



Loving and Forgiving

*Love is not gazing at each other,
It is looking together in the same direction.*

(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

There are as many definitions of love as there are people on earth. One of my friends is fond of saying: *A person is much greater than the sum of his or her acts.* What a wise perspective! God loves us and looks with great compassion at the beings created in his image. God is always present as we attempt to define our existence and dreams. We have a long road ahead of us but the Lord accompanies us in all our endeavors.

In the Gospel today we read: *I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven: hence she has shown great love.* What came first? Forgiveness or love? Jesus' forgiveness or the woman's love?

Since she has shown great love, I have forgiven her sins. Forgiveness appears to have been granted at the conclusion of this encounter. But we could also reverse the perspective: *if she showed so much love, would it not be because she experienced Christ's forgiveness.* In this case, forgiveness would have occurred at the outset of a distinct expression of love. Whatever the perspective, love is always the major factor. The essential teachable moment for Christians should not include a debate whether forgiveness of sin occurred first or later, but to recognize the immensity of the Lord's merciful love.

As we celebrate this Eucharistic feast, we should not be debating our status as *serious* or *insignificant* sinners, but to remind ourselves that while we are not worthy to receive forgiveness, a single word from God is sufficient to reveal his love and purify us of our sins.

The proof that God loves us is that we are welcome today. We are beings in need of forgiveness who have been saved by God's love. When we discover love, our eyes take on a new perspective. An African proverb sums up my thoughts: *It is never dark in the place where we are loved.* (free translation) The Lord enlightens us throughout our lives and we are assured of his ever-present love and forgiveness.

Yvon Cousineau, c.s.c.

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