

Covenant Love in Community Life

The life of God at work within us and within our life in Community is a life that wishes to lose itself in love; that wishes to pour itself out in loving service to our brothers and sisters. This is the character of the life within us. This is the character of the God we invite to rule and govern our lives.

1. What is covenant love? It is God's kind of love.

It is the love that has lost its limits; the love that fights to the end; the love that never gives up; the love that has let go of the right to quit.

If this kind of love is not at the heart of our life, if love is not THE characteristic of our life together, then there will be a certain unreality in our life: talk and not deeds, ideal and not reality.

The results will be that, despite all our intentions, we will not really trust each other (we won't be able to), and the deep work of healing and empowerment that community promises will not be fully realized.

2. Community is amazingly powerful and fragile at the same time.

It is built on God's power and inspiration. And it rests on the delicate basis of actual relationships, of the way we actually behave towards one another; which is to say, it can be broken.

What sustains, nourishes and heals community life is goodness – an environment of goodness, gratitude and charity. We will all make it if we are well loved. Problems resolve themselves in a climate of love and deep mutual respect. We are only capable of genuine greatness and sacrifice if we are well loved which includes appreciation. With the support of brothers and sisters (and with the confidence they give us), we have courage; we have the ability to make real sacrifices for the greater good.

Sometimes our very reticence to "get out there", to risk, to sacrifice, and to live generously, indicates that we're not loved enough. Love creates a momentum toward greatness. Love creates human capacities that weren't there before. We don't need to create committees and read another wise book about building a culture of love. We just need to do it. It's not such a mystery.

3. Covenant love in action creates a safe place of freedom where people can be vulnerable, take risks, put down deep roots and produce fruit.

A community missing covenant life and love will surely be filled with judgments, jealousies and competitiveness. But covenant love doesn't quit. It allows people to try something new, to fail at it and to try something else. When we love well, we encourage each other. "Nice try. You'll get it next time." "I'm for you. Don't give up." Covenant love corrects in private and lavishes praise and honor in public. Covenant love wants each of us to be the best and most authentic version of who God has created us to be.

4. Use the love you have for one another. Wield it. Everything we're about is creating life.

The life we're talking about will always be complicated. Life isn't a problem to be solved; you can't cure it. Suffering, difficulty and uncertainty are built into it.

We're back to the life we've asked for (prayed for): God's life. God's life is not neat; it will always cause trouble. God's life will always be more than we can grasp, always more than we can hang onto, always moving. We can't really organize, though we will try. God's life cannot be contained.

If we have God's life, we'll always be dissatisfied. We'll never have enough: enough time with our families; enough time alone with Scripture; enough time to do all the good in our hearts. We'll always want more.

5. God's life creates appetites in us that only God himself, that only eternity can fill.

These hungers lead us ultimately to God himself. And these hungers (appetites) that are built into our prayers also bring suffering, surprising suffering from surprising quarters.

How many of you know that your children will not always approve when you do what the Lord asks? Children: how many of you know that you won't always win the approval of the rest of your family by following God?

Some of us have made "mistakes of love" -- have not been wise in the ways we have tried to live the Gospel. And while we do our best, we cannot always prevent our lives from hurting people (at least in the short term). God's life is a big reality and it is not so manageable. And in the midst of that

complicated life, the thing that gives it strength and durability is love – practical love, goodness. Be good to each other.

I mean cards, phone calls, gifts, prayers, fasting for each other, vigils, meals for the sick, personal service, remembering birthdays and anniversaries, comfort – doing the things that mean love to people.

We have been so inventive with our religious architecture, our heritage of sacred music, our liturgy. We, as a whole, have been less inventive with our love. Pray for the imagination of love; for the creativity of love.

6. The new life that God promises is salvation.

The new life that God promises us, that he has brought into our midst, is his salvation: our personal salvation and the salvation of the world. It is a life beyond that which we could ever provide for ourselves; that has a character that goes beyond the limits of the human condition. It is a life that can produce the deeds of the saints and, as the Letter to the Hebrews declares, has within it “the power of an indestructible life”. And it is the only real witness we have to give the world – the life and goodness of God present in our midst:

Revelations 21:2-5 - *And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."*