

**FALLING IN LOVE AND STAYING IN LOVE:  
THE GIFT AND LABOR OF PRAYER  
IN THE PRIESTHOOD**

In Pedro Arrupe's, SJ, greatly admired meditation we read this: <<Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything>>.<sup>1</sup> The term "fall in love" has always made some think that love is an "accident", a reality that befalls a person, something one suffers like a wounding.<sup>2</sup> In some ways this understanding of falling in love is true, at least within the initial phenomenon of *beholding the beauty* of the beloved. Once the "energy" of the phenomenon withers, however, all humans are left with a choice: how do I *choose to love* from within the stirred affections of falling in love that now reside in my heart as a memory? These stirred affections still have a vital role in my self-gift to the beloved, affections that guide this love as the chosen meaning of my life.

In this essay I meditate upon the theological meaning of falling in love and staying in love, first as a human phenomenon and then as one ordered toward God. In doing so I hope to sketch out a vital spiritual truth: to fall in love with God is *the vital point of energy*<sup>3</sup> for every choice that follows and is the *sustaining truth* that endures throughout one's relationship with God.

**Falling in Love**

Within "falling" in love, is there a role for free will? Yes. Once a person experiences the affective pull toward the beauty of the other, he or she then chooses *to receive the beheld one within his or her own returned gaze*. One chooses to affirm the gaze and let it open the affectively imbued mind which stirs the will to choose the beheld beauty. The ecstasy of love lies

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<sup>1</sup> The full quote reads, <<Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything>>: P. ARRUPÉ, SJ (d. 1991, former Superior General of the Jesuits) One can also see this threefold approach to the spiritual life in other traditions in the church as well, such as the Sulpicians. <<Christianity consists in these three points, and the whole method of prayer is contained therein: that is, to look at Jesus [to fall in love], to unite ourselves to Jesus [to stay in love], and to act in Jesus [and it will decide everything]>>: J.OLIER, "Introduction to the Christian Life and Virtues", in W. THOMPSON, *French School: Selected Writings*, ed. Berulle and the (NJ: Paulist, 1989) 229.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. VON HILDEBRAND, *The Heart* (South Bend, Ind: St Augustine Press, 2007) 21.

<sup>3</sup> I understand "energy" in the way JEAN CORBON uses it in *The Wellspring of Worship* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005 <<Energy is the life giving power of the Holy Spirit>>. And so to fall in love is to become vulnerable to the transforming power of the love between the Father and the Word. This vulnerability to the love between the Father and Son is what true falling in love is ordered toward as opposed to disordered eroticism which always has at its core the disposition to take rather than make the self a gift.

in knowing that such wounding by beauty and being wounded is reciprocal. The joy of falling in love is found in both falling in love and *being loved in return*.

The choice present within falling in love is simple: will I choose *to surrender to the mystery of this beauty* and let the one who loves me actually do so? Without the "falling" aspect of love, that aspect which carries the wounding<sup>4</sup>, one would lack the affective adhesion to beauty necessary to render the self as gift. The wounding which occurs through seeing *the other as other*, and not an extension of the self, begins the process of purifying the Eros from remaining trapped in pleasure. Yes, falling in love is primarily an affective experience, but, paradoxically, at the core of such an experience are stable *truths* which communicate *to the intellect* that *this person* is worthy of self-bestowal. The primary truth that the affect attaches itself to is the beauty of the beloved, not simply his or her physical beauty, but a beauty that flows from the beloved's character, his or her constitution.<sup>5</sup> To stay in the drama of willing the good of the beloved long after the first "accidental" wounding occurs, the one in love has to continually choose to "see" this constitutive beauty. In seeing this beauty the fullness of reality bids that the lover also suffers the beloved's limited, sinful human state. This sober seeing does not destroy the affect's attachment to beauty but actually matures the affect allowing it to cling more securely to all that is lasting about the self and the beloved.

Following the awakening of the affective life one must resist the lie that the "falling" was not real. In order to do so a person needs to regularly embrace the truth of falling in love in the memory. In light of human finitude and sin, the first falling is not to be jettisoned, the aroused attraction was not a mistake that now needs to be rejected. No, the *falling is the most trusted part of love*, in it the eyes were open to see the other, a seeing of another never known before. The beauty of the one seen facilitates the death of the ego, and the choice to serve the beautiful one assists in convincing the ego to yield center stage to the beloved. *The work of love* is to keep the lover open to seeing and serving the beloved. All of love's reality is built upon trusting that what the affectively imbued mind saw when beauty arrested it was in fact the content of what keeps one loving forever. Falling in love was not only real but actually carries the seeds for mature love.<sup>6</sup> Mature love is reached when one cultivates the primordial truth of falling in love: one has finally "seen" another *as other*, no longer are others seen as simply useful. Part of falling in love is the real and dramatic welcoming of the other *as mystery*.<sup>7</sup> One measures authentic falling in love from passing erotic emotions by this standard: one has received and is now cherishing the reciprocal respect each has for the other *as mystery*. By mystery I mean that the lovers have

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<sup>4</sup> <<For Plato, beauty in fact is a cause of suffering. The encounter with it comes as a shock which takes the individual out of his everyday existence and nurtures in him a longing for the original perfection that was conceived for him and which he has since lost. The shock of the encounter with beauty is like an arrow that pierces man, wounds him and in this way gives him wings, lifts him upwards toward the transcendent.... The longing elicited by beauty finds its healing, through the revelation of the New Testament, in the Truth which redeems... When men have a longing so great that it passes human nature...it is The Bridegroom himself who has wounded them. Into their eyes he himself has sent a ray of beauty>>. As cited in GEORGE CARDINAL PELL, "The Concept of Beauty in the writings of Joseph Ratzinger" in V. TWOMEY - J.J. RUTHERFORD, eds. *Benedict xvi and Beauty in Sacred Art and Architecture* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2011) 25-6.

<sup>5</sup> T. DUBAY, *Deep Conversion, Deep Prayer* (San Francisco, Ignatius, 2006) for some succinct and moving meditations on love and beauty, 67-75.

<sup>6</sup> J. NOREGA, "The Spark of Sentiment and the Fullness of Love" in *The Way of Love*, eds. L. MELINA - C. ANDERSON (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006) 297.

<sup>7</sup> A. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2005) 105.

*received one another as gifts from God.* This is at first nascent and the lovers are not even necessarily capable of articulating this divine component. The couple simply knows they have met another, but beyond this "other" they detect "something more". As the couple's spiritual consciousness expands and develops, it is the reception of the other as *divine* gift, the "something more", that explains how falling in love can simultaneously be a radical conversion of behavior as well. As the lovers receive one another as gifts, their behavior is transformed from seeking or taking to one of receiving in gratitude. In mature love it is gratitude that occupies the core of one's experience about the other. In mature love it is gratitude toward the beloved and toward God, the giver of all good gifts, which defines a person's relationship to the beloved.

The maturation wrought by falling in love has its origins in the death of the ego and the simultaneous reception of the other as the meaning of one's life. Where before, the self was at the center of all thought and decision making, now, the beloved occupies the space once filled by the self. To have the deepest part of "me" be "another", as Gabriel Marcel once noted, is the very definition of the fruit of love's conversion. The death of the ego is facilitated by beauty itself, but a person must be able to withstand the purification beauty intrinsically carries to the "fat relentless ego". Without the needed courage a man may quickly corrupt his encounter with beauty; trying to possess it, take it, and become related to it only out of fear of losing it. What is unknown to such fear is that beauty only remains when it is received as gift. Much love between a man and woman is corrupted by fear and its offspring possessiveness.

### **Falling in love with God**

How does what was noted regarding human love apply to one's love of God and God's love of us? In the case of human-divine love, the initiative of love' is God's. God sees us first, so to speak, and then we respond to being beheld. But we have to affirm the gaze of God as He loves us within the very truth of our fallen and redeemed nature. We have to let the truth of such love wound us, open us to being affected by such awe-filled love. God's love for us is received most securely through our vulnerability toward Christ. Christ is the face of God and He reveals that face when we are not afraid to let Him affect the fullness of our humanity. Some, out of fear (cf. *Mt 14:27*), receive his presence only with curiosity and remain guarded, in control, refusing to allow divine beauty to inexorably lead to surrender. These curious ones remain "scholars" in the faith, regularly cautioning others not to trust the affect, as if "distance" guarantees love and affection breeds bias rather than clarity.<sup>8</sup> No doubt both reason and affect are tainted by sin and weakness but it is by *deep engagement* with the Word that both are purified, not by acts of affective detachment. Deep engagement with the Word involves one's entire person; affect, intellect, will. It is an engagement that invites relationship and not one that promotes a form of

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<sup>8</sup> <<The heart has its reasons; it has its own rationality, which reaches beyond "mere" reason. On the basis of the logic of this sentence we can get to the meaning: Any perception presupposes a certain sympathy with what is perceived. *Without a certain inner closeness, a kind of love, we cannot perceive the other thing or person. In this sense the "will" always somehow precedes the perception and is its precondition; and the more so, the greater and more inclusive is the reality to be perceived.* We are able to give the assent of faith because the will - the heart - has been touched by God, "affected" by him. Through being touched in this way, the will knows that even what is still not "clear" to the reason is true>>:  
BENEDICT VI, An address on the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctorate in Theology by the Theological Faculty of Wroclaw/Breslau. (October, 2011). [Emphasis mine].

"Enlightenment" objectivity, a form that chooses to quiet the affect and still any attraction, of the will toward what is good and beautiful. Detachment favors a narrow form of knowledge that is recognizable only by modern scientists: distance, extrication, disengagement.

As Benedict XVI notes, <<Contact with the visible manifestations of God's love can awaken within us a feeling of joy born of the experience of being loved. But this encounter also engages our will and our intellect. Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the "yes" of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never "finished" and complete... The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God *becomes our joy* (cf. *Ps 73 [72]:23-28*>>.

Communion with God within the sacramental life is what guarantees that a person will be touched by divine love in the fullness of his or her personhood - intellect, will, and affect. Such communion has profound ramifications, truly raising within us a dramatic decision of the heart: will I or will I not resist Pentecost? <<You have seduced me O Lord, and I was seduced; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed>> (*Jer 20:7*). To resist the love of the Spirit within the sacramental life is to remain a "skeptic" or "scientist" within the church and to never move toward becoming a "theologian".<sup>9</sup> A theologian is one who desires to rest upon the heart of Christ and to receive all that He wishes to give from that heart.<sup>10</sup> What is in the heart of Christ? <<Only by participating in what is most personal to [Christ], his communication with the Father, can one see what this most personal reality is; only thus can one penetrate to his identity.... The Church arises out of participation in the prayer of Jesus (cf. *Lk 9: 18-20; Mt 16: 13-20*)>>.<sup>11</sup>

To love Christ, to become engaged in his Love in the fullness of one's person, and not simply engaged by emotion or intellect, is to participate in what is most personal to Him, *His communication with the Father*.<sup>12</sup> When we fall in love with God, then, we allow Christ to pray

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<sup>9</sup> In saying "theologian", I do not mean here a professional teacher but a Christian who knows that all knowledge about God is *contained within and given from* the heart of Christ. It is to this heart that one needs to adhere. See J. CORBON, *The Wellspring of Worship* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) 167. Likewise, in saying "philosopher" I do not mean a professor but a person who gains all knowledge about God from only what the senses and reason can ascertain.

<sup>10</sup> EVAGRIUS, *Ad Monachos*, Jeremy Driscoll, ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003) 320.

<sup>11</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Behold the Pierced One* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 19.

<sup>12</sup> Although I will not explore it in this essay I must note the suffering one experiences in the "felt absence" of God. Saints have attested to knowing spare affectivity in their prayer and living in love by faith alone. To have low affect in prayer during any one period in life is not a sign that one has fallen out of love with God or that God has pulled away from us. When Christ hung upon the cross He was in deep intimate union with the Father and stayed in communication with Him even in the midst of aridity, pain and desire. I would argue that *His commitment to communing with the Father* even upon the cross was in a very real way a consolation with diminished affectivity. This paradoxical consolation resides in Christ's desire to be obedient, to be a listening Son. In this commitment to listen to the Father even upon the cross, Christ secures and grows in loving intimacy with Him. To desire, and then direct, one's will to adhere to the Heart of God is the way to stay in love even in the midst of aridity and desolation. See, Joseph Langford, *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire* (Ind: OSV 2008) 247. Also, Mother Teresa knew this absence of

in us. To have Christ pray in us is the logical outcome of allowing him to behold us in love. As we respond to this beholding we let what He has affected or wounded, namely, our mind, heart and will, become entry ways through which He passes in order to dwell within us. Christ bears in himself such beauty that it opens our deepest human elements, softens them to receive what previously we were hardened to or unconscious of: God wants to enter and possess and abide within the core of our humanity. When we fall in love with the Crucified we receive what all lovers receive: the deepest reality of the beloved, the heart. The heart of Christ, astoundingly, is also shared with those who would rest against it. This heart is communication with the Father, and this communication is the Holy Spirit, and so in allowing Christ to see us, to behold us, to love us, we receive the Holy Trinity.

If we allow Christ to enter, we welcome his fidelity to who He is, the Father's Only Begotten Son, and thus our hearts become the arena within which He shares this fidelity with us, as beloved adopted sons. This sacred exchange or prayer deeply etches our interiority; it becomes the point of contact between our identity and His transforming Spirit. It is the Spirit who draws us into eternal life. It is the Spirit who draws us more deeply into the mystery of Christ's own fidelity to the Father. Therefore, we see Christ beholding us most profoundly from the Cross, the bed of sacrifice and fidelity for the Bridegroom. Upon the cross, the Trinity's love is revealed: "See how I love...till the end". If we miss the weight of love upon the cross, we miss our only opportunity to fall in love with God, for *no other reality contains the true intentions of God toward us other than the cross*.

### **Staying in Love with God**

God attracts the heart and, by the heart, the mind and will. In order to stay in love with God, one must live in "attraction" to Him. A person cannot simply choose to love; he or she must choose to love God from within the lived memory of falling in love with God. By memory here I do not mean a past experience that one *recalls*, but an ever occurring grace that *one receives in the present as a result of having endured an historical event that now etches the soul*. In other words, one has a date and time of falling in love with God. As a result of this falling in love, there is a grace one continually receives; it is the offer of love that one consented to as lie "gazed" upon the cross of Christ. One gives this grace real assent; it is not simply a universal notion that applies to all persons, such as "God loves us". No, God loves me and <<shakes me to the roots of my being, raising my personal existence to an intense pitch>>. Living within such an initial attraction and subsequent consent moves an individual; it does not simply inform him. To stay in love with God, one must stay within the effects, ever given, of being one who said "yes" to the divine love that transpires between the human heart and the cross.

As Marko Rupnik, SJ noted about love and memory: <<After having experienced...a real encounter with God, I surrender to the Lord, seeking to make this foundational event a lasting

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affect was itself a kind of intimacy with God. In a sense she was saying, "I do not want to feel His love because Love itself wants me not to feel His Love". In her own words, "I just have the joy of having nothing, not even the reality of the Presence of God.... With my whole heart I want it to be just like this - because He wants it". I could hardly think of a more affectively full, spousally ordered and transcendently erotic statement than that. Darkness contains affect, it can never be vanquished in its relation to love. See B. KOLODIJCHUK, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* (NY: Doubleday, 2007) 227-228.

memory. It is a memory of love that permeates all my faculties, which are rooted in and grafted on love: my reason, sentiment, will, intuition... and even my sensory perception. This memory, this safeguarded taste, becomes the authentic starting point of all discernment>>.<sup>13</sup>

To stay in love with God is to know that one has fastened the soul to the ultimate good, thus this "staying" in love is a sober adhesion and not untethered passion. It is a love secured by one's participation in the Love offered from the cross, and sacramentally from the altar. We stay vulnerable to the paschal mystery of Christ so that He can accomplish in us His eternal desire to share Himself with His Creation. Staying vulnerable to the love bestowed from the cross and received by the human heart is most effectively accomplished by a commitment to share all thoughts, feelings and desires with the Crucified. A commitment to never turn away from the cross, never turn from the ever pouring love gushing from the Sacred Heart. Here is true spiritual vulnerability: <<I will turn toward you oh loving God even as this turning is filled with pain, shame and perhaps even nostalgia for my sins, sins I love so well... have loved more than You<<. The way to stay in 'love is a way of weakness before the truth of love; it is a way that takes one through humility and from humility to deeper receptivity. This way of "staying" does not lead down errant paths of uncontrolled passion but rather establishes one in sober receptivity and gratitude, the true marks that one has been deeply affected by Divine beauty. In this way, all the saved are caught up in a doxology of love, wherein <<the Father does not keep His joy to Himself>>.<sup>14</sup>

Concretely, then, one stays in love when one offers the truth about themselves in a sacred exchange with the truth of Christ's self-donation. In this holy exchange we secure love for God by unflinchingly sharing the deepest aspects of our thoughts, feelings and desires with Him, not as a pious exercise but as a profound dying to all that is kept secret and hidden in our souls. This sharing is not a scouring of the psyche for content, but an invitation to Him to abide in us and elevate from our depths all that we need to offer Him so that we might adhere to His kenotic love - pouring, ever pouring forth from His Sacred Heart.

### **Loving God Will Decide Everything**

Staying in love with God leads to a great fruit of love: habitually making decisions out of communion with God. To be in communion with God is to dwell in a state of *diminished interference between a man's heart and the Trinity*. This state of *diminished interference promotes the capacity to make decisions out of loving communion*. To dwell in this state is to be gifted with rest (cf. *Mt 11:35*), with an *inhabited silence* wherein a man and the Trinity converse on all manner of things in a fashion that is living, immediate, and with consequence to behavior. An inhabited silence is one that reverences both the deep quiet of the heart even as within that heart there lives the divine presence, always actively calling out through the conscience, the heart, to be gratefully received.

By attending to this communion, a person reduces the appearance of wandering and stray thoughts in his prayer and increases his interior beholding of truth. He rests with God so that he can be still from within and not tossed to and fro by emotion. Instead of such interior turmoil, *his affect is nourished by the truth* of revelation as this truth is <<breathed forth>> (*Lk 23:46*) from within the Paschal Mystery.

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<sup>13</sup> M. RUPNIK, *SJ, Discernment: Acquiring the Heart of God* (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006 ) 113.

<sup>14</sup> J. CORBON 66.

To receive truth stabilizes a person's interiority and gifts him with rest, a rest that flows from an intimate relationship with the Trinity<sup>15</sup> from which arises his habits of decision making. As a stable character trait, such interior silence develops gradually. To *stay in communion with the charity of Christ* demands the way of interior silence. It is a way that wills receptivity to truth as such truth radiates the beauty of Christ. In this case, silence is a thoroughfare of communion with the beauty of truth. One who makes decisions from a state of "holy communion" ought to emulate Jesus' own interiority: <<Christ only speaks of that which He beholds>>.<sup>16</sup>

To behold the beauty of God in Word and sacrament, however, does not render a person speechless but *enables* him to speak the fruit of his own silent communion with God.<sup>17</sup> It is only speech and action that flows from this silent communion, this gaze upon divine beauty, that carries the potency of true divine-human exchange. For lovers of God it is to abide in this exchange that becomes the optimal desire of life. <<One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: / that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, / to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple>> (*Psalms* 27:4). The Priest and Loving God.

Since the priest is a spiritual leader,<sup>18</sup> and he holds such leadership as his primary field of expertise, he needs to minister from *his interior intimacy with Christ*, out of his falling and staying in love with Him. Pope Benedict suggests this very point: <<Do not become utterly absorbed in activism. There would be so much to do that one could be working on it constantly... Not becoming totally absorbed in activism means...remaining with God... One should not feel obliged to work ceaselessly; this is important for everyone...even more so for a Pope. He has to leave many things to others *so as to maintain his inner view of the whole, his interior recollection, from which the view of what is essential can proceed*>>.<sup>19</sup>

One can only make clear and faithful decisions if one learns how to listen, and listening necessitates interior silence. Interior silence depends on the security of the lived memory of falling in love with God. A silent heart is a heart that has welcomed truth and now rests quietly while the truth of ecclesial doctrine nourishes the conscience, the love-soaked mind. For the priest, this interior silence that enshrouds and protects staying in love with God may well be one of the greatest gifts he can give to the church.<sup>20</sup> External silence and the reading of scripture

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<sup>15</sup> *Ps* 131 :2: <<I have stilled my soul, hushed it like a weaned child. Like a weaned child on its mother's lap, so is my soul within me>>.

<sup>16</sup> Bl. D. MARMION, *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (St. Louis: Herder, 1925) 315.

<sup>17</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n. 294: <<In this regard, however, one must *avoid the risk of an individualistic approach*, and remember that God's word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the Truth along our path to God. While it is a word addressed to each of us personally, it is also a word which builds community, which builds the Church. Consequently, *the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church*>>. See also A. WALKER, "Love Alone: Hans Urs von Balthasar as a Master of Theological Renewal" in D. L. SCHINDLER, ed., *Love Alone is Credible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008) 33-34.

<sup>18</sup> <<The faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life>>: BENEDICT XVI, Warsaw Cathedral, May 25, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Light of the World*(San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010) 71-72.

<sup>20</sup> The contemporary master on the ways of discernment, Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV, notes this about his teacher, St. Ignatius of Loyola: <<Ignatius does not ask that we become aware of, understand, and act in regard to *all the movements of our hearts*, but rather with respect to those which may impact our adherence to the will of God, as strengthening or weakening this adherence>>:

T. GALLAGHER, *The Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad, 2005) 25.

alone will not insure interior silence, for experience tells us that deep within the human soul are a cacophony of voices: some from God, some from the self, some from past authority figures, and even some from demons. Along with external silence and other realities mentioned immediately below, one must be schooled in how to discern, how to distinguish the voices within, and once distinguished, how to relate to them so that nothing can disturb the heart resting in the Trinity.

In discernment *we follow* those affective movements that deepen our faith, hope, and love, and *we resist* those movements that undermine those virtues. Further, the priest needs to contemplate the *face* of God, the beauty of God. It is crucial that a man not simply be left in silence. He beholds 'the holy face of Christ by way of *lectio divina* and the sacramental life. In this way, he is also assisted by spiritual direction to *acknowledge* the movement of God within his heart and to *relate* all of his thoughts, feelings, and desires to the Sacred Heart. In turn the priest will *receive* divine love, which prompts him to *respond* to this love by deeper prayer, service, or moral action.<sup>21</sup>

The priest is also called to deepen his faith filled decision making by dwelling in the beauty of the Paschal Mystery. <<Beauty is the very way in which reason is freed from dullness and made ready to act>>.<sup>22</sup> If this is true of beauty in general, then imagine the quality of actions flowing from his choice to stay in the presence of the Paschal Mystery, which is beauty itself. To stay in the presence of the Paschal Mystery is to choose to personally appropriate the grace of regular worship within the Eucharistic liturgy. To stay in the presence of the Paschal Mystery is to be vulnerable to Christ communicating himself and so to bond the man to the living God.<sup>23</sup> For the priest, the entryway for grace is directly through the sacramental character that defines his vocation. The character is the weak point of creation for him, the point at which the mystery of Christ can reach him most directly and most powerfully. The priestly character is Christ's own gift to the priest rendering him permanently available to the sacrificial mystery of Calvary. The priest, then, stays in the presence of the Paschal mystery most securely when he remains faithful to his priestly identity and charisma.

To be a priest who is affected regularly by the radiation of truth and beauty, which constitutes the Eucharistic liturgy, is a prime way to have "reason made ready to act. To be taken up in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ frees reason to influence the affectively imbued will to act in faithful witness to the love that now defines the conscience. This love is a reciprocal dynamism between the Trinity and the priest, a love which has as its goal a sustained indwelling within the human heart. Such a love is beautiful and calls out to the priest to remain ever engaged with its radiation of truth, thus securing divine love as the fount of all decision making.

In silence and from within a matrix of beauty, the priest appropriates the grace of falling in love and staying in love so that all of his decisions are marked by these realities. The capacity to decide out of love is received through purification and trial. It is, of course, the core of Christian life to both *suffer this purification* and *be established in communion with the Trinity*. One's priesthood can only become more dynamic in its expression as one embraces his falling in love and staying in love with God as the constitutive element of his spiritual life.

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<sup>21</sup> J. HORN, SJ, *Heart Speaks to Heart* (Omaha, NE: IPF Publications, 2009), for more on this method of prayer.

<sup>22</sup> G. PELL, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. RATZINGER, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000) 43.

I began this meditation with this idea: to fall in love with God is *the vital point of energy* for every choice that follows and is the *sustaining truth* that endures throughout one's relationship with God. To love God is not something a person assumes as guaranteed throughout life and ministry. Such a wonderful mystery of communion that it is *must be guarded and protected* in memory and contemplation so that all one's actions will reflect the truth of having said "yes" to the searching gaze of divine love become Flesh.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I would like to extend my gratitude to Msgr. John Cihak who read earlier versions of this essay.