

The Mightiness of Love

"Lovest thou me?"

- John xxi,16

Deuteronomy xxxii,1-14

John xxi,15-end

Psalm 91

New Book of Worship, Psalm 91, pp.69-70

These words, addressed in the first place to Simon Peter, are equally addressed to us all. Thrice uttered by the Lord in the presence of His disciples on the occasion of His last recorded conversation with them prior to His ascension, they would have a special claim to our consideration. The query, under the circumstances in which it was given, becomes the question of questions?

For love, we know, is the very life of man. Whatever the ruling love is such is the man himself. There is no human act or utterance which has not its origin in love. The desire for a thing is what leads to doing and planning it. Purpose is implied in every intentional or voluntary operation. And what are desire and purpose but phases or manifestations of love?

Moreover love is the life of our thoughts and the cause of them. Thus the inmost principle of our being is love, which, seeking to express itself or to come forth into visible and tangible existence, appears in various forms. It is embodied in the kind actions which make it felt by others, and also in the skill and wisdom whereby those actions are designed and executed. End, cause, and effect constitute a triad which repeats itself everywhere throughout the universe. From the end or purpose, by the cause or means, to the effect or result the creative work always advances, both in least things and in greatest. The same general order is observed, and the same general laws are operative in making, for example, a simple sound or gesture as in constructing the most complicated mechanism. Back of the thing produced is the thought that produced it, and back of the thought is the desire or affection which gave the original impulse.

So, reason and analyze as we may, when we retrace the stream of causation from outward phenomena to the center and source of their being, we at last invariably come to love. The case is the same whether we speak of substantial forms or of momentary actions: love is the prime cause of their existence.

As it is with man, so must it be with Him in whose image and after whose likeness man is made. "God is love," and from love has created the universe. The first cause of all finite existence is the Lord's desire to fashion beings other than Himself to whom He might impart His life. Love was the end, wisdom was the means, and uses wonderful and numberless were the result.

But when we mention the Divine love, we refer to something infinite and perfect. It must necessarily be absolutely pure and unselfish. Goodness is another name by which it is known. In creating us from His Divine love therefore the Lord must have had in view our happiness. He must have intended that life itself should be a joy and blessing. And as love is the source of all enjoyment, He must have intended that we should experience the delight of loving. For this reason

He made us free and rational beings; for without freedom there can be no genuine love, and without rationality there can be no genuine thought.

Of all living creatures man alone is endowed with the power of reciprocating the Lord's love. And the effect of such reciprocation is conjunction with the Lord. Man's will is joined to the Lord's will and man's thoughts are responsive to the Lord's thoughts. This conjunction can be accomplished only as evil is shunned and put away, for there can be no companionship between good and evil. Only so far as evil is shunned in obedience to what is seen to be true and right can the doors of the human heart be lifted up and the King of glory enter. Conjunction once established never ceases. It must needs grow stronger and stronger forever. Conjunction with the heart of universal being is eternal life.

But we may, if we choose, abuse our opportunities. The freedom which is given for our happiness may be turned to our destruction. Love of some sort must needs dominate us, and if it be not the love of the Lord and the neighbor, it will be the love of ourselves and our own worldly pleasures. It is according to the appointed order of our creation that these various kinds of love exist within us. There is a right kind of love of self and the world and a wrong kind. These loves have their place and use when made subordinate to the higher loves. But if they undertake to rule the whole man, they become evil and monstrous. Their rightful position is that of servant, not master. Our life's work, the work of regeneration, is to bring them into subjection. They are natural loves; love of the Lord and the neighbor are spiritual loves. When the latter rule in us, our entire nature comes into its true order. But one or the other must have dominion. This is what the Lord meant when He said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

We should have a clear concept of what life really is. The external objects of nature which we can see and touch are real and vivid to us, and all that is within our souls seems shadowy and mystical. Yet spirit is living and matter is dead. Outward life has no existence except as it is filled with internal or spiritual life. The things around us are as nothing compared to the things within. The farther we go in an interior direction the nearer we come to the fountain-head of existence, until at last we find it in the Lord God Himself, from whom flows forth the mighty river of His uncreated life forming, vivifying, and sustaining all things.

Understanding, will, thought, affection, wisdom, love are the vital forces of the human spirit. Plainly enough they are not of man's own creating. They are communicated to him from within. They are his Heavenly Father's most precious gifts. They are the life within his life, the life that causes him to live, the life that cannot die.

Love is that life, the Divine love which as the central sun of the universe

constantly sends forth its rays to create, to preserve, and to bless; nor is anything hid from the heat thereof. It gives life to the heavens with their countless angels, to worlds unnumbered with all that dwell therein down to the humblest creature and minutest object. Thus love is the most potent of all influences, and the primary question is: what does one love? For this reason the Lord asks, "Lovest thou me?"

All religion is based on three essential principles: the acknowledgment of God, the sense of obligation to Him as evinced by a life according to His precepts, and the acceptance of Divine revelation which makes known who and what God is and what His precepts are. We must love Him as we should love each other, for what we know He is. If we love Him, we shall love goodness, for He is goodness itself. If we love Him, we shall love truth, for He is truth itself. And we shall abhor all that is opposed to good and truth. It is as the Lord said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," and "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." How true it is that all professions of love to the Lord are an empty pretext unless we desire and endeavor to do those things that please Him! Love that does not express itself in actions is not genuine.

When therefore we would answer the question, "Lovest thou me?" we must first ask how far we are disposed to learn and keep the Lord's commandments. The Lord is kind and just. If we are not kind and just to the neighbor, we do not love the Lord. This He taught when He said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples: if ye have love one to another."

And he who loves the Lord must love His truth. To such an one the Scriptures must be precious. So also will he love the church. Whatever teaches us about the Lord, whatever serves to bring us nearer to Him or to make us more conscious of His presence will of necessity be valued more and more.

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" This question involves nothing less than the issues of life and death. For if we do not love Him, what do we love? If His truth and goodness are not dear to us, what do we prize in their stead? This is certain: that love is our inmost nature and we must love something. If we do not serve one master, we must serve another.

Each one should ask, "To what purpose is my life directed? What am I living for? Do I care a little for that which is not myself? Am I willing to make sacrifices for the sake of others?"

While we live in this world, we determine what our love shall be. It is a long process; but every day should bring us nearer, so that as we grow up, no ambiguous answer can be given to the question, "Lovest thou me?" It is only as we learn and keep the Lord's precepts, looking to Him as the only source of happiness and peace that the true purpose of our creation can be accomplished: "In thy presence is fullness of joy."

Amen