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The Proper Order: God Loves, and We Respond

By the Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

I said in a recent funeral homily that I wonder if we in the Church often miss asking the most important question at the end of someone's life. That question is, "Did this person seem to grasp God's audacious, outlandish, extravagant, over-the-top, unmerited love for them, and how did they try to love God in return and reflect that love to others?"

Love is the essence, in any way that we might try to approach that question. A key verse of Scripture comes to mind: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God's love for us tells us that we are meant to be here, that our lives are not random or accidental. God's love is a given, not something that we have to spend our lives trying to earn, as if we could, anyway. God's love is a secure foundation on which to build our identity and purpose. It is a dependable touchstone from which we can greet and respond to everyone we meet. It is

the last, best, and final hope as we age, as we are ill, and even as we die and embrace new life after death.

God's love is a powerful driver for all of our Outreach efforts, as we seek to help beloved children of God in physical need. It propels our Evangelism, as we seek to tell a hurting world and folks all around us that they are loved by the God of the Universe.

God's love animates our Fellowship, as we are eager to see what new insights and experiences we can share with God's beloved people in our circle. Also, how better, as Christians, can we battle the age-old sin of racism, and every other evil that seeks to divide and discriminate among God's people, but by and through proclaiming God's love?

Lent is a traditional time in which we take inventory in our lives, especially our spiritual lives. Maybe asking this fundamental question of ourselves would be helpful right now: **how have we experienced God's love for us, and how are we sharing it with others?** Could it really all boil down to that? Jesus seemed to think so:

When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus] said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets'" (Matthew 22:34-40).

I have offered several different types of music in previous *Simple Gifts* meditations, and some of you have shared how the music helps underscore the message. I hope you are inspired by this anthem, "[Love Changes Everything](#)," from the creative, musical theatre genius Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber. Believe it -- "Love changes everything . . . How you live and / How you die."