



Mission Talk
March 1, 2026
Fr. Josh Luttig

Welcome to the 2026 Lenten Parish Mission.

I am really, really excited for this night. But first of all, I want to explain what is the purpose of a parish mission? What are we doing here? Well, we have these during Lent because Lent is a time God wants to encounter us in a very unique way where we focus on surrendering our hearts to him more fully. And we're going out into the desert of Lent for 40 days just like Jesus did.

And that's because God wants to encounter us. And so we have nights like this, these parish missions to facilitate that encounter. And so we're going to do that through a couple of different ways. First of all, we're going to encounter God, hopefully through a talk in which he wants to speak to you. Through that, we're going to have a parishioner give her testimony about how she's living out the themes that I'm about to talk about.

And so hearing someone's testimony can strengthen us in faith to live out this message and to encounter God through that. And then we are going to enter into adoration, eucharistic adoration, when we encounter the Lord through that beautiful sacrament. And we're also going to have prayer teams and praise and worship music to help us encounter him through those beautiful ministries as well.

First of all, are there any non-parishioners here? Anyone here not from St. Andrew? I'll single you out. Okay, wonderful. Well, welcome to St. Andrew. Hopefully you always feel welcome here.

But let us begin with a prayer. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this beautiful season of Lent. And we thank you for creating us in your own image, designing us in a way that we can encounter you and we can receive your love. We ask you to pour out your spirit upon me that I may speak your words fruitfully and ask you to send your spirit upon all who are here that their hearts may be opened to receive your love for them. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

All right. My heart is just burning to share this message with you. As I was praying and asking the Lord what he wanted to share with you. I think he really gave me his heart to share with you today. And so I hope that we can really receive this. And I don't know about you, but I was having a lot of kind of pushback from the enemy throughout the week leading up to this. And that's a really good sign in my Book. That means we're taking ground from the enemy tonight that we're going in the right direction. So I hope you feel the same way.

Now, this talk is going to cover quite a bit, and some of it will be a little dense, especially the first part. But the goal is to set a foundation to build on for the rest of it. And through the whole thing, I ask you to pay attention to not exactly what I'm saying, but what God is doing in your heart during this talk, because he wants to highlight certain things, and certain things will stand out for you to return to in prayer and allow God to speak into your heart more deeply.

Now, to set the foundation, I want to start off with a question, because every single person, whether they know it or not, is asking this question. They're asking, what is my purpose? What's the most fundamental purpose of my life? What was I made for?

Now, most people, even Catholics, have the wrong answer to this question. And if we have that wrong answer, we can end up going down the wrong paths. And that gets messy and painful and hurtful. And a lot of us have experienced that in one way or another. But if we get the right answer, the answer that God wants to speak into our hearts tonight, and we live by it, it puts everything else into perspective. It simplifies



our lives. It directs our focus and provides meaning to everything that we do and everything that we experience.

So I want all of us to call to mind an answer to that question right now. What is my purpose? If someone asked you, what is the purpose of your life, what would you tell them? Some people might say, my purpose is to be a good person or even to be a good Christian or to get to heaven or to be a saint. And all those are good answers.

Now, just curious, did anyone grow up with the Baltimore Catechism? Yep. I'm asking you to show your age a little bit. That's okay. But if you did, you're probably bouncing in your seat right now. You're like, when I was seven years old, my religion education teacher made me memorize the answer to that question. And so the Baltimore Catechism says, I was created to know, to love and to serve God in this life and to live eternally with him in the next. And you're like, yes, finally. I've waited 70 years for that. We're great.

Now, these are all good answers, but they are not the answer. Here is the answer. The most fundamental purpose of your life and of my life and every single human being who has ever existed or will ever exist, their purpose is to receive God's love. They were made to receive God's love.

You might be thinking, okay, Father Josh, but those are all the same answers, like, they're all just different ways of saying the same thing. How is that any different than any of the others? Well, there's nothing more fundamental than our purpose to receive God's love. St. John tells us in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he first loved us. And love needs to be received.

So if we go back to the Baltimore Catechism, answer to know love and serve God. Well, how do we know God? We know God by receiving his love. How do we love God? We can't love God without first receiving his love. And how do we serve God? We can't do that either without first receiving his love. And how do we live eternally with him in heaven? We can't get to heaven without accepting grace, without accepting his love in our hearts. So your most fundamental purpose in life is to receive God's love.

Now, other religions say that love might be one of God's attributes, that God is loving. But Christianity is the only religion to say that God is love. That's the very nature, the very being of God is love. Love is who God is. And love requires three. Okay?

Love requires the lover, who is pouring out the love. Love requires the beloved, who is receiving the love and making a gift in return, reciprocating it. And love requires the love that is shared between the lover and the beloved.

And so if God is love, God needs to be three - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now God, the Father is eternally loving his Son. What does that look like? The Father is making a complete gift of himself to the Son. And then the Son is eternally receiving the love of the Father. There's this active receptivity, there's this choice to receive the gift of the Father. So what does that look like? He chooses to receive everything that the Father is giving him the gift of the Father and reciprocates that love by making a gift of himself in return. And this gift of self that the Father and the Son share is so complete, so perfect, that it's a whole other divine person. It's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the love that is shared between them.

So God is love. And we are created in the image and likeness of God, which means that we were created for love. So through our sin, we have separated ourselves, from God and from his love. Because sin is a rejection of God's love, and we'll come back to that later. But because of Jesus and what he did for us, we are invited back.

And in fact, we're invited into something deeper and more beautiful than what Adam and Eve experienced in a garden. And because of Jesus, we become sons and daughters of God.



Through our baptism, we become by grace what Jesus is by nature. Jesus is the Son of God by nature, but we become children, sons and daughters of God through grace. That means we are invited into Jesus' place in the Holy Trinity, into those relationships. So Jesus invites us to share in his identity, in his relationship as the Son of God.

And remember, what did I just say? What's Jesus place in the Trinity? What's his identity? What's his relationship as the Son of God? Jesus is eternally receiving the love of the Father. He's receiving the gift of the Father, the active receptivity. He receives that perfectly. And then he reciprocates that love by making a gift of Himself in return.

So that's what we were made for. That is our purpose. That's what we are supposed to do on earth now and for eternity in heaven. We are made to enter into trinitarian love. We are called to live that same active receptivity that Jesus lives for all of eternity. We are called to receive God's infinite love, the perfect gift of Himself to us, and then reciprocate that love by making a complete gift of ourselves in return. So we are invited into God himself, into love himself.

Now, are you worthy of that? No. That's an invitation to a wedding feast that no one is worthy of, and we never will be. We can't earn that invitation. We can't earn God's love, not even a little bit. But the good news is that it's not about our worthiness or unworthiness. It's about the fact that the invitation has been given to us. We have to decide, will I choose to receive God's love or will I not?

Okay, that's the foundation. That's who God is. That's who we are, and that's what we were made for. And I know trinitarian theology is a little bit dense, but it's so beautiful. So I hope you're still with me and you're following, but now I want to build on that foundation that we've laid and talk about God's desire.

So God is love. And the three persons of the Trinity are eternally giving and receiving themselves. By making perfect gifts. And that means they lack nothing. God is infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself. That's the first line of the catechism. And they put that there for a purpose. Again, that sets the foundation or sets the framework to understand all of the rest of Christianity.

So what could an infinitely perfect and blessed God desire? God desires to be received. Love desires to be received. God, Trinitarian love is so perfect and so complete that it flows over and it desires to be received. And so that's why he created us. That's why he created you to receive Him. There's no other reason for that.

Because God doesn't need minions to do his work. He doesn't need slaves. He just wants to share Himself. And he chose to create you to share Himself with. We could spend all night on this one point. God chose to create you the way you are, with all your unique personality and your quirks and your foibles and interests and hobbies, your sense of humor, everything.

He could have created you a little bit different or a lot of bit different, but he didn't. He chose to create you the way you are because he wants to love you the way he created you. Doesn't that just like cut through any social pressure that we have to be anyone else other than who we are? I hope it does. Because God didn't create us to be someone we are not.

He created you to be the best version of you, that saint version of you that he has in his mind. And he wants you to live up to that potential. That saint version of you is you, as you are now. But choosing to completely receive God's love. Okay, that's the difference between you as you are now and you in heaven. You in heaven will be so freely able to receive God's love that it'll be like a second nature for you. Second nature because that's how we were created. That's God's purpose for all of us.

But none of us are quite there yet, are we? I know I'm not. God knows. Or God wants us to receive his love. He wants to be received. But is He? Do we do what we were made to do? Do we choose to receive Him?



So often we fail to. And I think we all have experienced the pain of trying to love someone and that love not being received, or worse, that love being actively rejected. Right?

Some of us prefer to love other people in different ways. Some love through spending quality time with people. Some love through giving gifts. Some love through giving affirmations. Some love through acts of service, and some love through, like physical touch, right? So these are like love languages, languages in psychology.

But have you ever offered to spend time with someone you love and they just say, like, eh, not today. No thank you. Like, that hurts right.

Now have you ever found the perfect gift for someone you love and they don't appreciate it? Or even worse, they reject that gift. Like, ouch.

Have you ever tried to affirm someone you love and they just kind of shrug it off? They don't really receive it, they don't accept it. That hurts too.

Have you ever done something kind for someone, an act of service, to show how much you love them and then they don't even notice it? That makes us feel unloved or unappreciated.

Have you ever tried to give someone you love a big hug and they just turn away? Yeah, that hurts.

And all of this hurts. And it hurts because love is meant to be received and it hurts us. Us mostly because of our insecurities, right? It leads us to think, I guess I'm not wanted or I'm not needed or I'm not appreciated. That's why it hurts us, because we have this kind of selfishness or this need to be received by other people.

And it does hurt God that his love is not received. But it's for a different reason. Because God isn't insecure, he's not selfish. It hurts God because he desires it for us. God hurts, like on our behalf.

It's like a parent trying to love their rebellious children, but their children refuse to receive their love and keeps choosing what hurts them. That hurts the parent. But it's not because of any lack of the parent. It's because the parent knows what's best for that child and their love for them. They respect the child's freedom to reject that love.

And as any good parent knows, that hurts. You want what's best for them, but they keep choosing what you know is wrong. And that's kind of what it's like for God. In Isaiah, God says, hear, O my people, O Israel, if only you would heed. You can just kind of hear the pain in God's voice through that prophet. God is saying, if only you would heed the love that I'm pouring out to you. And Jesus himself says in the Gospel, how often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. But you were not willing. We didn't let God love us. So God has this ache for us, this pain for us on our behalf.

The heart of Jesus cries out - let me love you. Please receive my love. So that's the theme of this Lent as a parish - the cry of Jesus' heart. The desire of the Sacred Heart for us to receive his love.

There's a beautiful poem that expresses this cry and the pain of Jesus heart. It's called "A Lone Young Shepherd". And it's written by St. John of the Cross, who's my favorite saint. And he communicates God's love through spousal imagery, just like scripture does. And there are only two characters in this poem. There's a shepherd boy, which is Jesus. And then there's a shepherd girl, which is all of us. So I'm going to read this poem, and it's on your handout if you want to follow along there. And I invite you to please listen for and to feel the ache and the pain and the desire of Jesus heart.

His Heart An Open Wound
A lone young shepherd lived in pain

withdrawn from pleasure and contentment,
his thoughts fixed on a shepherd-girl
his heart an open wound with love.

He weeps, but not from the wound of love,
there is no pain in such affliction,
even though the heart is pierced;
he weeps in knowing he's been forgotten.

That one thought: his shining one
has forgotten him, is such great pain
that he bows to brutal handling in a foreign land,
his heart an open wound with love.

The shepherd says: I pity the one
who draws herself back from my love,
and does not seek the joy of my presence
though my heart is an open wound with love for her.

After a long time he climbed a tree,
and spread his shining arms,
and hung by them, and died,
his heart an open wound with love.

Isn't that beautiful? Can't you just feel God's ache? God's desire to love? So I want to break down a few parts of this poem for us tonight. So first of all, the shepherd boy, Jesus is wounded by love, okay?

And that's what love does. Love wounds us. And imagine, remember being a boy or a girl falling in love with someone. It feels like your heart is just pierced. There's a knife in your chest and you can't stop thinking about the beloved. And we want to spend every moment with them. So we've all experienced that love wounds us.

But there's something about that wound that's not painful in itself. We can tell it's a good thing. That wound is beautiful. That love that is desired there is beautiful. But the poem says, even though his heart is pierced, there is no pain in such an affliction. There's no pain in a wound of love. But there is.

There's no pain of being wounded by love. But the shepherd boy is in pain. Pain of being forgotten by his beloved. The pain of his love not being received. And so the shepherd girl is always on the shepherd boy's mind, but she never thinks of him, right? His wounded heart is pouring out his love for her, but she doesn't even think to receive it.

You are always on Jesus' mind. How often do you think of Him? His wounded heart is always pouring out his love for you. But how often do you think to receive it? And that's all of us. We have forgotten the One who loves us. We cause him so much pain in this way. And the shepherd boy says, I pity the one who draws herself back from my love and does not seek the joy of my presence, though my heart is an open wound of love for her.

So you can see this pain isn't about Him. It's about the shepherd girl. It's about us. He wants us to receive his love for our sake, not for his. For our sake. It's pity. He knows what's best for us. And he wants us to receive his love for our sake. Not out of insecurity or selfishness on his part. He wants it for us. God is in love with us, and he's in pain for us, like on our behalf.

Now, love leads us to do some pretty crazy things. And God's infinite love for you and the pain that he is in for you, that he has for you, because of our own rejection of that love, has led God to do some pretty crazy things. What does the poem say? That one thought his beloved one has forgotten him is such a great pain that he bows to brutal handling in a foreign land. So he bows to brutal handling in a foreign land. What does that mean?

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God became man. God's love and pain for us drove him to become one of us, drove him to become man. Yet we wouldn't come to Him, so He came to us. We were meant for heaven, but we chose hell. So God came from heaven to save us from hell. He came to win us over. But when he came to earth, we still rejected Him. We didn't believe him when he came. He wasn't the Messiah that we wanted.

We didn't want the love that he was offering us. So what did we do?

Or what did God do? God did something even crazier. He climbed a tree, spread his precious arms, hung by them and died. His heart an open wound of love.

God is so wounded for you that he became man. And even after you rejected him over and over, he chose to suffer at your hands and die for you. He did all of this to win you back, to show how much he loves you, hoping that you would choose to receive his love. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that God has first loved us.

Now, each stanza of this poem ends with "his heart an open wound of love". And there's a lot to this, and it becomes particularly clear at the end of the poem. After Jesus the shepherd boy climbed that tree and spread his precious arms, hung by them, and died. Because when Jesus died on the cross, his heart was physically pierced by a spear, and his heart literally became an open wound of love. So Christ's body manifested in a physical way what God has always experienced in a spiritual way.

God's heart was always wounded for you. His heart was always pouring out his love for you. But it is shown most perfectly in the sacred heart, pierced on the cross because of the crucifixion. We can now see physically that God's heart, the heart of that poor shepherd boy, is an open wound of love. And it still is.

Did you ever notice that after the resurrection, Jesus had his glorified body, meaning that it was perfect, yet it still had those wounds from the crucifixion. The holes in his hands and his feet remained, and his heart was still pierced. And this is because Jesus glorified body perfectly reflected who he is, who God is. God is love. And these are wounds of love.

So these wounds of love reveal God's eternal love for us in a physical and an incarnational way. They aren't imperfections, but they are perfect reflections of who God is. God is love, and God himself, love himself, is wounded for you.

So isn't this good news? This is the good news. This is the gospel. All of scripture tells us the love story of God and his people, and that's all of us. And it comes to a culmination or a consummation, if you will, on the cross, where God shows us how wounded he is for us, the lengths he is going to go to win us over and to draw us back to himself. Can you feel the ache of God's heart for you?

I know I've been kind of like lofty so far, and I find it so beautiful. And I hope you do too. Because we see who God is, who we are, and God's desire for us. Now these beautiful truths need to do more than just exist in our Minds, right? They need to take root in our hearts, and we need to live out these truths. So where does the rubber meet the road with all of this?

What does this mean for our daily life? Well, remember when I said that when we have the right answer to the question about the purpose of our life, it simplifies our lives, it directs our focuses, and it provides



meaning to everything we do, everything we experience. Well, here's when all that comes into play, and it's very practical.

So if each of us is made to receive God's love, and that's our purpose, then I have this crazy idea. How about we actually make that our purpose? How about we make choosing to receive God's love the focus, the purpose of our lives. For many people, I think this is the key to unlocking God's grace in their lives and overcoming the obstacles that some of us have been running into, bumping into for years. Because we know we need to love God. We know we need to love neighbor, we know we need to overcome our sin.

But we end up believing the voice of the enemy that says we just need to try harder. We need to try to pick ourselves up by our spiritual bootstraps and try to be better. But we fail and fail again. Because here's the key. We don't need to try harder. We need to receive better.

Because God is always giving us what we need. But so many of us think we have to love God in order to earn his love, but we have it all backwards. Remember, in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that God first loved us.

So on a very practical level, we need to change the way we think. And this is the renewal of the mind that St. Paul writes about in Romans. He says, be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. So what is the will of God? What is his desire for us? What is the ache of his heart, his will, his desire? His ache is for us to simply receive his love.

That's what is good and acceptable and perfect. It all flows from this. We want to love God, and that's a beautiful desire of our hearts. But how do we truly love God? By putting his desires above our own, right. By putting God's desire for me to freely receive his love over my desire to earn it, over my desire to earn his love first. Because we love God by allowing him to love us. We love God by choosing to receive his love. And when we start thinking this way, allowing our minds to be renewed. And when we live this out, it unlocks God's grace in our lives.

Because when we receive God's love, we are able to love God as we ought. When we receive God's love, we're able to love others as we ought. And when we are able to receive God's love, we are able to overcome and conquer sin. Because sin is what ultimately, it's a rejection of God's love. It's a decision that I make to try to find love outside of or without God. Because whenever we sin, it's us trying to get on our own what God is always offering us free of charge, okay?

God's love is not in that second piece of chocolate cake or it's not at the bottom of a bottle. It's not in our Amazon carts, okay? God's love is in the relationship that we are invited into. It's trinitarian love. So when I choose to receive what he's offering me, his love, I don't have to try to get it somewhere elsewhere. Like sin is so much less attractive when we are tapped into trinitarian love. When we are actively receiving God's love, we see sin for what it really is. It's empty, it's void.

It's like air that we are trying to consume to fill our hungry hearts. It's never going to work. But when we receive God's love, it's like eating a big meal. Right, after eating a big meal, the junk food that you're normally tempted to eat, it doesn't even look appetizing anymore. I don't even want cake right now. I'm so full.

So when we are filled with God's love, sin isn't even attractive anymore. We see it for what it really is. So we need to be conscious and active about receiving God's love. Again, that active receptivity that we are invited into. So do you see how receiving God's love more deeply is? It's the key to everything. It's the foundation for everything. Are you struggling with your self-worth? Choose to receive God's love. Let him show you what you're worth. Because you're worth the cross. That's what he says to all of us. Are you struggling with habitual sin? Choose to receive his love. Temptation will be so much less appealing. Are you struggling to



love a particular person? Choose to receive God's love. Because you'll start to be able to love them with God's love, not just your own.

And living like this is possible. That's what the saints prove to us, and God is, well, we see this in the lives of the saints, but it takes time. It takes practice. That renewal of our minds that is necessary to begin to live this way happens through small choices that we make throughout the day. It's not something we go 0 to 60 with. It's taking those small baby steps and allowing the Holy Spirit to teach us, allowing life to be a school where we learn to receive God's love more perfectly here on earth so that we can do so perfectly and eternally in heaven. Because God is always pouring himself out to us.

There's this waterfall of God's love available to us at every moment. But we need to choose to step under that waterfall and to receive it. We need to choose and actively receive his love. And so every single moment of our existence is an opportunity to receive that love. Some moments are pleasant and some moments are painful, but God is loving us in every moment, in both of those. So part of this renewal of mind is learning to see, is learning to see God's love in these different situations.

Now, it's not hard to see how he's loving you when you have a really beautiful experience in play, in prayer, or when you win the lottery, right? No one has to ask God how He's loving them in those moments. But when that diagnosis comes in that you were worried about, or when you're struggling to provide for your family, or when you're struggling with the same sin over and over again, it's not so easy to see God's love in these situations.

So here's the thing. Love looks differently in those different situations. Sometimes we get confused because we look for a particular form of love in every situation. But that's not how love works. The way a good father loves his son, when the son falls and scrapes his knee on the sidewalk, is different than how a good father loves his son when the son chooses to misbehave, right? One situation might involve a loving hug, and another situation might involve loving discipline.

But it's the same love. It comes from the same heart, the same source. So love takes different forms. And sometimes God loves us by consoling us, affirming us, and encouraging us. And sometimes God loves us by convicting us of our sins, by disciplining us, or allowing us to go periods of time without feeling his consolation in prayer.

He does these things because he loves us. He knows the people that we are made to be. He sees that saint version of you, and he knows the best way to get you from where you are now to where you are meant to be for all of eternity with him in heaven. So it's not always easy to receive God's love. It's not always pleasant, but it's the same love.

We have to receive God's love as he wants to give it, not as we want to receive it. Does that make sense? We have to receive God's love as he desires to give it the form, the avenue that he wants to love us through, not that particular form or avenue that we expect or we hope to receive it. For we have to start thinking the way God does. So we shouldn't look for the same form of love at every moment. And God can love us through our prayer, through other people, and through our circumstances. So again, love takes different forms, but it also takes different avenues.

Because God is creative, right? If he can create the whole universe and all of its beauty, he can love you through different means or through different avenues. And again, we can get frustrated when we expect love to come in a particular way. We might get frustrated that we have a rather dry period of prayer. And in our frustration, we might not even notice how God is trying to love us through a relationship with someone else, a beautiful sunset that day, or how he's speaking to us through a book, or how he's speaking to us through a song that comes on the radio.



So it's not always easy to see the form and the avenue that God's love is taking in a particular moment. So I encourage people all the time to ask God, like God, how are you loving me right now? How do you want me to receive your love? Because I do this all the time myself. I might be in a difficult situation, and I'm frustrated, I'm tired, I'm impatient. And I just don't see how God is working. So I take a breath, and I say, lord, I know that you are always pouring out your love for me. I make an act of faith and I ask him, please help me to receive that love. How do you want to love me right now?

And sometimes he'll speak to me, affirming my identity or speaking into whatever situation I'm in. Sometimes he'll show me how he sees me or how he sees the situation or the person that I'm struggling to love. Sometimes he'll give me peace or strength to persevere through a situation. And sometimes he will give me a suggestion to reach out to someone or to turn to a particular verse of Scripture.

So God wants to direct us to that avenue of his love to that particular river of his love that he's offering us. God wants to love us. And sometimes it's helpful if we just ask him what he's doing, how he's loving us, what form of love, what avenue. And if we're having a really hard time seeing how God is loving us, it can be helpful just to look into the past as well. I imagine we've all been in situations where we have really no clue how God is doing or what God is doing or how he's using, what we are going through.

But after the situation was resolved, we can kind of look back into the past and we can see how God was at work, even if we didn't see it at the time. So seeing how God was loving us in difficult situations in the past can help us to see how he's loving us now. And it helps increase our faith and trust in his ways of loving us, trusting that God knows what's best for us. And if all else fails, we can make an act of faith and say, lord, I don't see how you're loving me right now, but I trust that you are. Help me to receive your love however you want to give it.

And if we do this well, if we choose to fulfill our purpose, if we choose to receive God's love, it will change our lives. Jesus says, I am the vine and you are the branches. He says, abide in me, abide in my love. And he doesn't tell us to do something that he's not providing us the grace to do. Right. We can choose to abide in Him. We can choose to receive his love. And he also says, whoever abides in Me will bear much fruit. And he says the flip side as well. Without Me, you can do nothing. And that's how stark the contrast is. If we choose to receive his love and abide in him, we will bear much fruit.

We'll become the saints that we were meant to be. We will perform miracles in his name. We will love God and others as we are called to. But if we refuse to receive his love, or only receive it in the way that we want, we will fall short of the life that we are called to live.

So to recap, we have the right answer to this most fundamental question, what is my purpose? My purpose is to receive God's love. And now that we have this answer, we have to make a choice. Do I choose to receive God's love even when it's not pleasant? Or do I not. Do I choose to reject him or forget about him like the shepherd girl? God is aching for you to receive him. This shepherd boy. His thoughts are fixed on you. He is wounded for you. So listen to the cry of his heart, this open wound of love that is crying, let me love you.

Let's say a prayer. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your sacred heart, which is incarnationally and sacramentally pierced for us, that you're always pouring out your love for us. We ask you to send your spirit upon us. Lord, breathe into us new life so that we can truly receive your love as you desire.

Help us to see which forms and which avenues, which direction your river of love is flowing. Help us to tap into that so that we can love you in return and love others as we ought, that we can see sin for what it truly is. Eternal Father, we worship you. We give you praise, and we ask that you seal all of this, all of the work that you have begun in our hearts and in the holy name of Jesus. Amen.



All right, so you've heard enough from me now. Now God wants us to encounter him through a beautiful testimony. So hearing how God is working in others, as I said before, can strengthen our faith and it can open our eyes to how God wants to work in our life.

So now I invite Sarah up to come speak with us, and she will share about how she has received God's love and how it has strengthened her life. So let's welcome Sarah.

Hi, everyone. My name is Sarah. Sorry that my voice is a little tired. I've been performing at shows, at theater for three days now. So today was my last day. So my voice might be a little tired, but we'll make it work.

So for a long time, I felt like God's love was something that I had to earn. I grew up Catholic. I went to mass, I prayed, I tried to be a good person. But deep down, I believed that God loved me more when I did things right and less when I failed.

I thought that his love depended on how well I prayed, how kind I was, or how put together my life was. And when I messed up or when I felt insecure or anxious or not enough, I didn't turn towards God. I pulled away. I felt like I had disappointed him.

And I know I'm not alone in that. I think all of us, at some point, have felt like we needed to prove ourselves to God or to others, or even to ourselves. And whether you're a teenager trying to figure out who you are, or a parent trying to do everything right, or someone carrying doubts and failures that we don't talk about, we all have moments where we wonder, am I enough?

What changed for me wasn't in one big moment. It was slowly realizing that God's love for me didn't begin with my effort. It began with his choice. I started to notice how Jesus treated people in the Gospels. Not the perfect ones, but the tired ones, the doubters, the sinners, the people who had nothing to offer. And I realized that if that's how God loves them, then that must be how he loves all of us too. Not because we earned it, but because we are his children.

One of the biggest shifts in my faith was understanding God's desire. I used to think that God wanted perfection from me. Constant productivity, constant holiness, constant strength. But what I've come to learn is that God desires relationship. He wants our hearts and not our performances. And that's true for every one of us, no matter where we are in life. As an 18-year-old, I feel a lot of pressure to have things figured out. To know who I am or where I'm going or what I'm supposed to do.

But I also know that this feeling isn't unique to my age. We all have seasons where life feels uncertain, where we're making hard decisions, carrying responsibilities, or walking through things that we didn't expect.

No matter how old we are, we all face moments where it's difficult to trust, difficult to let go, and difficult to believe that God is still at work. The hardest thing for me wasn't learning to love God. It was learning how to receive his love. To stop striving and proving and believing that I had to earn a place in his heart.

And I think that that's something that many of us struggle with. Receiving love is often a lot harder than earning it. Knowing this has changed how I live. I pray differently now. I bring God my doubts, my stress, my failures, and my hopes. And instead of feeling pushed away, I've experienced a God who stays.

A God who stays for all of us, even when we feel unworthy or unsure. I no longer see God as someone I have to impress, but as someone who is always waiting for me, arms open. And that invitation is for every one of us not to try harder, but to trust more. Not to earn his love, but to receive it. Because God's love is not something that we're meant to work for. It's something that we're meant to rest in.

Thank you.