

*All you need is love.* And it was not The Beatles but St Augustine who first sang that song. He actually said, *Love God and do what you like* – which is not a licence for irresponsibility, because Augustine knew that if we truly love God, then what we like and what we do will be what God wants us to do. We must distinguish different sorts of love: for the love of apple crumble is not the same thing as love for one's wife. The ancients identified four forms of love:

First there is *στοργή* which may be translated as *affection*. This affection is a fondness for things or people with which we have become familiar: family, friends, people who find themselves thrown together by chance and circumstances. And you can feel affection for an old dog or an even older pair of corduroy trousers. Affection is our natural, reasonable expectation. We expect to be treated politely, kindly, with good manners. And in turn we are expected to treat others the same way. Affectionate community is the basis of all our relationships in society. And so when we see it break down, on the individual level when someone is rude or offensive towards us, we are shocked and hurt. When affection, kindness, good manners breaks down more generally, our life in community becomes disordered and diseased. It only takes a few louts to torment a neighbouring family to death – as we have seen.

At a less violent level, we see the affectionate community becoming disordered when inconsiderate types play their noise machines at an intolerable pitch. Or, as actors and orchestral musicians complained last week, theatre and concert goers were disturbing performances by using their portable phones. Affection often exists between people who disagree with one another. I have a friend in Leeds called Jack and we are poles apart politically and we've enjoyed many ferocious rows. Yet affectionate regard has not been broken and we are always glad to see each other. Or there is often affection between people who are in active competition – though I think I see more of this among cricketers than footballers. We can have affection even for those we disapprove. We might say affectionately of such a person, *the old so-and-so!*

Another sort of love is *φιλία* - the Greek word for *friendship*. This is sometimes called *brotherly love* and there is a city in the United States named after it: Philadelphia. Friendship is usually between persons sharing the same likes and habits. When we represent lovers, we draw them as looking into each other's eyes. But with friends we picture them side by side and looking in the same direction. Walking in the same direction. Think of two anglers setting off to find their accustomed place on the riverbank. Lovers speak to each other of their love and so fortify and sustain it. Friends do not speak much of their friendship, if at all. Instead they speak of their common interest: angling, sewing, dominoes, tennis, literature or ten pin bowling.

We speak of *love at first sight* – and it is something which happens often. But not *friendship at first sight*. Friendship is generally something achieved only with time and effort. If we want to keep our friends, we must work at our friendships and, as Samuel Johnson told us, *keep them in good repair*. Loyalty is the hallmark. We do not disown our friend if he does something to upset us. We do not give him up if he gets into trouble. We visit our friend when he is in jail. But we must accept our friend's honest criticism

and even his disapproval when he says we are in the wrong. And it is our duty of friendship to speak honestly to him when we think he is going wrong. The quickest destroyer of friendship is gossip. Or taking the huff. Or, as some do, looking for every opportunity to take offence. Jesus said to his disciples, *Behold, I have called you my friends*. He was frequently brutally honest with them. But loyal even unto the Cross: *Greater love hath no man than this: that he lay down his life for his friends*.

So we come to Eros – though it is pronounced ερως. Eros is not sexual desire, though it accompanies sexual desire. Sexual passion is Aphrodite or Venus. Eros is *being in love*. It is not indiscriminate sexual desire, but love and desire for a particular person. It is exquisite and also rather amusing and embarrassing. By contrast, Aphrodite, sex, does not want the other person as a person for her own sake but only as the means to sexual satisfaction. This is nothing to do with Eros. It is not erotic. It is promiscuous lust. And promiscuity dehumanises us because it finds us treating other people – who are also made in the image of God – as if they were mere objects and commodities, means to our selfish ends.

Eros is the most dangerous of all the forms of love. Individuals and nations have been broken by it. Eros is the subject of at least half the great tragedies ever written. As C.S. Lewis says, *Erotic love becomes a demon the moment we regard it as a god*. Of course, erotic love containing sexual desire is necessary for the propagation of the human race – though Augustine wondered whether before the Fall of Man we might have been able to beget children without all those disquieting passions. At this point, the great Augustine seems almost comically to come close to saying that sex is permissible so long as you don't enjoy it. Erotic love is meant to be enjoyed, but it is a strange combination of things: for it involves moments of serious romance among comical moments of play.

The highest form of love is charity, the love which God has for us and which he says that we should have for him and for one another. The old word for this is αγαπη. It is said that God is omnipotent, he can do as he likes. But there is one thing he cannot do: he cannot stop loving us. It is his nature to love us. And he will go on loving us even though we kill him. This is the meaning of the universe. The first thing to understand is that God does really pour out himself eternally in his love for us. He can't help it. The next thing is for us to accept this love, to receive it. Pride is the worst sin precisely because it rejects God's charity. Then we are to emulate God by letting this love with which he loves us overflow from ourselves towards others. This means loving others not for anything we might stand to gain from them, but for their own sakes. This means that I have to understand emotionally and existentially that other people are as real as I am – that their needs and desires, their lives themselves, are not theatrical props for the drama of my life.

Now we approach the heart of the mystery. When we love our neighbour, the love with which we love him is not simply the gift of God. The love with which we love our neighbour *is* God. For love is indivisible. And God is one. So God is this love. It is not the case that love is, as it were, one of God's attributes or qualities. God is love *and nothing else*.

Of course, our acts of love involve other people. But St Augustine tells us that we can begin to understand what love is even when we are alone. In order to begin to understand love, he says, *You do*

*not need to go out of yourself.* For the soul knows itself and loves itself and the love with which the soul loves itself is God. In this way, each one of us is a model and image of the Blessed Trinity where the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father and the love with which they love each other is the Holy Ghost. That is the pattern on which we are made: the Holy Trinity.

*At this point high imagination fails;  
But already my desire and my will  
Were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed,  
By the love which moves the sun and the other stars.*