
BIG SIGNS OF LOVE IN OUR LIVES (1)



A sign is something we can see, hear, or touch. It reminds us of something we cannot see. For example, there are many signs of spring: the birds return, the ice covering our rivers melts, maple trees give us their sap for maple syrup, small animals come out of their burrows, buds and flowers come out on trees, and leaves appear. People, words, gestures and objects can all be signs, some of which express the life in us, and others, the friendship that is: "I love you!" Today I would like to show you four big signs that speak of God's love for us. "The love of God has shown itself in Jesus Christ!"

"I Love You"

The father, mother, and grandparents are as many "I love yous" to the child. When a child sees these people, it recognises in them a sign of kindness and affection. This makes parents and grandparents feel good: "You are my grandma of love, my granddaddy of love! You are my mom of love, my dad of love!" Brothers and sisters are also signs of this love and kindness. And so are the teacher and the baby sitter! We have half a feeling that we would like this way of seeing things continue a long time. And who knows? If Big Brother or Grandpa feels such affection, won't his heart fill with even more kindness and affection? Friends, too, are signs of friendship, not of the short-term kind, but long-lasting friendship; nothing can break the bond of friendship, or tarnish its beauty. Love and friendship are lasting values: when we have loved once, we love always!

THE BEST OF SIGNS

Jesus gave his Church the seven greatest signs of his love for us all. We call these signs the sacraments. They are outward, visible signs used by Jesus, to give us divine life. Baptism makes us members of God's people; in confirmation we are given the Spirit of Jesus; in the Eucharist we receive the body and blood of Jesus. Reconciliation is Jesus forgiving us, marriage consecrates the love of each spouse to make it a sign of Jesus' love for humankind. The anointing of the sick is a sign of the presence of Jesus among the sick and ailing, and ordination gives the Church servants of the Gospel to proclaim the Word of God, celebrate the sacraments, and maintain unity. We will never really fathom these signs which tell us so much more than we can imagine. Yes, there really are "I love yous" that are signs of the presence of Jesus in our lives. Among these "I love yous," there are four of them that I would like to tell you about, and they are baptism, reconciliation, the holy Eucharist, and confirmation.

BAPTISM

The first "I love you" is baptism. The words and actions of the priest are signs of Jesus' friendship. All those who take part in the baptism are also a beautiful sign of friendship. Through baptism, Jesus invites us to live like him. It is good to recall the different stages of baptism, it seems that the Church likes to pass on to us its most precious inheritance, its sense of welcome, the Great Commandment, the Word of God, the Church's prayer, and its faith and hope. Among the beautiful [French] baptismal songs there is one called "White Robe," which sings of extraordinary gestures of friendship: "On that new day I dressed in the white robe of Christ; I answered your call, so that the banquet hall might be filled. The loving hand you placed on my shoulder told me I was your friend. I am a beggar, but the child of a king; you have made me your son. The brightness of Easter on my face, I am the light of Christ; wedding songs will join my lighted lamp, in the night. We eat the bread of God at the wedding table in paradise, and we shall be as gods, with features in His image." And the beautiful song, "Father I am your child," reminds us of the wonders of baptism: "I have a thousand proofs of your love. I want to praise you in song, the song of joy of my baptism."

RECONCILIATION

I want to make a few comments on the great sacrament of reconciliation: it shows us how Jesus came not for the healthy but for those who needed him. Jesus called some of his listeners to learn the meaning of mercy... He came for sinners: he felt really at ease with them, and he wanted them to be the first to know that they were the Father's beloved children. Jesus told different stories to explain the Father's kindness – stories like that of the good shepherd who goes after his lost sheep. People were scandalised when they heard Jesus forgiving sins: to these people, God alone could forgive sins. However, to show them that he, too, had this divine power, he cured the handicapped man who was brought to him, and freed him from both his sin and his infirmity. Later, Jesus gave the same power to his apostles, to forgive sins in his name. We read about how Jesus keeps on forgiving the sins of his listeners, especially those of the adulterous woman. "Your sins are forgiven. Go, and do not sin anymore!" Jesus will end up giving his life and dying on the cross for the forgiveness of the sins of humankind: "Take and drink, all of you, this is my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus really looks on us with love; forgiveness is a special sign of this friendship of Jesus, and it emboldens me to remain his friends, and the friend of everybody. In the person of the priest, Jesus forgives me, and since he has done so, we too must do the same, we must love and forgive one another.

OPEN MY EYES

Faced with the wonders of baptism and forgiveness, it behoves to be totally open to everything which the Lord, our friend, has prepared for us from all eternity. "Open my eyes, Lord, to the wonder of your love. I am the blind man along the road; heal me, that I may see you. Open my hands, Lord, these grasping, greedy hands: the poor man is dying at my doorstep; teach me to share. Keep me walking, Lord, however difficult the road; I want to follow you to Calvary: take me by the hand. Help me hear, O Lord, my brothers and sisters who cry to me; let my heart not be deaf to their suffering and their prayer. Keep my faith, O Lord: so many tongues proclaim your death; when evening comes with its heavy burden, O Lord, abide with me."

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (543) (02 June 2004)