

GROWING Together

13th Series

BELOVED OF GOD

*All I want to say to you is 'You are the Beloved.'*¹

Sometimes we don't feel lovable, loving or even loved! For Henri Nouwen those moments are exactly when we can feel God's love best. Our pain can be made meaningful. Pain can open us enough to feel deeply God's tender love. In this way our life can become a source of joy.

Henri Nouwen was a Roman Catholic priest, a scholar, on occasion a professor, and for a while a monk. In addition to his work and ministry, Henri was a writer of over forty deeply spiritual works which continue to inspire in people around the world.

Throughout his life, Henri knew that we are loved by God. He wrote that we need to be alone and silent to hear God's love, to share our pains and joys with others to know that we are all loved, and to be people of love for the sake of the suffering world.

HENRI NOUWEN (1932-1996)

In 1986, after many years in Holland and the United States, Henri moved to Canada where he joined L'Arche Daybreak in Richmond Hill, Ontario. L'Arche is an international network of communities founded by a Canadian, Jean Vanier, where people labelled with mental handicaps live together with their friends. It took great courage for Henri to join L'Arche, where most of his reputation meant nothing to people who do not read!

In L'Arche Henri found a home for the first time and allowed himself to become known intimately. Henri did not hide his struggles with depression and his enormous need for friendship. He wrote about his pain with great honesty. It is no secret that Henri was generous and kind, but also often in a hurry, impatient, and self-absorbed! The L'Arche community did skits about Henri's wild personality. He was hugely amused and deeply touched that his friends could know him so well and still love him.

I have lived my whole life with the desire to help others on their journey, but I have always realized that I had little else to offer than ... the journey I am making myself.²

LIVE WELL TO DIE WELL

Increasingly, in his most recent writing and speaking, Henri had pondered the mystery of death:

Now in my sixties, trying to come to terms with my own mortality, I trust that ... my attempt to befriend my death will be good not only for me, but also for others ... I want to die well, but I desire also to help others to die well.²

What is it to die well? For Henri, to die well is to live well — to live so that our life even with its pains and struggles is a sign of hope. We should so live that we will continue to be a gift for others after our death.

If love is, indeed, stronger than death, then death has the potential to deepen and strengthen the bonds of love. It was only after Jesus had left his disciples that they were able to grasp what he truly meant to them.¹

Those who have died well are no longer limited by their needs and wounds: their ability to love is now one with God's.

Shortly before he died, Henri wrote:

My own death is not so far away. But I have heard the inner voice of love, deeper and stronger than ever. I want to keep trusting in that voice and be led by it beyond the boundaries of my short life to where God is all in all.³

If he could say one thing to us, to sum up everything he believed, Henri would tell us that each of us is one of God's beloved.

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¹ *Life of the Beloved*, Crossroad, New York, 1992.

² *Our Greatest Gift*, Harper, San Francisco, 1994.

³ *The Inner Voice of Love*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1996.

Special thanks to our guest writer, Carolyn Whitney-Brown, a writer and a member of L'Arche Daybreak. L'Arche communities can be found in many cities.

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.



Gathering the Family of Jesus

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