I recently came across this saying and immediately thought of all the work you do and began to think of how many people you have touched in the last year.

From Jan 1\textsuperscript{st} to Nov 1\textsuperscript{st} 35 chaplains in 33 hospitals have made 69,128 visits. When Saint Teresa of Calcutta was asked how do we end world hunger she said, “Start with the person in front of you.”

SO, I ask you, “How do we change the world ?” “Start with the one in front of you.”

We are on the way to changing the world.

As we begin the holy season of Advent and wait for the birth of our Savior, let us never forget Saint Teresa of Calcutta’s words.

Thank you for the unconditional love you show each person you come in contact with.

Be assured of my prayers this Advent and Christmas Season.

Blessings,

Jim
Listen

Understanding God’s unconditional love often requires enlightenment from the Holy Spirit. Below is an inspired article that systematically gives clear insight to this wonderful gift of God’s love and God’s grace.

+++ The most televised Scripture citation is John 3:16, made famous on the signs waved by Christian fans of professional sports teams all over the world. The pericope reads: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life.” This much-loved line from Scripture reflects the centrality of God’s love for humanity and radiates the reality that God is a compassionate and loving Father.

The term “love” is quoted approximately four hundred times in the Bible, making it one of the most frequently used terms in the entire corpus of Sacred Scripture. Love has been the topic of some of the world’s greatest poems, songs, theater, books, and art from every age. In Catholic circles, love has also been the topic of theology and spirituality—and with good reason, for love is an expression of the heart and a powerful emotion. Catholics would be wise not to forget that God is the author and creator of love and that God can be found in the beautiful love story in the Song of Songs, the short book in the Bible. The Song of Songs is a magnificent portrayal of the mutual and generous love of God and humanity.

To Love Is Divine

If you grew up Catholic, you have probably heard the statement “God is love” at least once, if not a thousand times, and it may have lost some of its potency over the years. But despite your hearing that “God is love” countless times, the veracity and meaning of the statement does not diminish. The old adage “to love is divine” is an accurate statement that mirrors the ancient axiom “Deus caritas est,” or “God is love.” The New Testament makes reference to this divine truth in the First Letter of John (4:16): “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.” This text represents the heart of the Christian faith, the idea that God created humanity for love: love of God, love of neighbor, love of self.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997) reveals that God loves humanity more than any mother loves her children, more than any bridegroom loves his bride, and more than any son loves his father (219). The fact is that God chooses to love us even though we are flawed, weak, frail, and imperfect. The Prophet Jeremiah proclaims, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you” (31:3, NRSV). God’s love for us is everlasting because God is love. God’s very essence and being is love, as revealed throughout the whole span of salvation history: Creation, the Exodus, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and eventually in the Parousia (second coming of Christ). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “God’s very being is love. By sending his only Son and Spirit of Love in fullness of time, God has revealed [an] innermost secret: God is an eternal exchange of love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and [God] has destined us to share in that exchange” (221). Since God is love, and God is with us and God abides in us, then Catholics are called to love as God does: wholly, divinely, and without reservation. “We love because God first loved us” (1 John 4:19). To love is divine because love first comes from God and unites us to Christ and each other; therefore, love begets love, according to Pope Benedict XVI in his first papal encyclical, Deus Caritas Est (2006) (18).

Continued on next page
Theological Love

Theologically, Christian love can be summed up by pointing to the Incarnation, when God became human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict states, “The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts” (12). It is God’s unconditional love for humanity that allows God to reveal himself to us through the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth. The great German Jesuit Karl Rahner (1978) refers to God’s gratuitous love as “God’s self-communication,” which is to “signify that God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of the [human person]” (Foundations of Christian Faith, 116). It is God’s self-communication and unmerited love for humanity that allows God to “empty himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6–8, NJB). Love within Christianity points specifically to the love of God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Christ—the Anointed One of God.

Pope Benedict XVI also addresses the twofold reality of Christian love—(1) love of God and (2) love of neighbor—both of which stem from biblical faith (Deus Caritas Est, 16). The two mandates—to love God and to love our neighbor—form a symbiotic association with each other that draws a person into deeper union with God. The Holy Father notes, “The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbor or hate him altogether” (17). The two great commandments to love God and love our neighbor constitute the love story that exists between God and God’s children. This love story increases and unfolds as our faith in Jesus Christ evolves and recognizes the awesome gift of God’s love. It is a reciprocal love, a gift that must be received and shared (7).

Another theological point regarding love is that love is a gift from God and a virtue of God. Love is one of the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 1822; 1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is a fruit or gift of the Holy Spirit: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). Love is a gift from God that undergirds the entire Christian message—namely, “Christ died out of love for us” (CCC, 1825). Living a dynamic, Catholic, faith-filled life must incorporate love. The Apostle Paul poignantly remarks, “Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts—the way of love” (1 Corinthians 12:31). In addition, Paul states, “If I have faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (13:2). The love that allows us “to move mountains” is an all-inclusive love, an unconditional love, and an everlasting love: a love that grows and flourishes as we grow in holiness.
Types of Love

Traditionally, there are four types of love, and they tend to interact with each other. In his classic book The Four Loves (1960), the great Anglican spiritual writer C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) expounds upon four types of love: (1) affection, (2) philia (friendship), (3) eros (romantic, sexual desire), and (4) agape (charity, God’s love).

The first, affection, is the humblest form of love; it puts on no airs (see Lewis, p. 56). Affection is simply the warmth and genuine kindness that parents demonstrate to their children, that teachers show their students, that coaches display to their athletes, and that people demonstrate when working or living among each other, thus forming a small community (see pp. 53–60). Lewis comments that “affection does not expect too much, turns a blind eye to faults, revives easily after quarrels; just so charity suffers long and is kind and forgives” (p. 61). Affection is the cornerstone for the other three types of love.

Philia, the Greek noun for “friendship,” describes the human social interaction between two or more persons. Lewis maintains that philia is based in love: “Very few [contemporary] people think friendship a love comparable in value or even a love at all” (p. 87). When people refer to others as “my best friend” or “my good friend,” these are words of endearment. Lewis contends that philia is not at all derogatory in any way; and of all the four loves, philia is the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious, and necessary (see p. 88). However, not many human beings could survive or live without having any friends—not in any real sense of the word “live.” Friendships are one of life’s gifts that make the world tolerable and more palatable. Finally, philia is concerned with freedom and choice: human beings are free to select their own friends and allow other individuals the ability to enter into another’s private world. We may believe that we have chosen our friends—but in reality, and after having traveled several miles along the journey of life, our friends have chosen us. Jesus mentions this reality about philia in the New Testament: “For you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). This passage gives us a great insight into Jesus’ understanding of philia.

Eros, the third kind of love Lewis identifies, describes the state of being deeply in love with another person. Eros is the Greek word for love and sexual desire; it goes beyond attraction and friendship. According to Lewis, “Eros makes a man really want, not a woman, but one particular woman,” and vice versa (p. 135). Virtually every young person longs for the great gift that is eros with someone with whom they fall in love. But authentic eros leads to a deep and binding commitment: to Christian marriage, the pinnacle expression of eros. In marriage eros reaches its fullness through communal living, sharing, sexual expression, and procreation. In marriage, eros can lead two people to spend the rest of their lives with each other, growing old together and seeing their children’s children. Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes that “true eros tends to rise ‘in ecstasy’ towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves” (no. 5). The Holy Father reminds Catholics that God is the author of eros and also loves humanity with an eros love—not a sexual love, but a passionate love, one that can lead a person to a “path of ascent, renunciation, purification, and healing” (Deus Caritas Est, 5). Christians can experience God’s love as eros, just as married Catholics experience each other’s love in this way, thereby connecting eros and agape to each other and to God.
Agape (Greek meaning “to be friends with” God or “the love of” God) is a fourth level of love, a realization and connotation that is totally different from charity (Lewis, 165). The New Testament affirms this truth: “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8). “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us” (4:10a). These two pericopes represent a principle of agape: that is, God is love and God desires to be in love with humanity. For Lewis, agape is the fullest experience of love because agape is God’s full and unconditional love for human beings. Agape is more than love; it is divine energy, it is primal love, and it is gift-love from the creator and author of all good gifts—God (see Lewis, p. 175). Two Old Testament figures have enjoyed agape with God: the Patriarch Abraham (see Genesis, chapter 22) and the law-giver Moses (see Exodus, chapter 4). Both enjoyed divine friendship with God that demonstrates agape with God. Pope Benedict XVI notes that agape is “possessive love and oblative love . . . a descending love [coming from God] . . . a source, which is [expressed in] Jesus the Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. John 19:34)” (Deus Caritas Est, 8).

These four types of Christian love represent a relationship that exists between each of the love types—affection, philia, eros, agape—as well as a relationship between spirituality and charity. Human loving and divine love are intrinsically linked to one’s spirituality, which encompasses kindness, empathy, care, and compassion.

Care and Compassion

The real and tangible side of love is the ability for the Catholic body of believers to be caring and compassionate towards others. This ability is the practical side of agape and caritas, or charity. The primacy of Christian love implies the centrality of pastoral living and ministerial praxis—works of mercy and works of charity—in our contemporary and complex world. The love of God does not end and begin with ourselves; it begins weekly with the celebration of Sunday Eucharist and is carried forth to our neighbors and to others in need (see Pope Benedict XVI, Sacramentum Caritatis, 91). Love demands that we are caring and compassionate to those most in need: the poor, the marginalized, the disenfranchised.

In his apostolic exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis, Pope Benedict XVI (2007) states, “The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God’s gift [of love]” (91). The Sunday Eucharist moves Catholics to social action and transformation, which are byproducts of God’s agape and our caritas, or charity, toward each other. The care and compassion that Catholics display pastorally toward one another are the same care and compassion demonstrated by God and are the tangible source and reality of God’s love.

Pastorally, the way Catholics infuse the principle of Deus caritas est into the world is through solidarity, reciprocity, and forgiveness, which are genuinely expressed through the care and the compassion shown to others in the world. The love of God—Amor Dei—is a powerful force in the world: apart from it, Christians can struggle and flounder, but equipped with God’s love Christians can move mountains and live inspiring lives that join us to Jesus the Christ and reflect the Latin motto Deus mea lux est, or God is my light.
“Anne, Anne,” I hear a voice calling to me as I’m walking down the hospital corridor. It was Maria, tugging her husband’s arm as they made their way across the hall to greet me. “Ivan, I want you to meet Anne. She is the chaplain.”

Maria and Ivan, both in their mid-eighties, were impeccably dressed with an old-world European flair about them. Indeed, as young adults they had both immigrated separately from different countries in Eastern Europe. Love had brought Maria and Ivan together, from the first day they met through work. She was beautiful and educated and so was he, they were both very poor but had promising careers, she as a linguist, he as an engineer and inventor. While other suitors had taken Maria out for milkshakes and burgers, Ivan was different, more sophisticated - Ivan took her to the symphony, the opera, the ballet. While Ivan was alone in America and lonely, Maria and her family offered him connection and an instant feeling of home. Very soon, Maria and Ivan fell in love and got married, and for the next 50 and counting years they built a beautiful life together, had children and grandchildren, travelled the world. While Ivan and Maria may have seemed like an ordinary, albeit well dressed, couple from the outside, as a hospital chaplain I had the privilege of catching a glimpse of the inner workings of their love story in all its uniqueness, charm and beauty. More than anything, their story was undergirded, surrounded and saturated by the unconditional love of God, that perfect love bigger than themselves, that love that both brought them together and sustained their togetherness. While I had met Maria through her outpatient visits to the hospital, this was the first time I had met Ivan. I felt a tug of foreboding as I saw the concerned look in Maria’s face. Ivan, who had been robust and healthy his entire life, was now sick and in need of care. I uttered a silent prayer for them both as they went to see Ivan’s doctor.

“Anne, I can see it. I know it. Ivan is not going to live much longer,” Maria confided, her voice lowered, her look of concern now more pronounced. Only a few days had passed since I had first met Ivan, and now he was an inpatient. “His body is wearing out. All his organs are wearing out. I know it. He knows it. Anne, Ivan is not going to live too much longer.”

Although Ivan had never been a hospital inpatient before, now that he was sick his illness was serious. He had been admitted by ambulance through the emergency department, and his prognosis was fair at best. Truly, his organs were beginning to fail, and Maria just “knew” in the way that spouses often intuitively know that they were nearing the end of their lives together. Now Maria had become reflective, meditating on their marriage and all its ups and downs. Indeed, love had enabled Maria to love Ivan, not an idealized Ivan but the real Ivan, with all his good points and his not so good points. There was no doubt that Ivan was devoted to Maria and their children and grandchildren, he had been a good provider, he had broadened their lives through his adventuresome spirit and love of

Continued on next page
Listen

even controlling, strongly opinionated, and had a lot to say about how Maria spent her time. He had exerted almost despotic control over their finances, and he could be moody, at times going into depressions that could last for weeks. By far the biggest problem for Maria, though, was that Ivan was not a believer. While Maria was a devout, devout Catholic, Ivan was a self-proclaimed atheist. From day one of their marriage, Maria had prayed fervently for his conversion, much as Monica prayed for Augustine. Knowing her devotion to her faith, I marveled that she married an atheist in the first place. Yet married they were, and for better or for worse, Maria was determined to honor the vows she made to God and to Ivan on her wedding day, and she was determined to honor them wholeheartedly, both in letter and spirit. And somehow, even after all their years together, Maria’s love for Ivan had stayed just as fresh as it was during the delightful days of their early courtship.

“I will not go on dialysis - it’s just putting off the inevitable,’ Ivan spoke, brow furrowed, a practical man, willing to stare down hard truths. “I don’t want to live on any kind of medicine. No.”

After a couple of peaceful weeks at home, Ivan was back in the hospital, and this time he was critically ill. At this difficult juncture, Ivan’s first thought was of Maria. How would she fare? He could never live on as an invalid, a burden to her and to their family. His only regret in dying was that he would have no more time with Maria, their children, their grandchildren. For as much as Maria loved Ivan, Ivan loved Maria, the full Maria in all her strengths and shortcomings. She had been a marvelous and caring wife to him, a hot meal always waiting for him after his long day at work. Her roast potatoes were so good, they were truly heaven on earth. And the house was always immaculate, their children always so well cared for. And she had such an admirable peace and confidence about her, borne no doubt from her Catholic Faith. And yet she could be so self-righteous about it, so heavy-handed. Always preaching to him and to anyone who would listen about the “one right way” for people to live. Sure, she was convinced she was doing her best to save souls, but he wished she could lighten up a bit, open her mind, relax. Indeed, at times she had alienated their children with her overbearing beliefs. Why couldn’t she live and let live? And yet, one flash of her bright blue eyes instantly melted all his frustration towards her. He loved her right down to his core, and since the day they had married his world had felt complete with her by his side.

“Anne, Ivan will not take any of his medicines. And now we are here again. I told Ivan’s doctor, and he said, ‘Maria, let Ivan be his own physician.’”
After briefly being discharged to a rehabilitation center, Ivan was back in the hospital yet again. Dialysis, at a minimum, would now be required to preserve Ivan’s life, and Ivan was resolutely opposed to it. While Ivan may have been able to hold on longer, he wanted to live and die on his terms. Maria and Ivan had come to the inevitable fork in their road, shared by many many spouses at end of life, where love was now calling them to set each other free. While Maria could not imagine her life without Ivan, with a big sigh she fully accepted his choice. She honored his wanting to let go, to die rather than to be kept alive through artificial means. She rose to the occasion with dignity and gravitas, resolutely giving him permission to go, repeatedly assuring him that she loved him, that she would be ok. While Ivan worried that she might not be ok, he worried more about being a burden to her, an invalid that would take all her energy, an invalid who could give her nothing in return. And who knows how much his ongoing care might cost? Ever a practical man, Ivan had no interest in running down their savings with his medical bills. She might live for many more years, she might need every penny they had saved. He never wanted to burden her, in life or in death. With heavy hearts, both Maria and Ivan knew what must happen now, what was right, fitting. Very soon, they would bid each other farewell, lowering the curtain on their lives together.

“Anne, get the Priest - Ivan wants to be Baptized! Ivan wants to become a Catholic!” Maria’s face was radiant as she ran into my office, grabbing onto my arms and shaking me in her delight. “Jesus has moved his heart! Thank you, Jesus, thank you!”

Even though her beloved Ivan was dying, Maria had just received quite possibly the best news of her life. Ivan had asked to become a Catholic! All her years of prayer had paid off, and God’s love had now accomplished the miraculous. Despite the strength of her desire for Ivan’s conversion, Maria had never asked him directly - no, for Maria this needed to be between God and Ivan. What joy she felt that God had moved Ivan’s heart! For Maria, now, there was vast redemption in losing Ivan, both in his soul’s salvation and in their future reunion in Heaven. Indeed, she would rather have seen Ivan die immediately with Jesus than live indefinitely without Him. It seemed me that Ivan became Catholic both because of Maria and in spite of her. Although Ivan’s salvation was of course God’s accomplishment, Maria’s example had inspired Ivan. Even though her sometimes self-righteousness had often turned him off totally to the Church, he had also seen how her faith had given her resilience, strength, purpose and even joy when times were difficult. Now, as he faced his own death, he wanted more of this grounding in his own life, this keystone that Maria’s faith seemed to offer. Moreover, he knew how happy it would make Maria if they could finally share in her Catholic faith. By the Grace of God and nurtured by Maria’s love and example, Ivan felt inspired, at long last, to say yes to new life in Christ.
“Thank you, Anne, thank you for coming so quickly,” Maria welcomed me into Ivan’s hospital room, Ivan’s body lying peacefully and, yes, lifelessly.

My heart jumped as I entered Ivan’s room and embraced Maria. Once again, God had led me to be in the right place at the right time, a phenomenon so often experienced by those in hospital ministry. I had known that Ivan was in the hospital, but I had no idea that he had just passed away. I sought to center myself, inhaling deeply the room’s warm thick air, air thick with love, air thick with sadness. Maria was of course there, along with her daughter. One of her sons had also just arrived, surprised (as I had been, albeit silently) to find that Ivan had already passed away. For Maria and Ivan, love had very often been a verb, manifest in their many acts of devotion and kindness to each other over the years. At this moment, however, at Ivan’s death bed, their love struck me less as a verb and more as a noun, literally that “person, place and thing” thickly blanketing and swaddling all participating in this profound moment. Love had held Maria and Ivan for their whole lives together, and love was certainly continuing to hold them now. We sat in silence for a while. We reflected on Ivan’s life for a while. We prayed for a while. And, then, there was nothing more to do. After a last kiss on Ivan’s forehead and a final tear-filled hug, Maria walked out of Ivan’s room and walked out of the hospital, flanked on either side by her son and daughter. After more than 50 years together, Maria and Ivan had said their goodbyes.

“Anne, I miss my husband,” Maria looked downcast, saddened. “Every morning I wake up and still expect him to be there...It is no good for me living alone.”

A few weeks later, I saw Maria once again at the hospital, this time en route to one of her regular doctor’s appointments. While she remained as beautifully dressed as ever, she looked noticeably tired and drawn, her tasteful tweed suit hanging loose on her in a way it hadn’t before. Maria’s grief was very deep and raw, and she was frankly just not sure how she would go on without Ivan. Every morning she woke up still expecting him to be there. The days were so quiet, the nights so sleepless. And the details of life were so overwhelming without him, as Ivan had taken care of the bills, all the house repairs, the taxes, so many things. At times, life seemed so barren Maria pleaded with God to take her life. Why does love have to lead to such pain? Indeed, a widow once swore to me should would ask God this very question when she arrived at the “pearly gates.” It does seem, truly, that love and pain are inevitably two sides of the same coin. I wish it didn’t have to be that way. Yes, pain is generally the lot of the surviving spouse, a real gift offered to the spouse who went first as the spouse left behind takes on the grieving for both people. I saw how Maria was offering Ivan this gift each day. Each day she got out of bed, each day she faced with courage, each day she suffered for them both.
“Now God keeps me here to serve God more - I am grateful for all I had with Ivan, and now I will do my best to serve God by serving all people.”

Several months had gone by since Ivan had died, and I bumped into Maria while she was once again travelling to a doctor’s appointment. Still more tired, still paler than she used to be, Maria nonetheless savored sharing with me all the wonderful time she had spent with her grandchildren, all the satisfaction she had found helping out in her parish. While Ivan’s death had left a hole in her life and in her heart that could never be filled, I could see how their love lived on, giving her life dignity, her empty days a sense of purpose. It lived on in Maria’s sense of sacred mission in supporting and caring for her children, her grandchildren, her parish and her community. Yes, this love lived on, the love that had brought them together, the love that had kept them together. The love that inspired Ivan to become Catholic, the love that soothed them and surrounded them as they relinquished each other into death. For this love was, is and will remain the unconditional love of God, a love that will endure long after Ivan’s days, long after Maria’s days, long after even their children’s and grandchildren’s days, the love that “has set eternity in their hearts.” (Eccl 3:11)
Recently I was perusing a website for a company that sold T-shirts with comical slogans on them. I noticed one that had a Caduceus symbol and the phrase “R.N. Here to save your ass, not kiss it”. I had seen this phrase before, and it always made me feel vaguely offended. While nursing was long known by many as a vocation of service, for many years now, nursing leaders have sought to improve the image and role of nursing, focusing on creating the image of a more professional discipline. I believe that the above mentioned T-shirt slogan takes away from that professional image. The idea of nursing as a vocation of service—and indeed the message of the T-shirt—implies that such service is beneath us, that we are too important to stoop to such lowliness. There is a quote from Mother Teresa of Calcutta that I find much more representative of nursing: “Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work”.

The theme for this newsletter, as we are preparing to begin Advent, is ‘God’s unconditional love’. In nearly 14 years of Faith Community Nursing practice, I have learned that God reveals His unconditional love for us through our everyday experiences. He allows us to see the Christ in other people, and to BE the Christ to other people. He presents countless opportunities for us to journey with others. I’d like to share a few recent examples:

M touched the dying: “My most precious moment would be at 2am when his anxiety would surface. Yes, he had Ativan but more importantly, I would hold his hand and ask the intercession of Our Blessed Mother, St. Pio and all the angels and saints to intercede before the throne of God for him. J would quietly return to sleep and also, his wife, P, as well who slept on the couch to be beside him.”

C touched the poor: She coordinated a community Thanksgiving dinner for 42 homeless and isolated members of the community. I was fortunate to be able to visit during the meal, and to witness the serenity of the volunteers and the patrons in a beautiful, welcoming, nurturing, dignified setting.

W touched the lonely, a man with dementia, who told W: “At times I wonder, sometimes I think I still believe, but other times I wonder. But because of you, I feel my faith returning”.

J touched the unwanted: a new diagnosis of diabetes in a middle aged parishioner. The parishioner had been non-compliant with meds, blood glucose monitoring, diet and exercise. The two met after Mass on a series of Sundays, as J educated and supported the parishioner toward self-management of diabetes, and more importantly, self-acceptance in the face of a chronic illness.

These are all examples of nursing as a vocation of service to others. On a higher level, these are all examples of God’s unconditional love being revealed through the works of His people, for His people. As we prepare for the Advent season, may we be reminded of those words of Mother Teresa: “…Let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work”.
I serve as the Chaplain in a County Jail. Jail is different from prison – in jail you have yet to be convicted. Once convicted you may be sent to a correctional facility, but until then you are "detained", awaiting trial, in a County Jail. Every County in Massachusetts has a jail, and every jail has hundreds of men and women being detained, awaiting trial. In jail there may be hope – or not, depending upon your circumstances. One of the biggest challenges in serving in jail is that battle between despair and hope. While awaiting trial bail may be denied, court dates deferred (multiple times), visits may gradually reduce to a trickle – and so does your hope of being released.

Consequently, homilies and counselling that speak of trusting God, God's love, and hope in God may seem hollow. To those that are 'detained' awaiting trial, battling depression and despair is a very real battle. Typically a detainee is held for months awaiting trial or bail, however it is not uncommon for those charged with serious offences to be detained for years prior to their case going to trial.

In the midst of this I was talking with one detainee who, because of the severity of his crime, was held in a section of the jail reserved for those for whom it would be unsafe to be with the general population. There is a wide range of reasons why someone may be here but, suffice it to say, despair is a frequent visitor to residents of this unit. My friend told me, “Deac, I know you believe this God's love stuff but it's hard for me to believe that's true in here”. We spoke a long time and eventually I had to leave, hopefully lifting his spirits and planting a seed of hope.

I saw him again a week later and he was visibly excited to see me. "Deac, I have to tell you what happened to me. That night, after you left, I actually got down on my knees in my cell and prayed. I prayed, 'God, Deacon says You love me and I'm not so sure about that, but if that's true I need you give me some sign that You love me, that You really love me'. Well the next morning they slide my breakfast through the slot in the door. Its a box of corn flakes and a carton of milk. Now usually I just eat the cereal dry, out of the box; but for some reason this morning I decided to pour it into the bowl and pour the milk over it. When I did, on top of the pile of corn flakes was this”. Then he pulls out a styrofoam cup that he'd kept separate, holding it like something precious, and for him it was.

He tips the cup over and out comes a corn flake, one corn flake – perfectly flat and in the perfect shape of a heart. “Deacon, this is my sign, of all the days I pour the cereal into the bowl. This day, the corn flake that lands on top of the pile of all the other corn flakes is this one – a perfect heart. I asked God for a sign of His love, I was looking for a sign of His love, and there it was”. As he is telling me this story his voice cracks and he begins to cry.

Despair is real, and for those incarcerated in prison, or those detained in jail, despair can be overwhelming, but the love of God is also real, and can be just as overwhelming. It is all around us if we look for it. We can encounter God in a religious setting like Church or a Prison Chapel; or in something as simple as a box of corn flakes. When we are willing to look with eyes of faith despair can absolutely be replaced by hope.
Listen

The Bible continually talks about God’s unconditional love. Below are several examples.

1 John 4:16
And so we know and rely on the love of God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

1 John 4:18
There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 Peter 4:8
Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Colossians 3:14
And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Ephesians 2:8
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 5:25
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Jeremiah 31:3
The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”

John 3:16
For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Continued on next page
1Corinthians 13:7

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1Corinthians 13:13

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1John 3:16

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

1John 4:8

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

John 14:21

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.

John 15:12

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

Luke 6:27

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.
As for what the best things are to say to someone grieving, the interesting thing you’ll see is the items on this list aren’t always very specific. They are often general statements or ways of being. We think this is worth noting. Though people get caught up in the “right” words to make someone feel better, often the best things aren’t words of comfort at all (we all know those can go astray quickly, however well-intentioned!). They are an acknowledgment of pain, remembrance, and an ability to be present.

So, without further ado.

- “There are no words”
- “I will travel to you and stay with you several days”
- “You can talk to me about your mum whenever you want – in 5, 10, 30 years”
- “Your grief-reactions are normal/appropriate”.
- “You aren’t going crazy”
- “Tell me more about your mother”
- Someone gave me a very sincere compliment on how I’ve handled raising my kids as a single mother a few years after my husband died. Meant the world to me to hear it. It’s a lonely journey. I needed that boost.
- “I’m just really sorry you’ve had to go through this”. She kept her gaze into my eyes as I sobbed… It was so powerful just being “witnessed”
- “Your Dad was a wonderful man”.
- “Learn to live in acceptance of the loss, not in spite of the loss”
- “She’s just made a change of address”
- “Grief has no expiration date”

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Listen

• “It’s okay to have bad days because it reminds you how much you love them and the good days remind you they’re right there with you”.
• “Just talk about your son whenever you feel like”
• “You don’t have to talk. I will just sit beside you“.
• My 81-year-old Father drove quite a distance to just sit with me and as he sat listening to me completely fall apart he reached over and put his arm around me and quietly said, “please know this is only temporary you will get to finish raising him one day. Then he said, I will get there before you and I will carry your messages to him“.
• “We’ve asked your colleagues and they have donated enough paid time off for you to take the time you need”
• “We were just talking about him last night”
• “We remember him and speak of him often”
• “When you feel that she’s with you know that she really is”
• “She is never far away”
• “Let me know if I can help”
• “I’m sorry for your loss”
• When someone tells you they are there for you, brings you flowers or comfort food, or your best friend comes over after you’ve told her not to (because you didn’t want to be a bother) because she knows you that well – those are the types of things that make a difference.
• “I was really mad at God when I found out”
• “We won’t forget him”
• “He was such a special kid”
• “I don’t know what to say but I can listen”
• “He would be proud of you”

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Listen
A few more…..

• “I am praying for you and will always be”
• “I love you”
• “Thank you for giving us the most beautiful, generous, loving person we’ve ever known”.
• “We loved her like she was one of the family”.
• “You’ve been a good dad to them”
• When my Mom passed a good friend of mine looked me in the eye and with such love and concern said “I am worried about you. I think you should consider grief therapy.” I did so because of her genuine concern and courage to say that to me at the time
• “One day you will be talking about Jessica and a smile will come to your face first before a tear”
• The best thing was from a chaplain who gave me permission to be mad as hell and instead of asking ‘why me?’ Asking ‘why not me?’
• My mom made me socks and a hat for my baby gone-too-soon in pregnancy. She said, “every baby deserves to be celebrated, no matter how long they are with us.”
• “A part of your loved one lives in you and all those he loved”
• “Be as kind to yourself as you are to everyone else”
• I received a card from a former college classmate of my husband. In the card she wrote about how proud my husband had been of me and how happy I had made him. She wrote that every time their paths crossed over the years that he always spoke so highly of me. She was in awe of how proud he was to have me as his wife.
• “You will never get ‘over it’, but you will get through it”
• “I can see by these pictures how much you loved each other. She must have known every day she was loved”.
• “There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Your life has been changed forever”.
• “You’re allowed to feel and be exactly as you are because this is your experience and no one else’s”.
• “I wouldn’t be alive today if your dad hadn’t helped me get sober by giving me a reason to be sober”.

Continued from previous page
And finally…..

- The best thing is when someone says, “I remember…” and then goes on to share a memory of the person you’ve lost.
- “I cannot possibly understand how you feel. But I’m here”.
- When I told a friend my heart is broken she said “I will lend you mine til yours has mended”
- “It’s okay not to be okay”
- “Look for signs. He will show you he is with you” [from another grieving mom]
- “He/she is with you always, and is proud of you for the way you live your life”
- I love when someone hears a song that reminds them of him & they reach out to tell me!
- “Come rest a minute – let’s talk about & remember all those sweet memories. Your dad was a great man & father”.
- “We’ll get through this together”
- “Now you’ve got someone up there watching out for you”
- “It’s okay to hurt. Don’t hold back your tears”
- “I have no words, this just sucks”
- “He was so loved and my life is better because he was in it”.
- “You are a good mother and his death with never change that”
- “You are not moving on you are moving forward”

https://whatsyourgrief.com/
When a minister of the Church brings Communion, the sick or elderly person shares in the eucharistic meal of the community. This holy Communion manifests the support and concern of the community for its members who are not able to be present. Holy Communion is a bond to the community for its members who are not able to be present. Holy Communion is a bond to the community, as it is a union with Christ. When the Eucharist is brought to the home, the family should prepare a table with a cloth and a lighted candle. All members of the household may receive Communion with the sick person, according to the usual norms. The following texts are among many that may be chosen from the Rite of Communion of the Sick.

A briefcase may be needed to carry the following items:

- White stole (for the priest or deacon)
- Holy water sprinkler
- Ritual, or card with prayers
- Crucifix
- Purificator

One should check with the priest as to what is needed; in some cases (e.g., Communion in a hospital), the requirements differ. The priest usually does not wear a surplice during the trip but does wear a narrow white stole under his suit coat.

**Greeting**

All make the Sign of the Cross. The minister of Communion speaks the following or a similar greeting:

**V. Peace be with this house and with all who live here.**

All respond:

**R. And with your spirit.**

**Sprinkling with Holy Water**

The Blessed Sacrament is placed on the table. The sick person and all present may be sprinkled with holy water. Before this sprinkling, the minister of Communion says:

**V. Let this water call to mind our baptism into Christ, who by his death and resurrection has redeemed us.**

Continued on next page
Penitential Rite

The minister invites all to join in the penitential rite:
V. My brothers and sisters, let us turn with confidence to the Lord and ask forgiveness for all our sins.

After a brief silence, the penitential rite continues:

R. I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,

(They strike their breast:) through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault;

therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

or

V. Lord Jesus, you healed the sick: Lord, have mercy.
R. Lord, have mercy.

V. Lord Jesus, you forgave sinners: Christ, have mercy.
R. Christ, have mercy.

V. Lord Jesus, you give us yourself to heal us and to bring us strength: Lord, have mercy.
R. Lord, have mercy.

Then the minister concludes the penitential rite:

V. May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
R. Amen.
Readings of the Scripture

Then a selection from the Scriptures is read. An appropriate reading should be selected and prepared by the family or the minister of Communion. The following Scriptures are appropriate but are not intended to limit the choice of a reading.

A reading of the Holy Gospel according to John 6:51

Jesus says: "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

V. The Gospel of the Lord.
R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

or John 15:5

or 1 John 4:16

Lord's Prayer and Communion

Following a time of silence, all join in prayers of intercession. Then, in preparation for holy Communion, all recite the Lord's Prayer.

V. Now let us pray to God as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Our Father, . . .

After this, the minister shows the eucharistic bread to those present, saying:

V. This is the Lamb of God
  who takes away the sins of the world.
  Happy are those who are called to his supper.

All who are to receive Communion respond:

R. Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

The minister gives Communion saying, "The body of Christ," "The blood of Christ," as appropriate. The sick person answers "Amen." All who wish to do so receive Communion in the usual way. After a time of silence, the minister says the following or another prayer:
V. All-powerful and ever-living God, may the body and blood of Christ your Son be for our brother (sister) N. a lasting remedy for body and soul. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
R. Amen.

Listen

Keep an eye out for Pope Francis’ 2019 Message for World Day of the Sick

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick.index.html