

The first article is from the Dunkirk, NY, *The Observer*. It was written by Daniel O'Rourke, a married Catholic priest.

Valentines' Day and Romantic Love

Valentines' Day will soon be here. The Greeting Card Association tells us that in a typical year its members sell a billion valentines (that's billion with a "b"!). Only at Christmas do they sell more cards. Cards, however, aren't the only items bouncing off store shelves to celebrate the 14th of February. Chocolate and flowers are also in great demand. Valentine's Day is big business.

The history of how Saint Valentine, an early Christian martyr, became associated with romantic love is confused and murky. Some claim the first recorded association of Valentine's Day with romance is in "Parliament of Fowls," a 1382 poem by Geoffrey Chaucer. Other scholars say this is probably a misinterpretation of Chaucer's poem. Let the scholars dispute, but no matter, today Valentine's Day is inescapably an expression of romantic love.

Fran Lebowitz, the American humorist tells us, "Romantic love is mental illness. But it's a pleasurable one. It's a drug. It distorts reality, and that's the point of it. It would be impossible to fall in love with someone that you really saw."

The English poet William Blake said it more gracefully,
"Love to faults is always blind,
Always is to joy inclined,
Lawless, winged, and unconfined,
And breaks all chains from every mind."

Lebowitz and Blake concur that romantic love makes us blind to the lover's faults and provides us with joy and pleasure. The American Psychiatric Association might deny that romantic love is mental illness and insurance companies won't pay therapists for its treatment, but most of us who have experienced it would, in retrospect, agree that it's irrational.

It's irrational but wonderful -- while it lasts. The challenge for us is to grow and to grow the relationship when passion for our lover fades and we come to acknowledge our partner's faults. Anyone in a long-term marriage or relationship knows that. We have to work at loving. Unlike romantic love, real love is not mental illness; it's a virtue. It's the habit of unselfishness.

Ironically, Valentine's Day in the United States is famous -- or infamous -- for something else. On February 14, 1929, Al Capone's gangsters mowed down five members of the Bugs Moran gang and two other unfortunate folks with Thompson sub-machine guns in a north side Chicago garage. History knows these murders as the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre. Massacre is probably too strong a word, but many married couple and others in long-term unions have killed their relationship by a death of a thousand cuts. The relationship dies not suddenly in a burst of machine gun fire, but little by little as our selfishness repeatedly wounds the relationship or marriage.

When MY needs, MY wants, MY happiness drive my actions and shape my words, I am selfish and not loving. Whether my motivation is conscious or subconscious, I am selfish -- no matter how many heart-shaped valentines or red roses I send.

We should look at our spouse or partner as someone to please and make happy, not as someone who is there to make US happy. That's what real love is -- and it does not come easy. Christians would say it is impossible without God's grace (1 Cor. 15:10). In any case, though, we have to work continuously to place the one we love before ourselves.

Isn't that what we ask for in the prayer attributed to Francis of Assisi?

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love...

Really that's how we make love. And the more we work at it, the better lovers we become. It's an acquired skill. Another Saint Francis, Francis de Sales tells us that we learn to speak by speaking. We learn to study by studying. We learn to work by working. In the same way we learn to love by loving -- by repeated, unselfish acts of kindness.

I'm not talking about boxes of chocolate or bouquets of flowers. I'm talking about getting supper, washing the dishes, about picking up the dry cleaning -- or our dirty clothes. I mean proofing our partner's term paper or club minutes. I'm talking about spontaneously doing these things because it pleases our partner not because it gives us pleasure. The lover gives without thinking about it -- or about society's gender roles. Real lovers don't count what they've done. They're not keeping book (1 Cor. 13:5). They do it without seeking or expecting anything in return.

Speaking of society as a whole the Dalai Lama observed, "Without love we could not survive. Human beings are social creatures, and a concern for each other is the very basis of our life together." If that is true for our world, it is even truer for our intimate relationships.

No doubt these intimate relationships are complicated. The poet W. H. Auden tells us, "The desires of the heart are as crooked as corkscrews." This Valentine's Day we should remember Auden's insight. It has lots to say about the differences between romantic and lasting love.

The *Irish Times* published the following on its Website.

Intrigue swirls through hallowed corridors of the Vatican

By Paddy Agnew

During his weekly audience in Paul VI Hall last week, Pope Benedict XVI said something while recalling the figure of San Domenico de Guzmán, founder of the Dominican order, that prompted a minor flurry among Vatican watchers:

"Is not the temptation represented by power and by careerism, is not this a temptation from which even those who have a leading role in the government of the church are not immune? ...We all know how, in civil society and sometimes in the church, things do not go well because many of those who have been entrusted with a responsibility work for their own good and not for that of the community."

... Writing in Rome daily *La Repubblica* last week, theologian Vito Mancuso commented: "The principal problem remains, however, and that is that today more than ever the decisive criteria for a successful career in the church is not spirituality or nobility of soul but rather servility. "The main requirements of future church leaders are not their ability to spread the gospel or be charitable but rather to be obedient at all times."

The pope offered the following comments on St. Anthony during his Wednesday audience on February 10. They were reported by *Catholic World News*.

St. Anthony knew true wealth comes through faith, Pope tells audience

At his regular weekly public audience on February 10, Pope Benedict XVI spoke about St. Anthony of Padua, the 13th-century Franciscan who is "one of the most popular saints of the Catholic Church."

St. Anthony was a renowned preacher and a brilliant theologian who "helped lay the foundations of the Franciscan theological and spiritual tradition," the Pope said. Following in the footsteps of St. Francis, he offered an attractive model of Christian life, emphasizing "prayer as a loving and joy-filled conversation with God."

However the "Doctor Evangelicus" (a title given him by Pope Pius XII) always insisted that Christians must be mindful of Christ's sacrifice and see life through the "mirror of the Cross." Life is rich and human dignity is exalted, St. Anthony taught, "because God considers us so important as to be worthy of his suffering."

Pope Benedict reminded his audience that St. Anthony lived and preached at a time of great economic growth in European society, and in that atmosphere he reminded the faithful that they must always be sensitive to the needs of the poor. That message bears repeating today, in an era of global economic interdependence, the Pope remarked.

The Pope concluded his talk with a prayer that during this Year for Priests, St. Anthony would help all preachers to "communicate a burning love for Christ, a thirst for closeness to the Lord in prayer, and a deeper appreciation of the truth and beauty of God's word."

The following editorial appeared in America magazine on February 15. You may subscribe at americamagazine.org.

Dysfunctional

This is the winter of our discontent. Liberals are sulking because President Obama has not given them change to believe in. Conservatives are filled with loathing at their own fantasies of his big-government takeover. Tea partiers are angry at the thought of the president succeeding at all. The media, preoccupied with politics without substance, suffer repetition compulsion, reporting hourly readings of the country's ups and downs. Most of all, the Senate has proved itself incapable of deliberative action. Its handling of the health care bill painted the worst caricature of the legislative process as 'sausage-making' since Bismarck first used the metaphor to characterize the process of lawmaking.

From the beginning, the Republican minority refused to reciprocate the president's overtures to bipartisanship. Even after being given disproportionate representation on the Finance Committee for drawing up the Senate health care bill, Senate Republicans used the threat of filibuster to form an immovable phalanx opposing even token reform. Even while they had a 60-vote supermajority, Senate Democrats were not

able to advance the legislative process. The public watched Max Baucus, Ben Nelson and Mary Landrieu feeding their egos and abetting their home state interests and said, "If this is health reform, we don't want it."

The White House cut premature deals with Big Pharma and the insurance companies and then let the deals stand even as the same special interests lobbied to gut the bill and stuff their pockets. Even after the State of the Union address, no one can say what the White House wants in a health care bill. If Canada can craft a health care law in a bilingual statute of 14 pages, why does the U.S. Congress need 2,000 pages, except that American lawmaking is so thoroughly ridden with special interests? The only branch of government that seems to have tried to work for the people these last months is the House of Representatives, led by its much-maligned speaker, Nancy Pelosi.

We face a vexing question of whether the political structures bequeathed us by the founding fathers can meet the challenges of the 21st century: health care, climate change, financial reform, sustainable development. Health care is only one of many issues the American political system has not been able to fix. The whole industrial world and some developing countries have more effective, less costly systems with universal coverage. Denmark has a green economy and has not increased its energy usage since the early 1980s. Canada, with its strong consumer protections and limits on banks' leveraging and securitization of assets, was spared the worst effects of the Wall Street collapse. Europe and China devote far less of their national wealth to defense. Europe applies the gains to domestic welfare and overseas aid; China to long-term development, while the U.S. announces another modest cut in 'discretionary spending' that leaves the bloated 'security sector' untouched.

Some opponents of health care reform argue that deadlock is actually what the framers of the Constitution intended with their system of checks and balances, but the framers never prescribed a 60-vote supermajority to pass a bill in the Senate. The supermajority is a matter of a changeable Senate rule that requires 60 votes to close off unlimited debate intended to prevent unwanted legislation from coming to a vote. The most obvious reform the Senate needs in order to end the tyranny of the minority is to make it easier to terminate debate.

At a very minimum, notice of the intent to filibuster ought not be sufficient to close down the legislative process. The current rate of use of the filibuster to prevent legislation from coming to a vote, used in recent years against major legislation 70 percent of the time, compared with 7 percent of the time in the early 1960s, is due in part to the minimalist requirement of mere notification to block legislation. Those who want to

delay legislation by nonstop talk ought to be forced to do so on television. C-Span will do the rest. Exposure will make the pettiness of the filibusters (or their wisdom) apparent for the public to see. Another step would be to reduce the number of votes needed for cloture to, say, 55 or even 51 votes.

If you are looking this anxious winter for glimmers of hope in government performance, one may be found in the U.S. military's application of its logistical strength to the post-earthquake relief in Haiti. International organizations and private relief and development agencies would have been severely hampered without it. A second is the promise of a successful negotiation on a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty between the United States and Russia later this month, reducing nuclear weapons arsenals on both sides. Of course, for treaty ratification we may have to hold our breath, as we wait to see whether it gets through the Senate.

The following prayer, by Jesuit priest James E. Hug, is from <http://www.educationforjustice.org/resources/prayer-globalization-solidarity>, a page on the Center for Concern Website. Please support the Center for Concern.

Prayer for a Globalization of Solidarity

Awesome God of the expanding immensity of cosmic time and space,
Intimate God, at home in each human heart,
Energizing, Organizing God, drawing us together into global Solidarity,

Yahweh,

Allah,

Brahman,

God of many names,

God of no name,

Abba,

Father Mother,

we thank You and we praise You

for the inspiration and human creativity

through which You are weaving us together

through communications and travel, social movements and expanding
consciousness

into one planetary web of Life,

one stunning revelation of Your Creativity and Love.

Awesome

Intimate

Unifying

God,

we beg Your forgiveness

for every time,
for every way
that we let our small glimpses of Your Immensity
swell our smallness into arrogance,
dividing us from our sisters and brothers in whose hearts You dwell
through Other images, experiences, cultures, revelations,
Longing for the Fullness
that only our Oneness can reveal.
We ask you to break us free
"as gently as You can . . .
but as forcefully as we demand"
from the unconscious/conscious idolatry
of wealth and "free markets" and individualism and competition and
consumption
that blind us to the rich complexity of Your Presence,
that reduce our sisters and brothers
"and us"
to consumers or producers, competitors or markets in our service.
Break the enduring chains
of slavery and colonialism
that have set our lives on such vastly diverging paths of wealth and
poverty.
Turn those paths toward each other into
Your True Path
to Fullness and Unity.
Purge us of whatever it is within us
that turns our eyes away from Your crucifixion-by-poverty
in nearly three billion of
our sisters and brothers,
that allows us to starve Your Revealing and Unifying Love
in 800 million of
our sisters and brothers,
that allows us to plunder our planet,
uncaring of our children's children,
careless of the Sacredness it displays.

Yahweh,

Allah,

Bra h man,

God of many names,

God of no name,

Abba,

Mother Father,

alert us to

Your Sacred Presence,

Your Urgency,

Your Tireless Struggle

within each of us in our uniqueness,
in all of us in our infinite diversity,
through all the forces drawing us together into one global village.

Fill us

with as much awe and joy at Your Presence in our sisters and brothers,

with as much energy and passion to work with You

"as we can bear"

that we all may be

One in You

and

You

may be glorified in us.

Amen.

Alleluia.

**Your comments and articles are appreciated. You may send them
to tony@tonyercolano.com.**