

The Myth of Little Christians  
Fr. Joseph Allen  
Upbeat  
V. 4, n.2, 1971

True love seems to be a mystery to mankind. We are told that love is many things. Man is constantly faced with the great “myth” of love. Is it the young man and woman smoking the “right brand of cigarettes” which is love? Is it the man who must learn “karate” (since he uses a certain shaving lotion) which is love? Is it the little cherub “cupid” shooting his arrow at your heart? Or is it using “the right toothpaste” which has the strange ability to send a pair of kissing lips through the air to land on another’s cheek? And, of course, there are many more “myths” about love.

How does one find the “real” love? The love which lasts beyond the moment? The love which is more than the myth. And we must remember that love is not a separate category: love is the very heart of life. We must, therefore, speak about real “life” to understand real “love.”

To begin with, love will forever remain a myth if we remain immature in our approach to life. If we desire to be “little” Christians, we shall see only the shadow of real love. Babies are extremely selfish. They must be. They need “to get” nearly everything. They must acquire size, ability, knowledge, and control of both themselves and their world. They are demanding because they “need.” They love someone when that someone can meet their own needs. A baby loves his mother because she removes pain and brings pleasure. He loves his mother for his sake, not hers. All this is the immature love of the “little” Christian. It’s not exactly evil when it is found in such innocent ignorance as with a child. It is natural for a child.

But for a mature Christian ignorance of the real love is evil for it “frustrates” the fullness of love. For the “little” Christian they myth his all that love is. “And with all thy getting, GET UNDERSTANDING,” (Proverbs 4:7) tell us. With loves, there must be understanding. Many sincere Christians find themselves badly hurt or broken into pieces by a love without understanding. Are not most of our songs of love really songs of frustration? Fate gets the blame, not our false ideas about love.

But the “real” love is not based on “getting.” For sure, the “myth” tells us that the reason for love is getting; if we use the right toothpaste we will “get” the right mate and live happily ever after. That’s love without the understanding. The real love is “giving,” and that means with no guarantees! That means that you may even get hurt because of that giving. And we can begin to understand this non-returnable love with Christ’s own words. He said that the understanding of love was when “You fed Me when I was hungry, and you helped Me get clothes when I needed them, and you let Me know that you loved Me when I was locked up or locked out.” Some of those people who were with Him were surprised. “When did we do these things to You?” they asked. And He repeated, in effect, what He had said before; “I told you to love your neighbor as yourself and you did.” And anyone who does this, even to one of the most socially unacceptable,

does it to Me. But some surely were the “little” Christians who knew only the “Myth” and not the true love. Some of them shook their heads in wonderment. It was all a mystery to them.

But the mature Christian knows that true love demands sacrifice. The mythical love of the little Christian knows nothing of this sort; he just used his love to “get.” We see the greatest example of this true love sacrifice relationship in the Liturgy at the Great Entrance. We offer our love to God through sacrificing those things which allow us to live. We offer bread and wine, simple substances, but the signs and sources of life. And so, we show our love by sacramentally sacrificing our lives through “food” which gives us life.

“Little” Christians can’t understand this. Yes, they are Christians; though not full-grown ones. They may be four years old or forty. And they will be able to love only according to their immaturity. But we must not neglect them or we would be doing the same thing that they do. We too would be loving them only to “get” their love in return. What they need is to be loved unconditionally. When a person is acting like a child, he needs to be accepted as a child and encouraged toward further growth. No amount of condemnation will help. Only the true love, the love which understands will help.

It is precisely with this true love that Christ told us to love. How else can we love our enemies; we can only love them if it is such an unconditional love, one which hopes to “get” nothing. This is the real maxim of Christianity. This is the thermometer, the measure, the piece of litmus paper, indeed, the mark, which shows the world that a man can call himself “Christian.” Not the hypocritical love of the “little” Christian. Not the “sugar-coated” love of cupid. But such a love that would be expressed by Christ as He hung on that tree: “Forgive them, Father!”

Of course, it seems irrational in this world. Things are just not like that. The world will not listen to such an understanding. But Christ told us that we should not expect the world to listen if we do not really love. We spend a lifetime studying to give the right answers. But after we have done our best to communicate to a lost world, the final argument, the “measure” that Christ gives us, is this true love of Christians. It is this that the world will judge us upon, because the world mistakenly does not care about doctrine, especially in the last half of the twentieth century when man no longer accepts absolute truths of any kind. And if they foolishly don’t care about the Absolutes and truth, they will not care about doctrine either. The world will, therefore, not recognize us for our doctrine, but through this real love. “The world will know you if you love one another,” He said.

Myths, for sure, may be beautiful. They sometimes proclaim a great message. The “little” Christians may be satisfied with these proclamations. But the mature Christian wants a proclamation with a passion. Our words are just that and little more. We can’t say “let us love one another” while our whole life is like a flashing neon light: “I couldn’t care less.” Christ is the criterion for this real love, and He showed more than words! He took the form of a servant, He lived the life of a transient, He died the death

of a criminal, and all to proclaim in action His love for us. And the world couldn't understand His actions of love either.

All this may seem like a puzzle. But what I mean is this: the "little" Christian lives by "myth," by proclamation of love, in and by itself. He doesn't go further than that. He doesn't "understand" that this love, this true love, is not the "getting" of the child, but the "giving" in an unconditional way.

And so, if we can be clear as to the difference between the myth of love and the real love, we are left with only one question: Why is it that we, who have assumed the name of the Compassionate One, are so lacking in compassion? Why is it that we, who claim to walk in the steps of the "man of sorrows," the One, who was "acquainted with grief," are so afraid to suffer for others? How can it be that we who sing the songs that we do are so long on song and so short on concern?

These are the questions of inconsistency and if we can answer them, we will finally be able to determine whether we stay at the "myth" level or get to the real love of love. This real love is the "fruit of the Spirit." It is deeper than the "myth" level of love. And we will not profit in terms of this world with such a love. But, then, if we deal only in terms of this world, we will be the "children of this world," those who live only by the "myth" of the world.

But, this love, the love that is possible only "in Christ," the love which is the "mark" by which the world knows we are Christians, the love, so deep, so profound, that it can even tell us to "love our enemies," this love that will "hurt" us, those lives which led God to give His only Begotten Son, this is the love that will make us "Children of the Highest."