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## Love Unlimited

[Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D.](#)



Some people seem to think that the Catholic Church is just another multi-national corporation, Catholicism, Inc., with the Pope as CEO. Obviously, this view is a bit skewed, but is not totally off-base. The Church is in fact an international organization. That's actually one of the meanings of the word "Catholic"—this church is no small sect limited to a particular ethnic enclave. Rather, it is "universal," intended to reach and include people from all nations.



That's an important message of this Sunday's first reading. Jesus' mission was first and foremost to the children of Israel. But notice that He never restricted His ministry to Jews alone. In fact, the person He pointed out as having more faith than just about anyone else He'd met was not a Jew, but a Roman, the centurion whose servant He healed.

As with the master, so with the disciple. Peter, the Vicar of Christ, meets another centurion who also exhibits faith and hunger for God. Not only was he a Gentile, but was an officer in the occupying army of the hated Romans. And he hadn't even gone through RCIA and sacraments of initiation yet, and what does God do? Pour out the Holy Spirit upon him and his companions! How could these enemies be denied the sacrament of the Spirit when God had not hesitated to give them a generous measure of the Spirit? James Joyce said that Catholicism meant "Here comes everybody!" In other words, the family is open to foreigners as well as countrymen, enemies as well as friends.



The Church is similar to a multi-national corporation in another respect. It has very serious business to attend to. Our second reading and the Gospel sum up this business in a single word—love. If you put this central concept together with the message of the first reading, you get both the mission statement and a good DBA for the corporate entity of the Catholic Church—Love Unlimited. Human beings without saving grace are capable of some love, as pointed out by C.S. Lewis's brilliant book, *the Four Loves*. But it is always a limited sort of love. It is limited in extension—we love our own country, our own family, our own spouse, our own friends. It is also usually limited in intensity—we often are willing to love as long as it

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doesn't cost too much.



But the love which is the Church's business is charity. It is divine love that gives itself without limit to everyone without exception. It is a love impossible for human beings without the divine power of the Holy Spirit that was poured upon the 120 at Pentecost and upon Cornelius and company on that day in Caesarea. The first letter of John tells us that God's offering up His only Son demonstrates the nature of this mind-boggling love and that the way to distinguish those who truly have the life-blood of God coursing through their veins is if the same sort of love is evident in their lives.

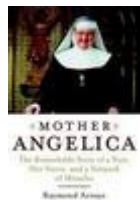
To love in this way is a privilege and an obligation for the Christian. But it is also a joy. In fact, true spiritual joy is what every human being is built for and longs for. But without the experience of receiving and giving this divine love, this joy can never be found.

Why were St. Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa able to be so full of joy when they had nothing? Because they gave everything. Just like God did. To love without limit is what God does, and so living of life and of love means intimate friendship with God.

When it is all said and done, that's really what it's all about. Doctrines, sacraments, Canon Law, customs, traditions and devotions—they are all designed to express and deepen this intimate union with God, this exciting adventure of love, that issues forth in more joy than we ever thought possible.



*This article originally appeared in the May 21, 2006 edition of Our Sunday Visitor as a reflection on Acts 10:25-48; Ps 98; 1 Jn 4:7-10; & Jn 15:9-17, the Mass readings for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, year B. It is reproduced here by permission of the author.*



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