

Hence will arise the most perfect contentment, peace and blessedness. That Beatific love begins with God, and extends to the Sacred Humanity of Our Blessed Lord, then to the Mother of Jesus, to His Angels, Saints and all those who are loved by God. The kingdom of God on earth, as being the forerunner of heaven, must also be a kingdom of love embracing all from first to last. Strive to make it so.

True happiness is allowing God to manifest Himself through us. In one's self, there are limitations of love's expression. In other words, we cannot love as we ought. We cannot truly experience love until we experience the love of God flowing through us. With surrender, comes the freedom to love as God's instrument. By allowing God to use us to accomplish His will we experience His love in a most intimate manner. Although God's love is without limits, He needs each one of us to express it. Intimacy with God is being His instrument in the manifestation of His love.

While the love command of the new covenant is not new in calling for love of others, it is new inasmuch as it is a commandment to love as Jesus himself does: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15.12; cf. 13.34). So, it is specifically Christian. In Jesus' love, the Father's primordial and originating love is revealed: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14.9; cf. 1 Jn 4.7-21). Christian love, then, involves a sharing in divine love, the communion between the Son and the Father in the Spirit: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (Jn 15.9), and: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are" (1 Jn 3.1).

Communion in Jesus is the source of Christian love. Though unable by themselves to love as Jesus does, Christians are joined with other disciples in a communion of love, whose principle is Jesus' divine love for those who believe in him (Jn 15.9). They share in divine love because Jesus wins for them the "power to become children of God" (Jn 1.12); and, reborn as God's children, they can manifest divine love in their relations with one another: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 Jn 4.7-8). Thus, loving one another as Jesus loves perfects his disciples' share in divine love: "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 Jn 4.12).

Christians' love for others also must be like Jesus' human love. By his own example, Jesus shows the practical significance of his new commandment of love: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15.12-13). Therefore, Christians must imitate Jesus' love in giving himself "to the end" (Jn 13.1). Thankful for what he has done, his followers must treat others in the same way: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 Jn 3.16).

St. Paul also teaches that Christians fulfill the new "law of Christ" by bearing one another's burdens (Gal 6.2). The baptized become one in Christ, and all unenviable distinctions among them are eliminated (Rom 12.3-8, 1 Cor 12.12-27, Gal 3.25-28). It is not sufficient to believe in Jesus; his disciples also must be ready to suffer, following his example (Phil 1.29-30). Instead of being self-indulgent and concerned about status, Christians are to serve one another (Mt 20.25-28, Mk 10.42-45, Lk 22.25-27, Jn 13.12-16); only such love fulfills the law and builds up the communion in Jesus, which will last forever (Rom 12.9-13, 1 Cor 13, Gal 5.13-14, Phil 2.2-8).

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Groundhog Day

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One of my favorite movies is Groundhog Day, starring Bill Murray and Andie McDowell. The story is an example of an exceptional work of moral fiction. Groundhog Day, which shows us a character who has to be exiled from normal life so he can discover that he is in exile from himself. In the movie, actor Bill Murray plays Phil, an arrogant, Scrooge-like weather forecaster who spends the night in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, where he is to do a broadcast the next day about the annual ritual of the coming out of the groundhog. He wakes up the next morning, does his story and is annoyed to discover that he is trapped in Punxsutawney for a second night because of a snowstorm that comes in after the groundhog ceremony.

When he wakes up in his Bed and Breakfast room the next morning, lo and behold, it is the morning of the day before all over again. Everything that happened to him the previous day -- the man trying to start a conversation at the top of the stairs; the old high school acquaintance recognizing him on the street, the ritual of Groundhog Day -- it all happens again.

And, once again, due to inclement weather, he is forced to spend the night. When he wakes up the next morning, it is the same day as yesterday and the day before, with the same oncoming snowstorm keeping him stuck in town and the same events repeating themselves like a broken record.

And so it goes, day after day, as this misanthrope of a human being finds himself trapped in Punxsutawney on groundhog day in what science fiction would refer to as a time loop. If he does nothing different, events will repeat themselves as they were on the original day. But if he changes his behavior, people will respond to his new actions, opening up all kinds of possibilities for playing with the unfolding of events. Either way, with each "new" day, he alone remembers what happened in previous editions of the same day.

At first Murray's character responds with bewilderment. Then he despairs and begins to treat life as a game: he risks his life and gorges on food, expressing both his sense of hopelessness and his growing recognition that, no matter what he does, time will reset itself and he will wake up as if nothing had happened.

In one scene, which turns out to be central to the movie's theme, he expresses his despair to two working class drinking buddies in a local bar.

One of his two inebriated companions then points to a beer glass and sums up the way he is responding to his situation: "You know, some guys would look at this glass and they would say, you know, 'that glass is half empty'. Other guys'd say 'that glass is half full'. I peg you as a 'the glass is half empty' kind of guy. Am I right?"

But as the days pass endlessly into the same day, this half-empty character finally finds a purpose in life: learning everything he can about his female producer, Rita, played by Andie MacDowell, so he can pretend to be her ideal man and seduce her. When that fails, and his efforts net him slap after slap, day after day, his despair deepens and he begins to spend his days killing himself. He kidnaps the groundhog and drives over a ledge into a quarry; he takes a plugged-in toaster into the bath; and he jumps off a building, always waking up whole in the morning.

In desperation, he reveals his plight to the female producer and she stays with him (without sex), in his room, through the night. Once again, he wakes up alone in the same day.

But, enriched by this experience of intimacy, and by the fact that someone actually liked him for who he is, he finally figures out a constructive response -- he begins to live his life in the day allotted to him, or, rather, he begins to live the life he never lived before. Instead of allowing circumstances to impose themselves on him, he takes control of circumstances, aided by the fact that he has all the time in the world and the safety of knowing what will happen next.

He begins to take piano lessons from a music teacher who is continuously surprised at how proficient he is, since she always believes it is his first lesson. He learns how to be an ice sculptor, which is the perfect art form for him since everything he does will have melted away when he wakes up anyway. And he becomes more generous.

Then, an encounter with death -- an old vagrant dies in his day -- has a deep effect on him. At first, he can't accept the man's death and, in at least one subsequent edition of the day, he tries to be good to the old man, taking him out to eat (for a last meal) and trying, unsuccessfully, to keep him alive.

When he stops trying to force death to relent, his final defenses fall away and his compassion for the old

man transfers to the living. He begins to use his knowledge of how the day will unfold to help people. Knowing that a child will always fall from a tree at a certain time, he makes it a point to be there and catch the child every time. Knowing that a man will choke on his meal, he is always at a nearby table in the restaurant to save him.

Slowly, he goes through a transformation. Having suffered himself, he is able to empathize with other people's suffering. Having been isolated from society, he becomes a local hero in Punxsutawney.

Now, he sees the glass as half full, and the day as a form of freedom. As he expresses it in a corny TV speech about the weather that he gives for the camera, at the umpteenth ceremony he has covered of the coming out of the groundhog:

"When Chekhov saw the long winter, he saw a winter bleak and dark and bereft of hope. Yet we know that winter is just another step in the cycle of life. But standing here among the people of Punxsutawney and basking in the of warmth of their hearths and hearts, I couldn't imagine a better fate than a long and lustrous winter."

In other words, having accepted the conditions of life and learned the pleasures afforded by human companionship, he is no longer like all those people who fear life's travails, and try to use the weather forecast, by human or groundhog, to control events. He accepts "winter" as an opportunity. Finally, the female producer falls in love with the good person he has become and she again spends the night (although he falls asleep so, again, there is no sex.) They wake up in the morning. She is still there and it is the next day.

What is so powerful about Groundhog Day is the way it lets us experience what it would be like to make a breakthrough like this in our own lives. The movie shows us a character who is like the worst in ourselves. He is arrogant and sarcastic, absorbed in his own discomforts, without hope, and cut off from other people. Like us, he finds himself in an inexplicable situation, seemingly a plaything of fate. But, unlike us, he gets the luxury of being stuck in the same day until he gets it right. Whereas most of us go semi-automatically through most of our (very similar) days, he is forced to stop and treat each day like a world onto itself, and decide how to use it. In the end, he undergoes a breakthrough to a more authentic self in which intimacy, creativity and compassion come naturally - a

self that was trapped inside him and that could only be freed by trapping him. Like many of the heroes of fiction, he can only escape his exile from himself by being exiled in a situation not of his choosing.

In telling this story, the movie hits on a message that expresses an essential truth. When we get beyond ourselves, we can become authentic and compassionate. Murray's character begins to understand that it is only when we cease to be consumed with ourselves and seek to benefit and love others, that we find true self-fulfillment and joy.

Love is the perfection which God manifests above all others in his dealings with mankind. Love is the highest and last form of service which we can offer to God. Love includes everything else; "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). It destroys all the obstacles and barriers to full and complete union with God. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much" (Lk 7:47). It is declared by the Apostle Paul to be the greatest and most lasting of the three theological virtues. Love holds the highest place as a natural emotion. It is the most essential expression of vitality, and most necessary as an element of life. St. Paul speaks of the absence of affection as a mark of unnatural degradation (Rom. 1:31). Each of us craves love and receives it gladly, even if it only be the affection of a pet. Love, as a virtue, is most ennobling, and is the source of many great virtues, generosity, patriotism, self-sacrifice. Love is a virtue of singular beauty in every one of its forms, and it helps to build up the most intense earthly joy.

The true beginning of love is self-surrender to God. In return, we receive, "The peace of God, which passes all understanding" (Phil 4.7). We are admitted to the presence of God in a new, unique way, and become more conscious of the infinite love He has for us. We will be drawn to Him with the cravings of an all-absorbing affection. We will realize that He is indeed our life, the necessity of our existence, for which every fiber of our being hungers and craves. We will seek Him with greater intensity than we have ever shown in struggling for food, water, shelter, liberty, wealth, or even life itself.

We must give ourselves up and return to Him with absolute abandonment. This will bring about a further resemblance to God in the soul. There will be a conformity of the human will to the divine, and the molding of our sentiments and desires to those of God.