

NOVEMBER 5 2025 FATHER JOHN BERTAO

I'm sure that many of us have heard this gospel before a number of times over the years. I am also sure that all of us have heard the word “hate” a number of times before, if not more than once, two or three times. Not always nice to hear.

So, why does the Lord Jesus say that we must hate our families, even ourselves? Here is what I learned from one of my sources after doing a lot of soul-searching as well.

See, in biblical times, the expression “to hate” often means “to prefer less.” Jesus used strong language to make clear that nothing should take precedence or first place over God in our lives. God, our heavenly Father, created us in His image and likeness to be His beloved sons and daughters. He has put into us His love and concern for all of our wellbeing and happiness. Our love for Him is a response to His exceeding love and kindness toward us.

True love, my source continues, is costly because it holds nothing back from the beloved. It is ready to give and sacrifice all for the beloved. And finally, God the Father gave us His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who freely offered up His life for us on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His sacrificial death brought us pardon and healing to new life in the Spirit and peace with God.

And of my quote, so I have a question for you—and I have asked this question before. Who do you have first in your life? Who do you have first in your life? Or what do you love most in your life? And the answer is, first and foremost, it must be God—our creator and saviour, who was there from the time you were born and will be there with you when you

lie down, at the final lie down when you die. And, of course, always accompanying you no matter what.

See, God knew you even before you were born. The second point—you and I, each one of us—is created in the image of God. Just take some time and look in the mirror, and see how unique God has created you, only you, as very special and unique.

And third would be your spouse, the person you chose as a life partner. So that if you are not married, then other family members are given to you as a special gift—but the spouse is one you chose yourself. And that's important to remember. So, if you have lost your spouse, of course, then your children will be next. You thought I was going to forget the children, but I wouldn't.

So please keep in mind that children are a gift from God to be cherished and respected. And potentially, they, of course, as you know, leave home for different reasons such as marriage, work, or college. However, God willing, your spouse will always be there if God so allows it.

My point is that the word “hate” or “prefer less” points us to prefer God first, above and beyond anything and anyone else in this world—and that we must rely on God first because He knows you better than anyone else. He knew you before you were born.

Very quickly, on my own personal journey to the priesthood that started at a very young age, although my family were very faithful to the sacramental life of the Church, I wanted to play with my friends, and I was too young to be thinking of the priesthood. At one point, I wanted, of course, to have a home, a car, a wife, and a number of children. That didn't happen.

However, as I aged, the calling got stronger and stronger. Upon discussing it with my parents, who I trusted very much, they told me that they would support whatever decision I made. It had to be my decision. And as you can see, I made it—and thanks be to God I did.

Now, one time, Dad told me that once I had been ordained, I might have to make a decision—maybe, maybe not—but sometimes it would happen that I'd have to decide who would come first: whether it would be the Church or my parents in case of an emergency. I strongly believe that when we make a decision with great faith and sincerity, God always provides when we put Him first.

For example, one day after my dad had died, my mom called me in the parish that I was at to say that she had fallen and needed help. That hurt—devastating. So, as I was getting ready to go to Mom's, I remembered a conversation I had with the late Cardinal Ambrozic, who ordained me, the day before my ordination. He told me that although I was making a vow of obedience to him and his successors, never to forget my mother—to always put her first, because she relied on me so much.

So, I rushed home, and when I got there, thanks be to God, it was not as bad as I thought. Mom was okay. Our relationship grew stronger, and my relationship with God grew even stronger than it had been before—and it continues to grow every day. Indeed, a blessing.

Now Mom at home, and God with me all the time. See, Jesus willingly embraced the cross not only out of obedience to His Father's will but out of merciful love for each one of us, in order to set us free from the slavery to sin, from Satan, from everything that could keep us from His love.

And what is the way of the cross for us? The way of loving sacrificially. You see, it means that when my will crosses with God's will, then God's will be done. We do that in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And we say that, we feel it, we mean it, and, of course, we follow it up.

See, the way of the cross involves sacrifice—the sacrifice of laying down my life each and every day for the sake of Jesus. This is not something new, as Saint Paul tells us when he writes, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." So our love, so naturally, that comes from God, we need to nurture it, make it grow, and follow it.

Personally speaking, I could never outmatch God's merciful love and His kindness toward me. Hopefully, you can say the same thing—that you can never outweigh God's love for you, ever and ever. He always gives us more than we can experience or even imagine.

Another question, last one: do you allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart and transform your life with overflowing love and mercy for God? I hope the answer is yes.

Let us conclude with a small prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are my treasure, my life, and my all. There is nothing in this life that can outweigh the joy of knowing, loving, and serving you all the days of my life. Take my life and all that I have, and make it yours for your glory now and forever.