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Sickness and Health

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Sickness and Health

Marriage-promises often include the words “. . . to love you . . . in sickness and in health.” Is it harder to love in sickness than in health? While it seems reasonable to think that we can love more easily “in health,” some reflection upon our lived experience might reveal an aspect of ourselves that is quite positive, perhaps surprisingly so.

If we consider that most of what we rightly consider as acting lovingly involves the expenditure of energy, then it appears that it would be easier for us to do so when we are in good physical and emotional health, than when we are not feeling well. And yet, if we recall some of the more difficult times in our lives, we might recognize that even with the limitations imposed by our illness or indisposition, we chose to think, speak and act with care for others. Love does not depend solely upon the level of energy we have, even though our bodily health has effects on the ways that we are able to manifest our love.

We might in fact love more, or with greater intention, at times when we are apparently able to do less of everything than when we are at our strongest. We cannot measure the quantity or quality of love by the same means as we do with material creation. Love is of the spirit, which becomes more evident when we look carefully at our experiences. To appreciate the reality, we can think of all our expressions of love in deeds and in words as being the external aspect of the experience, while love itself is essentially interior, non-material and spiritual.

Though we would like the people we love to always be in good health and to suffer little in life, we do not love them less when their bodies, minds or even their spirits are oppressed in any way. We can appreciate one of the apparent paradoxes or mysteries of love in recognizing how we seem to love more generously and selflessly those who are in some need rather than when all is well. We often find ourselves quite willing to spend time and energy on behalf of others who are unable to respond very well to us. We also might pray for friends and family more often or with more focus when we know of their difficulties than when everything seems to be fine.

Many of us concede that we have sometimes been more honest and in touch with God when we were facing personal difficulties than when everything was going according to our plans and desires. In our times of need, we have learned that God does not love us less when we are sick, or stressed, or in any way diminished. Neither does God love others to a lesser extent through us when our powers of thinking or acting are reduced. Love is not restricted

by our sickness or that of others, but is often called forth from us to a higher degree than when we are healthy.

Our life's priority is neither sickness nor health, but love.