

APRIL 15, 2026 FATHER JOHN BERTAIO

Last year I was having coffee with a friend who wanted me to meet a colleague who was, uh, he having issues with faith, particularly Christianity, and how we Catholics celebrated Holy Week and Easter. His concern was that there are so many bad people in the world, so many wars, these are his words, so many wars, suffering children, and seniors who suffer so much abuse. He could not understand how God could possibly allow all of this to happen.

At first my thinking was, “What’s the fastest way that I can get away from this conversation,” because it’s awfully heavy. At times like this, I’m tempted to just get up and to walk away, because I’m not very good at explaining so many things that people have, especially when I sense that they’re not prepared to listen, they just want to be heard.

However, when I thought about this particular situation, I realized that this individual is not attacking me personally, or my faith, so I sort of calmed down a bit. He is someone who was hurting, and is open to sharing that hurt, perhaps to get some relief from his great pain.

Remember today’s Gospel from Saint John, and I quote:

“For God so loved the world that he gave it his only Son, that whoever believed in him should not perish, but may have eternal life.”

And, “God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be save through him.”

From one of my sources I read that:

“Do you know the love which surpasses the greatest joy an happiness which one could ever hope and find in this life?”

Just think, just think...

“Greater love is manifested in the cost and the sacrifice to the giver.”

Or, “of the giver,” rather.

“True lovers hold nothing back, but give the best that can be offered to their beloved, including all they possess, even their very lives.”

Total, true, unconditional love.

So God, he provides his love for each and every one of us, by giving us the best that he has to offer. His only begotten Son, who freely offered up his life for our sake, as the atoning for our sins, and the sins of the world, to give it all up.

Those of us who have experienced giving, or experienced giving love and receiving love, can relate what a joy it is to share—to give and to receive.

Today's Gospel from Saint John tells us of the great unconditional love that God has for each one of us. It is not excluding love such as a few but love for a complete and single nation, love for each nation, love for each one.

But you see, it's a redemptive love that embraces the whole world, and a personal love for each and every individual that God has created in his own image and likeness, as we read in the first chapter of Genesis.

“God is the eternal Father. God is the Father of love, who could not rest until his wandering children have returned home to him.”

As Saint Augustine of Hippo has said, and I'm sure you've heard this quote before, it's a beautiful quote and worth repeating, and I quote:

“God loves each one of us as if we were the only one of us to love.”

As if you're the only one of the billions of people, as if you were the only one to love - that's how much God loves you.

Also, God gives us freedom to choose who and what and who we will love.

As our conversation continued, I tried not to interrupt or take it personal. The more I listened, the more I felt sorry for this individual, who was really hurting deep down inside. His tone changed from wanting answers to sharing his hurt, not to have a big theological discussion, but to share in a safe environment.

I remember reading an article that I paraphrase such as: “You’re only as sick as your secrets.” And that’s what he was. He was sick because he had so many secrets, so many hurt inside of him. This is a slogan that is repeated in the 12 Step recovery communities.

Our Gospel points to the same human impulse. Shame draws us into silence and secrecy. The fear of being exposed as broken and sinful, it makes us hide from God, from humanity, from others, even from ourselves—that person you see in the mirror. The impulse then is to hide, to hide what is rooted in the desire for safety of our own selves, and of course, a lot of shame. But ultimately, it harms us internally.

In contrast, Jesus invites us to live in the light, for our works to be clearly seen what they are. Freedom is found by stepping into the light, and acknowledging that we are imperfect and in need of being saved, in need of being set free.

Easter, dear friends in Christ, is a time for us to stop, reflect, and give thanks to almighty God for his unconditional love for each one of us, and again, as Saint Augustine stated:

“As if we were the only one on earth for God to love.”

Just think how special you, each one of you, is to God.

At the end of the conversation with the hurting individual, all of us left feeling that we had done someone a lot of good. And it cost us nothing.

You and I will never heal all the hurt that exists in society; however, we can only help one person at a time. If you ever have the opportunity to help someone, just be your good self, and shine that light of Jesus with someone who is in the dark. Who knows, you just might be the only light that they will see in their road to salvation.

Share his light to someone in need today, when you have the opportunity, and so we pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
your love is better than life itself.
May your love consume and transform my heart,
with all of its yearnings, aspirations, fears,
hurts, and concerns.
That I may freely desire you above all else,
and above all others,
generously, for your sake, and for your glory.
Make me love what you love,
desire what you desire,
and give generously,
as you have been so generous towards me.
Amen