

LIFE IN CHRIST

A PREACHED RETREAT BY FR. RANIERO CANTALAMESSA

SESSION 1: THE LOVE OF GOD

A. Introduction to Romans

- The Letter to the Romans isn't just meant for scholars, but for everyone.
- It is a powerful tool for evangelization.
- Romans is a compact Gospel message.
- Paul experienced pride and joy in being chosen to be a disciple of Christ.
- Paul said that one day all nations will be obliged to follow the Gospel.
- Despite being rejected in Athens, Paul continued to share the Gospel with "all the nations."
- There is grace and peace for you from God.

B. You are loved by God

- The most important thing is that God loves us.
- Be open to the love of God for you.
- You exist because God loves you!

"O Eternal Father, how then did you create this creature? I am greatly overwhelmed by this. In fact, as you show me, I see that you did this for no other reason than that in your light you were forced to give us being by the fire of your charity in spite of all the iniquity we were to commit against you, O Eternal Father! It was fire, therefore, that forced you to do so. O ineffable love, even if in your light you saw all the iniquities your creature was to commit against your infinite goodness, you pretended almost not to see but fixed your eyes on the beauty of your creature whom you, intoxicated with love, loved and through love you drew her to yourself and formed her in your own image and likeness. You, eternal truth, communicated your truth to me, namely, that it was love that forced you to create her."

- St. Catherine of Siena

- God takes his delight in loving us!

"In this way, I saw that God was rejoicing to be our Father; rejoicing too to be our Mother; and rejoicing yet again to be our true Husband, with our soul his beloved Wife. And Christ rejoices to be our Brother and Savior too." -Julian of Norwich

C. The Love of God was poured out at Pentecost

- Pentecost - the moment when the love of God filled the hearts of the apostles.
- Pentecost is not just about the power of the Holy Spirit, but also an outpouring of the love of God in the Trinity.
- The personal experience of being loved by God.

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“One night I felt the great tenderness of the Father enveloping me in a sweet and gentle embrace. Beside myself, I knelt down huddled in the dark. My heart was pounding and I abandoned myself completely to His will. And the Holy Spirit introduced me to the love of the Trinity. Also through me the ecstatic exchange of giving and receiving was taking place between Christ, with whom I was united, and the Father, and between the Father and the Son. But how can the inexpressible be expressed? I saw nothing, but it was much more than seeing and there are no words to explain this jubilant exchange which was responding, soaring, receiving, and giving. And from that exchange an intense life flowed from one to the other like the warm milk coming from a mother’s breast to her child. And I was that child and so was all creation that partakes of life, of the kingdom, of glory as it has been regenerated by Christ.”

-Anonymous

D. Paul’s experience of God’s Love

“After saying this, what can we add? With God on our side, who can be against us? ‘Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give. Could anyone accuse those that God has chosen? When God acquits, could anyone condemn? Could Christ Jesus? No! He not only died for us – he rose from the dead, and there at God’s right hand he stands and pleads for us. Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked. As scripture promised: For your sake we are being massacred daily, and reckoned as sheep for the slaughter. These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us. For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

-Romans 8:31-39 (Jerusalem Bible)

- The Love of God is a reality of living in Christ.
- Through Christ, Paul is made stronger than the powers of this world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What stood out to you from the talk? Where was the Holy Spirit speaking to you?
2. Have you experienced God’s love personally? What was that experience like?
3. How has experiencing God’s love transformed your relationship with Him?
4. How has experiencing God’s love transformed your life?
5. In what ways do you need the love of God to empower you in today’s world?