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INTRODUCTION

I have always been enthralled by the mystery of love in its insurmountable power and inexhaustible richness — able to impel someone to give up everything for the beloved. At the phenomenological level, we can say that everyone longs to love and to be loved. Our life is existentially qualified by and with love to its very core. Yet even when human love remains true to its language, the mystery of love may never be fully revealed unless we invoke our experience of redemption in the economy of God's loving plan to save us.

At the very core of our faith, we believe in a God who loves us beyond measure to the point of giving — and even going against — Himself on the cross. This is the kind of love we remember, celebrate, and share. Regardless of how filthy and unlovable we may be, God offers His heart filled with love to embrace us and let us share in His very love. The people around us, including our relatives and friends, may turn bitter toward us, and become disgusted and impatient with our mistakes and failures. But God will never fail to love us lavishly. We may fail to love Him, but He remains faithful to Himself. Without God's love, everything vanishes. Everything may pass away, but His love endures forever. This is the truth that I claim with conviction. God draws me out of sin and the failure to answer His offer of love, and brings me close, making me feel His love at every moment of my life especially through the great gift of the vocation He lavished upon me. For this reason, after considering the universal significance of love in every human experience and its central place in the Christian faith where God is revealed as love, I decided to write a theological synthesis using the theme of divine love — God's gift of Himself. God's desire to share His life shows His infinite love and His great tenderness in wanting us to love as He loves. Only by and with God's love can man find himself — his true identity and destiny. Hence, one with the sentiments of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, we can truly say, "Our vocation is love."

Thus, I wish to develop this paper into three major chapters with the aim of making a thematic and conclusive presentation of God as love. The first chapter is on the theme of the Father as source of love. In it, I will discuss the biblical sense of love and present that love finds its true sense in the life of the Trinity, the definition of the triune God. More so, I shall also portray the overflowing of divine love in created realities and with man as the epitome of God's creative love. It would be necessary then to take a look into man's failure to love, and God's loving plan to save fallen humanity by virtue of His redemptive love expressed in His election of Israel as His chosen people and the promise of His definitive intervention in history.

The second chapter deals with the theme of the definitive revelation of God as love incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. I will try to present His life and public ministry as a concrete manifestation of God's love that enjoins man to respond to the call of love.

The concluding chapter discusses the Holy Spirit as the gift of divine love dwelling and sanctifying the Church, thus, making her capable of perpetuating the mission of love in her proclamation and celebration. Along this mission, we will see that God's love though already a reality in the present also promises a future when nothing would stand in the way of our experience of God's love. This paper ends by honoring Mary, the towering icon of love, our model and our mother who intercedes for us along the difficult path of responding to God's love.

CONCLUSION

Our whole existence from the beginning of life to its definitive end is defined by how God relates with us in His desire to share His life with created reality. Because God communicates with us, we learn that He created us; He reveals Himself to us and redeems us out of His infinite love. He relates with us in love. His way of reaching out in love is always His initiative and totally unmerited by us. Thus, in love, God reveals to us His being as *totally for us and with us*. In love, we encounter Him as fully giving Himself to us without reservation because He is love. This is our confession! Divine love is God's gift of Himself to us. God, in His fullness of being and love, can never be thought of as different from His actions. When He reaches out to his creatures in and through love, He does not only act and reveal Himself. He offers what He is, meets us in the fullness of His being, and embraces us with His whole self.

Touching then on the central mystery of our faith, I have undertaken to present in a simple way how God progressively offers Himself to us in love. We realize that God is a communion of love as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father being the source, the Son being the incarnate and definitive revelation of divine love, and the Holy Spirit as the gift of love who realizes God's giving of Himself. In this theological synthesis, I wrote about the mystery of creation engulfed with divine love. But because man refused to respond in love, sin entered the scene and disrupted the communion of love between God and creation. Nevertheless, God shows His love all the more by saving us from our hopeless situation of sin through His self-offering on the cross. God's love then becomes truly salvific and reinstates us into our communion with God. Christ as incarnate love of God realizes the peak of God's reaching out to us in love because He became like us in order that we may become like God. In Christ's way of love, Christians are called to live their identity by loving God and neighbor. Moreover, concomitant to our experience of God's saving plan, we also encountered the Holy Spirit, the gift of love. We see Him as someone, a personal love, and communion between the Father and the Son. He made possible the communication of God to us and accompanied the mission of Christ. We witnessed too that He is a gift of love sent by the Father and the Son to dwell and sanctify the Church as communion in love so that the mission of love continues to gather people into communion with God. In the Holy Spirit, divine love is made present and efficacious in and through Christ in her mission and sacraments.

Moreover, we realized also that God's gift of Himself in love though made present is yet to have its fulfillment in the future. We saw that we who are recipients of God's gift of love are on a pilgrimage toward Him. In this journey, love is seen as the eschatological power which draws us to God in the future. We saw that this promise of the future is heaven. Heaven would be our full experience of God's love when we would finally share in the communion of love within the Trinity. And with this hope, we looked at Mary as our icon of love, who personified God's love both as gift given to her and as her response. We saw in her the full experience of divine love.

Summing up this theological synthesis, I realized that it has taught me three things in my vision of pastoral ministry. First, the experience of divine love is personal. God is a personal God who offers Himself in love to each of us. He invites us to enter into relationship with Him even in a tangible way. Divine love therefore is made concrete and bears fruit in relationship. Second, I realized that what defines my identity as Christian and as a future pastor is love. The personal experience of God's self-gift finds its perfection when it is shared with others. Love then redefines my relationship with everything and everyone. Each is considered in the way God shows His love to me. Much more, I have to see each person and every created reality as subject

to the tenderness of God. For this reason, love becomes the mode of existence and lens through which we measure everything, including social realities. Lastly, the gift of God's self in love impinges upon me the responsibility to become steward of His love. To respond to God in love, is to share in creative power of God to safeguard what He loves. This means to defend each subject of God's love against the power of selfishness which deprives it of its vocation to become a manifestation of God's glory and a vehicle of God's love to other creatures.