

Loving the Church

A Reflection on Loving the Church Despite Its Imperfections

Reflections Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life eScroll, August 2020, "Youth" issue

Loving the Church, the universal body of Christ, often seems close to impossible. Still, we must keep reminding ourselves that all people in the Church — whether powerful or powerless, conservative or progressive, tolerant or fanatic, rich or poor, black or white — belong to that long line of witnesses moving through this valley of tears, singing songs of praise and thanksgiving, listening to the voice of their Lord, and eating together from the bread that keeps multiplying as it is shared. When we remember that, we may be able to say, 'I love the Church, and I am glad to belong to it.'

Loving the Church is our sacred duty. Without a true love for the Church, we cannot live in it in joy and peace. And without true love for the Church, we cannot call people to it, as is mandated of every faithful believer.

Loving the Church does not require romantic emotions. It requires the will to see the living Christ among His people, and to love them as we want to love Jesus Himself. This is true not only for the 'little' — the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten — but also for the 'big' people who exercise authority in the Church.

To love the Church means to be willing to meet Jesus wherever we go in the Church, and even outside of it. This love does not mean agreeing with, or approving of, everyone's ideas or behaviour. On the contrary, it can call us to confront those who hide Christ from us. But whether we confront or affirm, criticise or praise, we can only become fruitful when our words and actions come from hearts that love the Church.

Finally, from a global perspective, Jesus, through His ministry and teachings, has told us that every person — those who have known Him, and those who are yet to know Him — is His own. He died for all. That being so, our love for the Church should begin with our love for all whom we come across. It is also important to think of the Church not as 'something over there', but as a community of struggling, weak people, of whom we are part, and in whom we meet our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.