

God is Love



You will never look in the eyes of someone God doesn't love. Always be kind.

An image of these words written on a chalkboard was shared on the Secular Franciscans USA Facebook page recently. It prompted hundreds of likes and shares by their followers. This simple truth and straightforward instruction impels us to 'see' differently.

How often do we avert our eyes or look through people to avoid connection? How often do we fall into the trap of prejudice? We judge people by their appearance, by their racial background, by what has been said/written about them and by how they make us feel. We often judge people at first sight.

Peter, the Apostle, was prejudiced against the Gentiles. This did not change until God appeared to Peter in a dream and instructed him to go to the house of Cornelius a Gentile and to accept him as a brother and as a fellow human being who is worthy to be loved and respected.

Peter began to see people as God sees them and began to learn to love as God loves. He began to understand what the love of God means. The experience of Peter goes to show that authentic love accepts others, even strangers and people who are outside our religious groups, race, ideology and community.

In scripture we find examples of God's love and instructions on how to be like God who:

- > **shares the pain:** In all their distress God too was distressed (Isaiah 63:9).
- > **really cares:** Can a mother forget the baby at her breast ...? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands (Isaiah 49:15-16).
- > **forgives and is merciful:** an attitude expressed in the parable of the prodigal son where the Father celebrated over the return of his wayward son (Luke 15:23-24).
- > **takes delight in people:** The Lord your God is with you ... God will take great delight in you, God will quiet you with God's love ... (Zephaniah 3:17).
- > **shows tough love:** ... God is love and whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them (1 John 4:16).

Fr Ronald Rolheiser provides a modern insight into the love of God:

God's love isn't a reward for being good, doing our duty, resisting temptation, bearing the heat of the day in fidelity, saying our prayers, remaining pure, or offering worship, good and important though these things are. God loves us because God is love and cannot be discriminating in love.

Rolheiser is also acutely aware of the prejudices that make it "hard to accept that God loves everyone equally – even our enemies, even those who hate us, even those who don't work as hard as we do, even those who reject duty for selfishness, and even those who give in to all the temptations we resist ...".

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References: <https://livingwaterspring.wordpress.com/2015/05/09/god-the-river-of-love-by-fr-gerald-musa/>; <http://ronrolheiser.com/amazing-grace/#.W3Sx0JMza9Y>

REFLECTION

- > When have you been challenged to love as God loves?
- > Are there opportunities to spread the message of love in your ministry?