

ZE06032402 - 2006-03-24

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-15620?l=english>

Father Cantalamessa on Why Jesus Calls Us Friends

Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on This Sunday's Gospel

ROME, MARCH 24, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa on next Sunday's liturgical readings. He is the preacher to the Pontifical Household.

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Fourth Sunday of Lent (B)

(2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21)

God So Loved the World!

In this Sunday's Gospel we find one of the most beautiful and consoling phrases of the Bible: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

To speak to us of love, God has made use of the experiences of love that man has in the natural realm. Dante says that in God exists, as though bound in only one volume, "what in the world is unbound." All human loves -- conjugal, paternal, maternal, friendly -- are pages of a notebook, or flames of a fire, which have in God their source and fullness.

Above all, in the Bible, God speaks to us of his love through the image of paternal love. Paternal love is made of encouragement, of impulse. A father wants his child to grow, pushing him to give the best of himself. This is why it is rare to hear a father praise his son unconditionally in his presence. He fears he will think he is perfect and make no further efforts.

A feature of paternal love is also correction. But a true father is also he who gives freedom and security to his son, which makes him feel protected in life. Herein is the reason why God presents himself to man throughout revelation as his "rock and bastion," a "fortress always close in anxieties."

At other times God speaks to us with the image of maternal love. He says: "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15). A mother's love is made of acceptance, compassion, tenderness; it is a "profound" love.

Mothers are always accomplices of their children and must often defend them and intercede for them before their father. One always speaks of God's power and force; but the Bible also speaks to us of a weakness of God, of an impotence of his. It is "maternal" weakness.

Man knows by experience another type of love, spousal love, of which it is said that it is as "stern as death"

and whose flames "are a blazing fire" (Song of Songs 8:6). God has also taken recourse to this kind of love to convince us of his intense love for us. All the terms typical of the love between man and woman, including the term "seduction," are used in the Bible to describe God's love for man.

Jesus fulfilled all these forms of love -- paternal, maternal, spousal (how many times he compares himself to a bridegroom!); but he added another: the love of friendship. He said to his disciples: "No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

What is friendship? Friendship can be a stronger bond than kinship itself. Kinship consists in having the same blood; friendship in having the same tastes, ideals and interests. It is born of trust, that is, of the fact that I confide to another my most intimate and personal thoughts and experiences.

Now: Jesus says that he calls us friends, because everything he knew of his heavenly Father he has made known to us, he has confided to us.

He has made us sharers of the family secrets of the Trinity! For example, the fact that God prefers the little ones and the poor, that he loves us as a father, that he has a place prepared for us. Jesus gives to the word "friends" its fullest meaning.

What must we do after recalling this love? Something very simple: to believe in God's love, to accept it, to repeat overwhelmed with St. John: "we know and believe the love God has for us!"

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