Matt.26:75

⁸ 1 John 4:7,8

⁹ P.T. Forsyth A.M. Hunter pg. 17

¹⁰ 1 John 4:10

¹¹ 1 John 4:11

¹² Luke 15:11-32

¹³ Luke 15:20

¹⁴ Augustine Confessions X, 6

Scripture quotations are from the NIV version
