

Palm Sunday
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

April 13, 2014
Rev. Paul Moore

Love in Action

In Greek mythology Narcissus was a minor god, the son of a river god and a nymph. He was kind of like my little long-haired mini-dachshund. He was a lot cuter than he was bright. His looks gave him a way with women. One such was Echo, a mountain nymph. She saw him at a distance and immediately fell in love with him. She followed him, and echoed everything he said, until finally she had the nerve to reveal herself. He spurned her, and she, brokenhearted, wandered in the mountains until all that was left of her was her voice repeating anything you call into a hollow.

Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, heard about Echo and Narcissus. She lured Narcissus into the woods to the side of a clear, still pool. He saw his own reflection in the pool, and not realizing it was his own reflection, died pining for the beautiful thing he could not possess.

Roy Croft wrote a song called "Love," published in 1936.

*I love you, not only for what you are,
But for what I am when I am with you.
I love you, not only for what you have made of yourself,
But for what you are making of me.
I love you for the part of me that you bring out;
I love you for putting your hand into my heaped-up heart
And passing over all the foolish, weak things that you can't help dimly seeing there,
And for drawing out into the light all the beautiful belongings that no one else had
looked quite far enough to find
I love you because you are helping me to make of the lumber of my life
Not a tavern but a temple,
Out of the works of my every day, not a reproach but a song.
I love you because you have done more than any creed could have done to make me
good,
And more than any fate could have done to make me happy.
You have done it without a touch, without a word, without a sign.
You have done it by being yourself.
Perhaps that is what being a friend means, after all.*

Now that's a beautiful song, full of gratitude. Gratitude is beautiful and right. Gratitude

is one of the ways we draw near to God. But I think the song is misnamed. It's noble and beautiful and artistic, but it's not really about the one to whom it is addressed. It's not about "you," it's about "me." This song is not really about love of the other person, it's about the love of oneself. It's narcissistic.

Self-love is good and necessary, and the ego has a necessary and essential role in self-care. Narcissism kicks in when the only thing we love is ourselves. Everything revolves around us, nothing has any meaning except in relation to us. It is entirely ego-driven, with no real appreciation of the presence of others. We make an idol of ourselves, and we try to force the rest of the world to bow down and worship. Ultimately it is not love at all. It is the most profound and devilish selfishness.

Eros was one of the very early gods, the earliest philosophers have Eros emerging on the scene after the first order of primordial gods. Parmenides, a little later in Greek history, has him as the first of the gods. We normally associate him with the attraction between lovers, but Eros was also an artist. Beauty was his gift, and the love of beauty his fire. His followers adore beauty wherever they find it.

In Roger and Hammerstein's "Cinderella" they have the prince and the girl singing:

(Prince)

*Do I love you because you're beautiful,
Or are you beautiful because I love you?
Am I making believe I see in you
A girl too lovely to be really true?
Do I want you because you're wonderful,
Or are you wonderful because I want you?
Are you the sweet invention of a lover's dream
Or are you really as beautiful as you seem?*

(Cinderella)

*Am I making believe I see in you
A man too perfect to be really true?
Do I want you because you're wonderful,
Or are you wonderful because I want you?*

(Both)

*Are you the sweet invention of a lover's dream
Or are you really as wonderful as you seem?*

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and their eyes are overflowing with it. Eros is in the air, playing with their minds and making them ask funny questions. In his later history Eros became more associated with eroticism, and was credited with troubling peoples' minds with silly thoughts.

Beauty is good, God is the source of all beauty. We do a lot of things around here because they are beautiful and draw our hearts up to God. But beauty is not an end in itself. If we cannot see the author behind the beauty, then we make an idol of the beauty, and blind our eyes. It becomes a bedeviling thing that fills our minds with foolishness.

In 1918 a boy named Howard Loomis was abandoned at Fr. Flanagan's Home for Boys by his mother. Howard had polio and wore heavy leg braces. Walking was difficult for him, especially stairs. Soon some of the older boys in the home began carrying Howard up and down stairs. When Fr. Flanagan asked about it Rueben Granger, one of the boys responded, "He ain't heavy, Father, he's 'm' brother."

The incident inspired songwriters Bobby Scott and Bob Russell to create a song first recorded in 1969 by Kelly Gordon.

*The road is long, with many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where, who knows when
But I'm strong, strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother
So on we go, his welfare is of my concern
No burden is he to bear, we'll get there
For I know he would not encumber me
He ain't heavy, he's my brother
If I'm laden at all, I'm laden with sadness
That everyone's heart isn't filled with the gladness
Of love for one another*

*It's a long, long road, from which there is no return
While we're on the way to there, why not share
And the load doesn't weigh me down at all
He ain't heavy, he's my brother
He's my brother, he ain't heavy, he's my brother...*

This is filial love, the love of another human being because they are a human being. It is what binds together families, clans, communities and nations. It's what inspires the humanitarian assistance that floods into places devastated by disaster, like New Orleans

after Hurricane Katrina, and most recently, Snohomish County in Washington. But filial love loves easily and quickly those like the lover. It loves family, but not neighbor, it loves friend, but not foe. It loves while loving is returned, or it dies. Filial love is good, but it is not the final love.

What kind of love, then, is greater than all these? What kind of love is truly without limit, condition or circumstance? What kind of love is completely free? St. Paul records in the second lesson today what many scholars believe to be an ancient hymn to Christ. It is called the Kenosis, the self-emptying of the second person of the Trinity, that in the person of Jesus Christ God might work the redemption of the world.

Greek also has a word for this kind of love, “*agape*.” The limitless, unconditioned love of God, who,

“being in the form of God thought equality with God not something to be grasped, but emptied himself...”

Why would God do that? In Jesus' midnight conversation with a very confused yet seeking Nicodemus Jesus says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life, for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved!”

Here is the driving force of the Trinity, here is the sustaining energy of the universe. Here is the final, greatest power, the deepest magic of Aslan, the truth, that of which it is no image or icon. Here is the love we see in action on the Cross. Here is the love in, by and for which we were created, and back into which God invites us through the Cross.

If the Cross means anything to you at all let it stand for that incomprehensible, all-inclusive, transforming and transfiguring love of God.