

God & Desire by Fr. Ray Ball

Do you struggle with desire? Then consider yourself blessed! If you have desires, that means you are alive and are connected to the energy, the abundance, and the vitality of life and God's Spirit! It also means that you are not made to live in a state of inertia (the opposite of faith) and it means you are not meant to live disconnected from others! I've reflected long and hard about desire. For much of my life I ran away from desire, and tried to build a life apart from it. I did not see it as a gift from God but as a weakness to be subdued. Desire (or attraction or passion), however, is good! It is life energy, it is not only from God, it is of God. It is part of our embodied reality that pushes us beyond ourselves to connect with others at a deep level. Only a power so strong can push us beyond the gravitational field of our self-centeredness to love another person as oneself. (Kind of like the first stage of a rocket that is needed to blast a spaceship out of the gravitational field of the earth, but then gives way to smaller and more easily guided engines designed to get to a specific destination!)

Desire is not meant to be repressed, denied, or buried. We are to make friends with desire by creating a deeper channel through which it can flow! Did you ever notice that ALL those who struggled with desire - the prostitutes, those caught in adultery, and those married multiple times in the Gospels – ALL ended up becoming followers of Jesus! Jesus did not tell them to get rid of their desire, but he helped them to channel and transform it into the deepest love possible. This can be expressed through this simple formula: Eros + Kenosis = Agape. Eros (Desire, Passion, Erotic Love) combined with Kenosis (pouring oneself out) = Agape (sacrificial Christian love). This is expressed by Jesus: "There is no greater love (agape) than to give one's life (kenosis) for one's friends (eros)."

The religious leaders (and the older brother of the prodigal son) who condemned people who were struggling with desire in general and sexuality in particular, did not become followers of Jesus! They were lifeless, hardened, and living out of their heads, having lost touch with their humanity as well as the ability to empathize with others. They were also in denial of their own struggles and projected and hated in others what they were struggling with, hating and denying in themselves. Notice how fixated they were on other people's struggles with desire, and how condemning they were as a result. Through renunciation and deprivation these religious leaders were living with no passion, no heart, and no life in them. This is because they had repressed desire and did not allow it to be transformed into genuine love and friendship.

Life is too short not to be around people who "light us up" from the inside, and to allow that life to be transformed into the kind of friendship which can lead us from simply a belief in God to a lifegiving walk and friendship with God and with people! What I most desire now, is to be around other people who may struggle with desire, but are honest and open about it - and who would rather make a mistake with it than to repress it - so we can help each other to grow into people who are alive and passionate about life, loving God and serving people! Jesus also preferred to be around such people too! The more I have learned to accept desire, the more peace and at-one-ness with life do I feel, and with an energy that is compassionate, caring, passionate and loving rather than anxious, restless, and possessive.

Just like a prism reveals how light is comprised of so many different colors, so does each person, and each created thing, reveal the abundant beauty of the magnificence of God – and our desires reveal the great longing we all have to experience fully the oneness of God's love that already embraces us in the depths of our being.