

Have you ever been in love?

Matthew 17:1-8

March 2, 2014

Have you ever been in love?

Maybe it was puppy love, a childhood crush, like Charlie Brown and the little red-haired girl.

Maybe it was a first, serious, high-school romance, awakening in you a new desire to share everything -- thoughts and feelings and dreams and touch -- with another person.

Maybe it was watching her walk toward you in a flowing white dress, knowing that "from this day forward," you belong to her and she to you.

Maybe it is the joy and the struggle of starting out, of having little but making do together, of facing a still uncertain future but making it work together, of dreaming, planning, studying, working, but most of all just being together.

Or maybe it is the confident, comfortable, wiser, surer, grateful feeling of being in love still after thirty-five years of living side-by-side, hand-in-hand, soul-by-soul.

Have you ever been in love? If you have, you know what it feels like. You know what it does to you. I know, because I have been in love, and still am!

Being in love rearranges your life. You find yourself thinking about her, thinking about him, all the time, when it is convenient and when it's not. Being in love distracts you, consuming time and energy that could or should be directed elsewhere, and yet, at the same time, it renews your energy, it reinvigorates you, giving new purpose to all you do.

When you are in love, all the disparate pieces of your life form up and take shape and coalesce around a new center, a new focus, a new point of reference for everything -- that one.

Being in love changes you. Namely, it's not just about you anymore! Being in love makes you astonishingly unselfish. It's all about her, wanting to please her. It's all about him, wanting to do what you can do to bring a smile to his face. You want to give -- gifts, things, experiences, yourself -- just to bring him delight. And whatever you do, wherever you do it, even if it has nothing to do with her, you do it for her.

Being in love rearranges your life. Being in love changes you. And being in love fills you up. You are filled with all kinds of new and unexpected emotions. You feel giddy or silly or shy. You feel exhilarated, intoxicated, bold. You feel ... joy! When you are in love, you are filled up with joy, not because of this or that, but just because.

Have you ever been in love? Have you ever been in love ... with Jesus?

Francesco di Bernardone was. This son of a wealthy merchant, this failed crusader, this hopeless romantic, this young man of Assisi we know better as St. Francis, was head over heels in love with Jesus. Once he saw the face of Jesus in the world and the people around him, once he heard, really heard, Jesus' simple words "Come and follow," that's all he wanted to do -- just do whatever Jesus said to do, that simple, because he was madly in love.

And that, and that alone, was what made him a saint. He was in love with Jesus. And that, that alone, can make you a saint!

When Jorge Mario Bergoglio was installed as bishop of Rome, not quite one year ago, he took the name, "Francis," and it fits, because this Francis, too, is in love with Jesus. He began his papacy with a daunting agenda and with high hopes from many people both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church, hopes that he could be a catalyst for reforming and cleaning up the Vatican bureaucracy, for promoting greater transparency and accountability both financially and morally, for revitalizing the church and refocusing its mission, for bringing down the high and mighty and raising up the humble and lowly, for bringing the church to the people and making it a church of the people and empowering the church to proclaim a timely and needful and healing message for this time and this place.

In less than one year on the job, Francis has already begun to fulfill each of these hopes in some remarkable ways, but I am convinced that he is the right man at the right time -- not merely for the Roman Catholic Church, but for all of us who by our faith in Christ are his brothers and sisters, too -- he is the right man at the right time for one reason alone: he is in love with Jesus, and it shows.

During this season of Epiphany, we have been listening together to Francis' words of exhortation in his *Evangelii Gaudium*, the "Gospel of Joy." We come now to the fifth and last chapter of the exhortation and Francis ends where he began. Do you remember the beginning?

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

And Francis reminded us that the result of that encounter is joy. Francis wants the men and women and children of Christ's church to be filled with joy and to carry that joy into the world!

As he brings his exhortation to a conclusion, Francis returns to the theme of joy-filled witness, joy-filled evangelization, joyfully bringing good news to a world of people for whom it is intended, and he reminds us again that joy comes from Jesus.

Unless we see him [Jesus] present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigor and passion. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody.

The church needs men and women and children in love, with Jesus!

Being in love with Jesus. What does it look like? What does it feel like? We know! We've already talked about it! You know what it feels like to be in love!

Being in love, with Jesus, rearranges your life. You find yourself thinking about Jesus, all the time. He distracts you. Thinking about him takes time and energy from you, and yet, at the same time, he renews your energy, he reinvigorates you, he gives new purpose to all you do. And all the pieces of your life now coalesce around him. Everything you do revolves around him.

Being in love, with Jesus, changes you. It's not just about you anymore! It's about him. You want to please him. You want to delight him, because he delights you. You want to give him gifts, precious gifts -- of things, of your work, of yourself -- just because. And whatever you do, wherever you do it, even if it is done to serve some purpose seemingly unrelated to your life as a person of faith, you do it for him.

Being in love with Jesus rearranges your life. Being in love with Jesus changes you. And being in love with Jesus fills you up! You are filled with all kinds of new and overpowering emotions. You feel ... giddy? Intoxicated? Just read Paul! You feel energized and emboldened, but humbled and shy, too, amazed that this One could love you, amazed that this One does love you. You feel joy! When you are in love with Jesus, you are filled up with joy, just because, and nothing and no one can ever, will ever, take that joy away!

How I long to find the right words ...

This is the burden of Pope Francis' heart, the burning desire of Francis' heart.

How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts.

And Jesus starts that fire. "This is my own dear Son. Listen to him!" Jesus starts the fire. Jesus plants the spark of his own Holy Spirit in us, and, when we are in love with Jesus, that fire burns bright, bringing light and life to us and to all around us.

I am in love with Jesus. He is my treasure, my glory, my delight. It's not about me, at all. I am weak. I lose my way. I fail. I know I disappoint him. But I am in love with him, and he is in love with me, and that is all that matters!

That is all that matters ...

Have you ever been in love? With Jesus?