

“Love of Relations and Friends”  
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St. John Henry Newman  
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"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God." 1 John iv. 7.

ST. JOHN the Apostle and Evangelist is chiefly and most familiarly known to us as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He was one of the three or four who always attended our Blessed Lord, and had the privilege of the most intimate intercourse with Him; and, more favoured than Peter, James, and Andrew, he was His bosom friend, as we commonly express ourselves. At the solemn supper before Christ suffered, he took his place next Him, and leaned on His breast. As the other three communicated between the multitude and Christ, so St. John communicated between Christ and them. At that Last Supper, Peter dared not ask Jesus a question himself, but bade John put it to Him,—who it was that should betray Him. Thus St. John was the private and intimate friend of Christ. Again, it was to St. John that our Lord committed His Mother, when He was dying on the cross; it was to St. John that He revealed in vision after His departure the fortunes of His Church.

Much might be said on this remarkable circumstance. I say *remarkable*, because it might be supposed that the Son of God Most High could not have loved one man more than another; or again, if so, that He would not have had only one friend, but, as being All-holy, He would have loved all men more or less, in proportion to their holiness. Yet we find our Saviour had a private friend; and this shows us, first, how entirely He was a man, as much as any of us, in His wants and feelings; and next, that there is nothing contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, nothing inconsistent with the fulness of Christian love, in having our affections directed in an especial way towards certain objects, towards those whom the circumstances of our past life, or some peculiarities of character, have endeared to us.

There have been men before now, who have supposed Christian love was so diffusive as not to admit of concentration upon individuals; so that we ought to love all men equally. And many there are, who, without bringing forward any theory, yet consider practically that the love of many is something superior to the love of one or two; and neglect the charities of private life, while busy in the schemes of an expansive benevolence, or of effecting a general union and conciliation among Christians. Now I shall here maintain, in opposition to such notions of Christian love, and with our Saviour's pattern before me, that the best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely, is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection towards those who are immediately about us.

It has been the plan of Divine Providence to ground what is good and true in religion and morals, on the basis of our good natural feelings. What we are towards our earthly friends in the instincts and wishes of our infancy, such we are to become at length towards God and man in the extended field of our duties as accountable beings. To

41 honour our parents is the first step towards honouring God; to love our brethren  
42 according to the flesh, the first step towards considering all men our brethren. Hence  
43 our Lord says, we must become as little children, if we would be saved; we must  
44 become in His Church, as men, what we were once in the small circle of our youthful  
45 homes.—Consider how many other virtues are grafted upon natural feelings. What is  
46 Christian high-mindedness, generous self-denial, contempt of wealth, endurance of  
47 suffering, and earnest striving after perfection, but an improvement and transformation,  
48 under the influence of the Holy Spirit, of that natural character of mind which we call  
49 romantic? On the other hand, what is the instinctive hatred and abomination of sin  
50 (which confirmed Christians possess), their dissatisfaction with themselves, their  
51 general refinement, discrimination, and caution, but an improvement, under the same  
52 Spirit, of their natural sensitiveness and delicacy, fear of pain, and sense of shame?  
53 They have been chastised into self-government, by a fitting discipline, and now  
54 associate an acute sense of discomfort and annoyance with the notion of sinning. And  
55 so of the love of our fellow Christians and of the world at large, it is the love of kindred  
56 and friends in a fresh shape; which has this use, if it had no other, that it is the natural  
57 branch on which a spiritual fruit is grafted.

58 But again, the love of our private friends is the only preparatory exercise for the love of  
59 all men. The love of God is not the same thing as the love of our parents, though  
60 parallel to it; but the love of mankind in general should be in the main the same habit as  
61 the love of our friends, only exercised towards different objects. The great difficulty in  
62 our religious duties is their extent. This frightens and perplexes men,—naturally; those  
63 especially, who have neglected religion for a while, and on whom its obligations disclose  
64 themselves all at once. This, for example, is the great misery of leaving repentance till a  
65 man is in weakness or sickness; he does not know how to set about it. Now God's  
66 merciful Providence has in the natural course of things narrowed for us at first this large  
67 field of duty; He has given us a clue. We are to begin with loving our friends about us,  
68 and gradually to enlarge the circle of our affections, till it reaches all Christians, and then  
69 all men. Besides, it is obviously impossible to love all men in any strict and true sense.  
70 What is meant by loving all men, is, to feel well-disposed to all men, to be ready to  
71 assist them, and to act towards those who come in our way, as if we loved them. We  
72 cannot love those about whom we know nothing; except indeed we view them in Christ,  
73 as the objects of His Atonement, that is, rather in faith than in love. And love, besides, is  
74 a habit, and cannot be attained without actual *practice*, which on so large a scale is  
75 impossible. We see then how absurd it is, when writers (as is the manner of some who  
76 slight the Gospel) talk magnificently about loving the whole human race with a  
77 comprehensive affection, of being the friends of all mankind, and the like. Such vaunting  
78 professions, what do they come to? that such men have certain  
79 benevolent *feelings* towards the world,—feelings and nothing more;—nothing more than  
80 unstable feelings, the mere offspring of an indulged imagination, which exist only when  
81 their minds are wrought upon, and are sure to fail them in the hour of need. This is not  
82 to love men, it is but to talk about love.—The real love of man *must* depend on practice,  
83 and therefore, must begin by exercising itself on our friends around us, otherwise it will  
84 have no existence. By trying to love our relations and friends, by submitting to their  
85 wishes, though contrary to our own, by bearing with their infirmities, by overcoming their

86 occasional waywardness by kindness, by dwelling on their excellences, and trying to  
87 copy them, thus it is that we form in our hearts that root of charity, which, though small  
88 at first, may, like the mustard seed, at last even overshadow the earth. The vain talkers  
89 about philanthropy, just spoken of, usually show the emptiness of their profession, by  
90 being morose and cruel in the private relations of life, which they seem to account as  
91 subjects beneath their notice. Far different indeed, far different (unless it be a sort of  
92 irreverence to contrast such dreamers with the great Apostle, whose memory we are  
93 today celebrating), utterly the reverse of this fictitious benevolence was his elevated and  
94 enlightened sympathy for all men. We know he is celebrated for his declarations about  
95 Christian love. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God. If we love one  
96 another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. God is love, and he that  
97 dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." [1 John iv. 7, 12, 16.] Now did he  
98 begin with some vast effort at loving on a large scale? Nay, he had the unspeakable  
99 privilege of being the *friend of Christ*. Thus he was taught to love others; first his  
100 affection was concentrated, then it was expanded. Next he had the solemn and  
101 comfortable charge of tending our Lord's Mother, the Blessed Virgin, after His  
102 departure. Do we not here discern the secret sources of his especial love of the  
103 brethren? Could he, who first was favoured with his Saviour's affection, then trusted with  
104 a son's office towards His Mother, could he be other than a memorial and pattern (as far  
105 as man can be), of love, deep, contemplative, fervent, unruffled, unbounded?

106 Further, that love of friends and relations, which nature prescribes, is also of use to the  
107 Christian, in giving form and direction to his love of mankind at large, and making it  
108 intelligent and discriminating. A man, who would fain begin by a general love of all men,  
109 necessarily puts them all on a level, and, instead of being cautious, prudent, and  
110 sympathising in his benevolence, is hasty and rude; does harm, perhaps, when he  
111 means to do good, discourages the virtuous and well-meaning, and wounds the feelings  
112 of the gentle. Men of ambitious and ardent minds, for example, desirous of doing good  
113 on a large scale, are especially exposed to the temptation of sacrificing individual to  
114 general good in their plans of charity. Ill-instructed men, who have strong abstract  
115 notions about the necessity of showing generosity and candour towards opponents,  
116 often forget to take any thought of those who are associated with themselves; and  
117 commence their (so-called) liberal treatment of their enemies by an unkind desertion of  
118 their friends. This can hardly be the case, when men cultivate the private charities, as  
119 an introduction to more enlarged ones. By laying a foundation of social amiableness, we  
120 insensibly learn to observe a due harmony and order in our charity; we learn that all  
121 men are not on a level; that the interests of truth and holiness must be religiously  
122 observed; and that the Church has claims on us before the world. We can easily afford  
123 to be liberal on a large scale, when we have no affections to stand in the way. Those  
124 who have not accustomed themselves to love their neighbours whom they have seen,  
125 will have nothing to lose or gain, nothing to grieve at or rejoice in, in their larger plans of  
126 benevolence. They will take no interest in them for their own sake; rather, they will  
127 engage in them, because expedience demands, or credit is gained, or an excuse found  
128 for being busy. Hence too we discern how it is, that private virtue is the only sure  
129 foundation of public virtue; and that no national good is to be expected (though it may  
130 now and then accrue), from men who have not the fear of God before their eyes.

131 I have hitherto considered the cultivation of domestic affections as the *source* of more  
132 extended Christian love. Did time permit, I might now go on to show, besides, that they  
133 involve a real and difficult exercise of it. Nothing is more likely to engender selfish habits  
134 (which is the direct opposite and negation of charity), than *independence* in our worldly  
135 circumstances. Men who have no tie on them, who have no calls on their daily  
136 sympathy and tenderness, who have no one's comfort to consult, who can move about  
137 as they please, and indulge the love of variety and the restless humours which are so  
138 congenial to the minds of most men, are very unfavourably situated for obtaining that  
139 heavenly gift, which is described in our Liturgy, as being "the very bond of peace and of  
140 all virtues." On the other hand, I cannot fancy any state of life more favourable for the  
141 exercise of high Christian principle, and the matured and refined Christian spirit (that is,  
142 where the parties really seek to do their duty), than that of persons who differ in tastes  
143 and general character, being obliged by circumstances to live together, and mutually to  
144 accommodate to each other their respective wishes and pursuits.—And this is one  
145 among the many providential benefits (to those who will receive them) arising out of the  
146 Holy Estate of Matrimony; which not only calls out the tenderest and gentlest feelings of  
147 our nature, but, where persons do their duty, must be in various ways more or less a  
148 state of self-denial.

149 Or, again, I might go on to consider the private charities, which have been my subject,  
150 not only as the sources and as the discipline of Christian love, but further, as  
151 the *perfection of it*; which they are in some cases. The Ancients thought so much of  
152 friendship, that they made it a *virtue*. In a Christian view, it is not quite this; but it is often  
153 accidentally a special *test* of our virtue. For consider:—let us say that this man, and that,  
154 not bound by any very necessary tie, find their greatest pleasure in living together; say  
155 that this continues for years, and that they love each other's society the more, the longer  
156 they enjoy it. Now observe what is implied in this. Young people, indeed, readily love  
157 each other, for they are cheerful and innocent; more easily yield to each other, and are  
158 full of hope;—types, as Christ says, of His true converts. But this happiness does not  
159 last; their tastes change. Again, grown persons go on for years as friends; but these do  
160 not live together; and, if any accident throws them into familiarity for a while, they find it  
161 difficult to restrain their tempers and keep on terms, and discover that they are best  
162 friends at a distance. But what is it that can bind two friends together in intimate  
163 converse for a course of years, but the participation in something that is Unchangeable  
164 and essentially Good, and what is this but religion? Religious tastes alone are  
165 unalterable. The Saints of God continue in one way, while the fashions of the world  
166 change; and a faithful indestructible friendship may thus be a test of the parties, so  
167 loving each other, having the love of God seated deep in their hearts. Not an infallible  
168 test certainly; for they may have dispositions remarkably the same, or some engrossing  
169 object of this world, literary or other; they may be removed from the temptation to  
170 change, or they may have a natural sobriety of temper, which remains contented  
171 wherever it finds itself. However, under certain circumstances, it is a lively token of the  
172 {60} presence of divine grace in them; and it is always a sort of symbol of it, for there is  
173 at first sight something of the nature of virtue in the very notion of constancy, dislike of  
174 change being not only the characteristic of a virtuous mind, but in some sense a virtue  
175 itself.

176 And now I have suggested to you a subject of thought for today's Festival,—and surely  
177 a very practical subject, when we consider how large a portion of our duties lies at  
178 home. Should God call upon us to preach to the world, surely we must obey His call; but  
179 at present, let us do what lies before us. Little children, let us love one another. Let us  
180 be meek and gentle; let us think before we speak; let us try to improve our talents in  
181 private life; let us do good, not hoping for a return, and avoiding all display before men.  
182 Well may I so exhort you at this season, when we have so lately partaken together the  
183 Blessed Sacrament which binds us to mutual love, and gives us strength to practise it.  
184 Let us not forget the promise we then made, or the grace we then received. We are not  
185 our own; we are bought with the blood of Christ; we are consecrated to be temples of  
186 the Holy Spirit, an unutterable privilege, which is weighty enough to sink us with shame  
187 at our unworthiness, did it not the while strengthen us by the aid itself imparts, to bear  
188 its extreme costliness. May we live worthy of our calling, and realize in our own persons  
189 the Church's prayers and professions for us!

190 The Feast of St. John the Evangelist.