



LOVE: A CHALLENGE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVERYONE

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An encyclical is a formal, circular letter the Pope sends to all men and women of goodwill. Through this instrument, the Pope expounds his Catholic teaching and doctrine based on Sacred Scripture and the tradition of the Church. He addresses issues of faith, morals, or current ecclesial and world affairs. Encyclicals enlighten, guide, and encourage religious experience - especially – for the ordained ministers and laypeople of the Catholic world.

Pope Francis has written four encyclical letters. The fourth, titled “*Dilexit nos*” (“*He loved us*”), was published on October 24, 2024, and addresses THE HUMAN AND DIVINE LOVE OF THE HEART OF JESUS CHRIST. I will reflect on this encyclical in this article.

During the eleven years of his pontificate, some have tried – from different platforms and motivations – to pigeonhole the magisterium of Pope Francis as conservative or liberal, as right or left. The truth is that the first Jesuit and Latin American pope does not recognize classifications or prefabricated labels. If a sole label could fit him, it would correctly reflect his human, Christian, and pastoral stature. It would acknowledge him as a Pope committed to the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Throughout his Petrine ministry and magisterium, Francis exhorts and encourages us all to return to the Gospel, connect with the teaching of Jesus, replicate in our lives the lifestyle of the Nazarene, and live our lives pursuing the same purpose and commitment that drove the life of Jesus: to realize in the world the reign of God, and his sovereignty.

This continuing commitment, adhering to the heart of the Gospel, is shown to us again in abundance by Francis in “*Dilexit nos*.” If Christian life means experiencing the love that God the Father has for us, revealed in the deeds and words of the Son, in order to – from that same love and in the same measure – love one another as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father, then this, his fourth encyclical, deals with the very heart and marrow of the life and teaching of the Master of Nazareth, to whom we confess our “*Way, Truth, and Life*” on the journey of faith of all Christ’s disciples.

Dilexit nos is about God’s love, his will, and universal commandment, realized through the life of Jesus: the new commandment of love. It is a commandment of love that is a program to guide the life of each disciple and build the world according to God’s will.

Dilexit nos comprises 220 numerals, organized in an introduction, conclusion, and five large chapters, as follows:

The first chapter is titled: **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HEART** (numbers 2 to 31), in which the Pope presents the love of the Triune God, manifested in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as the center of Christian and ecclesial life, a love that every human being and all humanity urgently needs to experience, live, and share, today. The Pope also reflects on the importance of the human heart, the core of the person, and on the transformation that God’s love, through Jesus, works within it.

The second chapter is titled: **ACTIONS AND WORDS OF LOVE** (numbers 32 to 47) and presents the actions, gaze, and words of the Heart of Jesus, recorded in the Gospels, which reveal God’s love for us and form the origin and foundation of our Christian faith.

The third chapter is titled: **THIS IS THE HEART THAT HAS LOVED SO GREATLY** (numbers 48 to 91). Here, the Pope explores the theological significance of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, his relationship with the Triune God – the community of love – and the importance of devotion to the Sacred Heart, the symbol of God’s love for us.

The fourth chapter is titled: **A LOVE THAT GIVES ITSELF AS DRINK** (numbers 92 to 163). Through the reading of texts of Sacred Scripture, the Church's tradition, and important figures, the Pope encounters and presents God's love as the

origin, core, and driving force of ecclesial life, called to be a sign of God's love in the world, a community of love, forgiveness, and service for all.

The fifth and final chapter is titled: **LOVE FOR LOVE** (numbers 164 to 216), and in it, the Pope addresses the great challenges of humanity and exhorts and encourages us to come to the daily and permanent experience of God's love as a healing and saving response to these significant challenges.

In *conclusion*, I echo the Pope's conclusion in his encyclical: I invite everyone to know, read, and live the teaching of this encyclical, i.e., to love everyone with the same love with which God loves us. I invite everyone to know, read, and live with the awareness that the evil and evils of our personal, family, and social histories always have, as their origin and common cause, the absence of God's love in us.

At the same time, the construction of a happy and better life, society, and world is only possible through human relationships founded on the love of God, lived, and shared among us all.

To this end, we must, above all, be able to experience God's love in our everyday lives. We must experience His love that gives us life, encourages us, forgives us, does not forget us, does not abandon us, sustains us, gives us certainty, truth, and trust, and gives us joy and hope, because *He first loved us* (1 Jn 4:19).

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