

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jan 8th 2013

1 John 4:7–10

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.

In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.”

If this passage from the first letter of John were the only scripture we had, it might almost be enough. It tells us who God is and what God has done for us – in just two and a half verses. It is most – perhaps all – that we need to know “so that we might have life through Him”.

God is love – a love given to us not in response to our virtue, but as an expression of who God is.

As almost always in the Johannine writings, we have to understand that the word we translate into English as “love” might be better rendered “self-giving” (not “affection”). Read the passage again, substituting “self-giving”, and let your breath be taken away by the boldness and incredibility of what it says. It can’t be so. Words utterly fail us as we try to express and grasp this seemingly impossible reality.

It can’t be so. If I really believed it, I would be a different person; my world would be a different world.

God is self-giving – not just as an abstract concept, but as the very concrete taking on of our fleshly humanity with all of its too evident limits, suffering all we suffer and more, and by conquering evil, allowing us to share God’s own self-giving. We didn’t earn it; we couldn’t. We didn’t have to. We’re not worthy; that’s OK; we don’t have to be. My sins are too great; God could never love me. Yes God could. God does; God gives; God fore-gives, gives Godself.

How then could we not do likewise? God gives us that power. Being selfless is not just a test we have to pass to enter the kingdom. It is exactly what the life of the kingdom is and will always be.

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