

# The Lord of Surprises

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One of the popular nicknames of God is that He is the Lord of Surprises. This is understandable, because our finite knowledge and finite love don't compare with His infinite knowledge and infinite love. That's why we very often don't know what to expect. It's like a child trying to play chess with a master who also knows beforehand what moves the child is going to make.

The first surprise from God that we ought to appreciate is that He chose us to accomplish His work on earth. Anyone with an ounce of the honesty of humility is aware of personal limitations, especially in the face of seemingly impossible tasks.

Knowledge of our inadequacies should prompt us to see yet another activity and characteristic of God. Like every good father, He loves to make up the difference between what we, His children, attempt, and what needs to be accomplished.

The truth of our faith has revealed that the primary need of this world is the saving of each person from the alienation from God that we call Hell. This is a lifelong, monumental task, far beyond our personal efforts, not only because of the power of exterior forces in the world and interior passions within each of us, both of which serve to destroy relationships; but again we are faced with the infinite distance between us and God, which alone we cannot cross.

The people of the Old Testament were expecting a saving Messiah, but to have their Creator-God come to them as a man was another surprising gesture of love. The infinite distance is crossed by the infinite God. Offenses committed against the infinite God are made up for by the infinite God, and human sin was expiated in a way so surprising that too many still cannot accept it. God Himself suffers terribly at the hands of the very humanity He created. God suffers humiliation to the point of degradation, severe injustice, and an agonizing death.

The Lord makes a statement with His teaching life and sacrificial death. The statement is, "I love you this much." He wants His statement repeated, time and again, in different ways, in our own lives. The Savior wants to live His saving life again and again in us, so that, persevering through life as He did, we can win His Father's eternal life, as He did.

The qualities ascribed to the Savior by the prophet Isaiah should be familiar, because we can identify with them: an ordinary life, and an unattractive appearance. For some of us who are attractive, it's just a matter of time. How many of us are held in high esteem, and for what reasons? Yet, what Christ did for us, we are called to do for ourselves and for each other. We are here to save eternal lives.

When we live hidden lives of prayer and self-sacrifice, we are accused of not doing anything, but we are doing everything. We may be doing little or nothing socially and economically to contribute to this present life, but we are doing everything necessary to contribute to God's saving presence and His life that will never end.

This contribution of ultimate value is particularly evident in the lives of the sick and disabled. Ruined bodies, hurting minds, and broken hearts identify us with Christ. It was the sacrifice of His mind, heart, and body that made up for our separation from God, and our personal sacrifices participate in this all-important redemptive activity.

We have then, the primary answer to why we suffer. Suffering love is the greatest love, a desperately needed commodity to make up for the growing hatred that is consuming human lives and our world. The key Biblical concept is that Christ, the Suffering Servant, gives his life as an offering for sin. His life's statement, "I love you this much," is made to His Father as an offering to make up for those who ignore or even show hatred toward Him. What kind of love is it in a person who offers Himself in reparation for us who killed Him with our sins? We have likewise been placed here to help take away the sins of many, even those who offend us, to win pardon for their offenses and ours.

By our baptism, each of us has been given a share in the priesthood of all the faithful. We have the right and duty to offer ourselves and everyone else, united with Christ, to our Father, for mercy, and for grace in time of need.

This is God's plan, but we have conflicting, non-conforming plans for our own comfort, as if we were going to live here in this world forever. We have to be brought into line with God's redemptive plan of love and life, and suffering is the only way. What else would command our attention?

We are the guilty nation that hands Christ over to torture and death, and we prove this with every evil choice that needs to be confessed and made up for. According to our laws, Christ must die in the millions of children our society kills every year, and in the eternal life we attack and kill within ourselves with our sins. It is we who reject God, again and again, choosing the ruling leaders in industry and entertainment, and the pleasures of this world, over our Eternal King. We are the ones who need conversion, so that what was said by Christ, may rightly be said to us and about us. "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice," and "My kingdom does not belong to this world."

Each Christian is another Christ, as we give up our lives as love-offerings, in ransom for many, so that we all may gain the eternal life of God.

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