



The Meaning of Love

The meaning of love is the meaning of life, because love, in spite of what we very often think or imagine, is not a simple feeling. When we speak of God, and we say that God is love, we do not mean that he is infinite feeling. We mean something deeper than this; that God is a plenitude of life and of being. And this applies also to our human love. Someone who is possessed by love is a man who has a plenitude of life in himself, in whom the sense of life, the power of life is so full, so great, that life is sure of itself. And this generates joy, courage, enthusiasm, and it goes so deep that it is beyond death itself. Holy Scripture says that love is stronger than death, indeed it is stronger than death because it has placed itself by its fullness, its power in intensity in the realm of the resurrection, in the realm of eternal life. And this is why love is capable of final sacrifice, not only of giving and of receiving but of laying down one's life, because this life, if it is given, is also possessed in its fullness. It is plenitude of life which finds expression in final sacrifice. You may remember the words of Christ: 'No one is taking my life from me, I give it freely myself.' In that respect love, the fullness of life which it expresses, is invulnerable. People may take our lives, people may put us to any test, and yet one remains invulnerable because no one in reality is taking; the person who loves is giving.

I would like to give an example of this. During the Russian Revolution a mother with two children was hiding in a small town. One evening a woman came, as young as she was, in her late twenties, and told her that she had been discovered, betrayed, and that she was to be arrested in the night in order to be shot. The mother looked at the children, and her new friend said, 'Don't worry, you go, and you hide.' And the mother said, 'How could I with these two children. I would be found within a few hours.' 'No', said her unknown friend, 'I will stay behind, call myself with your name and be shot perhaps, but you will escape.' And so she did.

This was an act of love, which proceeded from such fullness of life, from such certainty that life was not ending, and that it was only in the fulfilment that she would find in her death that she could do this.

No one has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friends. Who does it himself, freely, and who in doing so, attains to the fulfilment of life because life is worth only what one lives for, and life attains this fulfilment when all is done that can humanely be done beyond fear, in joy, in certainty.

This is the meaning of love to me. Such fullness of life, that will allow me to accept, to become totally vulnerable, never recoil, never resist, give myself to the last, without discrimination to anyone and for anyone with a certainty that love shall never be defeated, that love is stronger than death; because to love means that we already have renounced a limited self and grown into communion, that is community of life with God, who is love itself.